"It feels like trying to be emotionally available inside a pressure cooker"

Exploring Secondary School Staff Experiences of Trauma-Informed Practice in England and Wales

Doctorate in Educational Psychology (DEdPsy)

MAY 1, 2025
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Acknowledgements

This piece of research would not have been possible without the generosity of my research participants. I feel immensely privileged to have had the opportunity to listen to your stories, thank you for your openness.

The first person in my personal life I would like to thank is my baby girl, who was born at the start of this research journey. She has taught me about what matters most in life and without this perspective, I would not have had the determination to complete this work. Everything I do is for you, Lola Rose. Thank you for inspiring me to be the best person, psychologist and mother I can be.

To my loving Husband Jack, thank you for always believing in me. Without your relentless support of my dreams, all of this would not have been possible.

To my mum and dad, thank you for your constant encouragement. I grew up in a home where love and safety were a given. That foundation has made everything else in my life possible and I carry deep gratitude for it always.

To my supervisor, Dr Dale Bartle, thank you for challenging me to think in ways that I never have before. My head hurts after every supervision… but in the best way!

Finally, to my course mates; I don't think I have ever met a more values driven and genuine group of people. Thank you for being an ongoing source of inspiration and for stepping in to watch my baby when I've needed you! Especially you, Eira. I couldn't have done it without you.

Summary

This thesis is divided into three parts: a major literature review (Part A), an empirical research paper (Part B), and a critical appraisal (Part C).

Part A: Literature Review

This literature review is comprised of two parts. Part 1 of this literature review aims to offer a narrative overview of the broad and multidisciplinary area of trauma-informed practice (TIP), including a historical overview of approaches to behaviour in schools and when trauma-informed practice entered public discourse. This part will also explore theories underpinning trauma-informed practice. Part 2 will then go on to build a rationale for the current study by asking a question of the literature which will seek to explore what the current research can tell us about the experiences and perceptions of secondary school staff who are implementing a trauma-informed approach in their practice. This part of the literature review will conclude with implications for EP practice and a research question that will be answered as part of the empirical paper in part 3 of this thesis.

Part B: Empirical Research Paper

Part B of this thesis will present the empirical research paper. Part B presents a qualitative research study exploring the perceptions and experiences of secondary school staff in England and Wales who implement trauma-informed approaches in their practice. Drawing on semi-structured interviews with TISUK-trained educators and analysed through a combination of Reflexive and Critical Thematic Analysis, this study uncovers the tensions between relational ethos and institutional realities such as behaviourist norms, performance metrics, and leadership pressures. Anchored in a critical realist ontology and social constructionist epistemology, the study reveals how educators construct meaning around trauma-informed practice while navigating sociopolitical ideologies including neoliberalism and adultism. The findings inform a practitioner-facing contribution: the Relational Regulation Framework (RRF) which is designed to support emotionally attuned and ethically grounded responses to behaviour in school settings.

Part C: Critical Appraisal

Part C offers a critical reflective appraisal of the research process, exploring the author's positionality, ethical decisions, and methodological choices. It considers how reflexivity, professional background, and engagement with participants shaped the study, and critically evaluates the challenges of researching trauma-informed practice within an evolving and commercialised educational landscape. This section also reflects on the implications of the findings for future practice, policy, and the researcher's own professional development.

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Abbreviations

ACE – Adverse Childhood Experiences

ACT – Acceptance and Commitment Therapy

CASP – Critical Appraisal Skills Programme

CBT – Cognitive Behavioural Therapy

CTA – Critical Thematic Analysis

CYP – Children and Young People

DfE – Department for Education

EP – Educational Psychologist

EPS – Educational Psychology Service

PRISMA – Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses

RRF – Relational Regulation Framework

RTA – Reflexive Thematic Analysis

SAMHSA – Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration

SEMH – Social Emotional and Mental Health

SJT – System Justification Theory

TIA – Trauma-Informed Approach

TIP – Trauma-Informed Practice

TIS UK – Trauma Informed Schools UK

TRM – Trauma Recovery Model

UNESCO – United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

Key definitions

Behaviour	Given that behaviour is intrinsically linked with the psychological experiences of teachers (Brown, 2015), this thesis defines behaviour in an educational context as a broad term encompassing conduct by children or young people that elicits concern, actions, and interventions by teachers (Armstrong, 2021). Emphasizing the psychological responses of professionals has the advantage of avoiding a child deficit discourse (Harold & Corcoran, 2013a), which could otherwise lead to ambiguous questions regarding types of behaviour in schools.
Trauma	An *event*, series of events, or set of circumstances that is *experienced* by an individual as physically or emotionally harmful or life threatening and that has lasting adverse *effects* on the individual's functioning and mental, physical, social, emotional, or spiritual well-being" (SAMHSA, 2014, p. 8).
Trauma-informed / trauma aware/ trauma sensitive	The understanding of the potential effects of trauma on children and adults, recognising and responding to the effects of trauma on children and adults, recognising and responding to the effects of trauma, and trying to avoid re-traumatising individuals (SAMSHA, 2014).
Trauma-informed practice/ approach/ trauma responsive	A systemic and relational approach that prioritises psychological and physical safety, fosters trust and recognises the pervasive impact of trauma (Treisman, 2017, 2024a).

Part A: Literature Review

Word Count: 12,442 (excluding tables and references)

Overview of Structure for Part A

This literature review is structured in two distinct but related parts (part A1 and part A2), each drawing on a different review methodology to best address the aims of the thesis. Part A1 employs a narrative review to explore the broader sociopolitical and theoretical context that frames the research. Specifically, it introduces the interconnected challenges of rising numbers of young people who have experienced early trauma which can significantly affect wellbeing and behaviour in the classroom and increasing levels of teacher attrition (Little & Maunder, 2021). A narrative review is particularly appropriate for this section, as it enables a flexible, interpretive synthesis of literature across disciplines, time periods, and paradigms (Wong et al., 2013).

Rather than aiming for comprehensive coverage, the narrative approach for the present research allows for a thematically and historically informed account of how understandings of behaviour in schools have evolved; from punitive and deficit-based models to more relational and trauma-informed frameworks. It critically examines how psychological theories and research, educational policy, and sociopolitical conditions have shaped these shifts, and how they continue to influence the implementation of trauma-informed approaches in schools. This part concludes by emphasising the need to better understand the secondary school teacher experience of implementing a trauma-informed approach.

Part A2 then builds a focused rationale for the current study through a semi-systematic review of the literature. This section aims to explore what is currently known about the experiences and perceptions of secondary school staff who are implementing trauma-informed practices at a whole school level. While semi-systematic reviews are often linked with positivist paradigms (Bryman, 1984), they can also be employed within qualitative and interpretive research traditions to support transparency, rigour, and reflexivity in synthesising existing knowledge (Gough et al., 2017; Lockwood & Hannes, 2012).

Part A1 – The narrative review

In order to conduct the narrative review for part A1 of this thesis, electronic databases such as Google Scholar, Psychinfo and Scopus were accessed through the University of Cardiff and the searches were carried out between July 2024 and December 2024. Search terms included 'behaviour management' OR 'behaviour' OR 'discipline' AND 'schools' or 'community' AND 'trauma' OR 'trauma-informed practice' OR 'trauma-informed approach' OR 'adverse childhood experiences' OR 'relational approaches' AND 'perceptions OR 'experiences' AND 'staff' OR 'teachers' AND 'political' AND 'ideology'. The author also scanned reference lists (Creswell & Creswell, 2018) to find further relevant studies.

1. Introduction

The extent of behavioural issues in UK schools is exemplified by recent pupil suspension data published by the Department for Education (DfE). In the spring term of 2022/23, there were 263,904 suspensions, representing a 31% increase compared to 201,090 suspensions during the spring term of 2021/22: the highest termly figure of pupil suspensions ever recorded at that time (DfE, 2024b). In Wales, the trend is similar, with the rate of fixed term exclusions increasing from 50.6 per 1,000 pupils in the 2021/22 school year to 65.4 per 1,000 pupils in the 2022/23 school year which marks the highest rate recorded since 2011/12 (Welsh Government, 2024b). The most common reason cited for exclusions across nations was persistent disruptive behaviour (DfE, 2025; Welsh Government, 2024b). Little & Maunder (2021) argue that two inter-connected problems affecting the UK education system are the number of young people who have experienced early trauma which impacts on their wellbeing and classroom behaviour, and the number of teachers who leave the profession (Little & Maunder, 2021).

Despite the UK government's recruitment and retention strategy in 2019, teacher retention and recruitment has been a persistent challenge for over a decade (McLean et al., 2024). One of the reasons most commonly cited for this involves the stress and burnout that teachers report experiencing when managing behaviour (Swenski, et al., 2024; McMakin et al., 2023; Oberg et al., 2023; O'Toole & Dobutowitsch, 2023). Indeed, the demands involved in cultivating prosocial behaviours in children and reducing disruptive behaviours has long been a source of stress for school staff, and a fiercely debated topic in the research (Jones et al., 2024). This debate concerns how teachers manage behaviour and with growing knowledge and awareness about the psychological and physiological effects of stress on behaviour, more schools are endorsing the need for a trauma-informed approach to manage behaviour, rather than a punitive approach (Arbour et al., 2024). At the present time, differing perspectives are held by educational experts, psychologists, researchers and politicians regarding how schools can create calm and supportive environments where children and young people (CYP) can learn and thrive (Jones et al., 2024).

Our recent conservative government continued to argue for a harder stance on behaviour, where behaviour and discipline are seen to be the "cornerstone to so much of what defines this country's most successful schools" (DfE, 2021, para. 2). Gavin Williamson was quoted saying that "poor behaviour is dreadful for teacher morale" and that more should be done to create orderly classrooms where "students can learn and teachers can teach" (DfE, 2021, para. 8). To a certain extent, punitive approaches might serve this goal, through using consequences such as detentions or internal exclusions or other loss of privileges to deter pupils from misbehaving (Jones et al., 2024). This authoritarian rhetoric is echoed in the most recent guidance on behaviour in schools from the DfE which suggests that sanctions in schools are necessary to help pupils understand that there are consequences for their behaviour and to create environments conducive to learning (DfE, 2024a).

However, England's current labour government is now recognising the need for schools to become more informed about the need to create a compassionate school environment centred on positive relationships (DFE, 2024). In December (2024), England's labour government published the Children's Wellbeing and School's bill (DFE, 2024) which mandates the integration of mental health support within schools, ensuring staff are equipped to support children's mental health needs. Recently, the Labour party have been quoted saying;

> *"Labour will provide access to specialist mental health professionals in every school, so every young person has access to early support to address problems before they escalate."*

(*Labour's Plan for Schools and Mental Health. [Policy Speech/Announcement Summary].*, 2024, para. 33)

Whilst these developments signal a positive shift toward systemic mental health support, there remains a lack of guidance in England on integrating a whole school approach to meeting student mental health needs (Long, 2022a). By contrast in Wales, the government have been proactive in considering whole school approaches to mental health support through re-designing the curriculum: the Welsh government are in the process of introducing a new wellbeing focused curriculum which is expected to be fully implemented in all schools by September 2026 (Welsh Government, 2024a). A focus on health and wellbeing is one of the 'Core Areas of Learning' in the new curriculum for Wales document and highlighted as a key priority for developing whole school approaches and a wellbeing culture (Welsh Government, 2021). This demonstrates a growing commitment to integrate a focus on wellbeing into school policies and practices.

Before exploring how teachers experience this greater focus on health and wellbeing in education, it is important to provide a brief overview of the broader historical and sociopolitical context of how we reached this point in England and Wales.

2. Historical and sociopolitical context of evolving approaches to behaviour

2.1 Psychological perspectives underpinning a punitive approach to behaviour

The evolution of approaches to behaviour in schools has been attributed to the rise and fall of behaviourism in the early to the mid-20th century (Braat et al., 2020). At the start of the 20th century, society was influenced by theories of behaviourism (Watson, 1913), followed by cognitive and humanistic psychology (Bandura et al., 1961; Maslow, 1943) through to the more holistic and inclusive approaches of the present day (Valdebenito et al., 2019).

Behaviourism emerged in the early 20th century, which emphasized the importance of scientific rigor in the study of behaviour (Watson, 1913). Alongside the influences of psychology, this period was marked by the dominance of positivism and empiricism, ideologies that valued observable, measurable evidence and scientific methods. Politically, this era saw the rise of progressivism and technocracy, which advocated for the application of scientific principles to social and political governance (Jost et al., 2013). Behaviourist theory is a psychological perspective that emphasizes the importance of observable behaviours over internal mental states and this approach focuses on how behaviour is learned and influenced by the environment through conditioning processes (Skinner, 1953; Pavlov 1957; Bandura, 1977).

Behaviourist theory has been widely applied in educational settings with techniques to shape student behaviours including; positive reinforcement, structured classroom management strategies and behaviour modification programs (Kwari & Bodinga, 2016). One of the first pioneering psychologists in the 20th century to study behaviour was Ivan Pavlov (1849-1936). Pavlov conducted a famous experiment which involved conditioning dogs to salivate in response to a previously neutral stimulus, such as the sound of a bell by associating it with food. This process was called classical conditioning and his experiments led to significant insights into how behaviours can be learned through association (Pavlov, 1927). In educational settings, classical conditioning can be used to create positive associations with learning and the school environment such as through the use of rewards and other positive associations that help students develop more positive attitudes toward learning (Boakes, 2003).

In the second half of the 20th century, another influential researcher to study behaviourist theory in psychology was B.F Skinner (1904-1990). Skinner used the term "Operant conditioning" to describe the process by which behaviour can best be learnt through the use of reinforcement and that behaviour can also be eliminated through proper use of punishment (Kwari & Bodinga, 2016). Behaviourist theory sees behaviour as a function of both antecedents (what happens before a behaviour) and consequences (what happens after a behaviour). Skinner used the term 'reinforcement' to describe any event that strengthens or increases the likelihood of a behaviour. Reinforcement can be positive (adding a pleasant stimulus) or negative (removing an unpleasant stimulus) (Skinner, 1953, p. 430). He also used the term 'punishment' to describe any event that weakens or

decreases the likelihood of a behaviour. Punishment can be positive (adding an unpleasant stimulus) or negative (removing a pleasant stimulus) (Skinner, 1953, p. 182). A systematic review of the literature published this decade, exploring various behaviour management strategies in UK schools highlights how behaviourist theory continues to influence classroom practices and approaches to classroom behaviour (Moore et al., 2019).

Guided by behaviourist theories, traditional approaches to behaviour in schools focused mainly on observable behaviours, using consequences to shape desired behaviours (Jones et al., 2024). Behaviourist theory can be applied in the school environment through the use of a hierarchical framework of clearly defined targets, rewards and sanctions for specific behaviours, which all staff and pupils are expected to follow (Nash et al., 2016). A systematic review indeed found that punitive measures such as detention and suspension, can still play a role in maintaining order and discipline in schools (Valdebenito et al., 2019). Some research suggests that for the majority of pupils, such strategies are effective most of the time and can be catalysts in creating calm, purposeful classrooms where learning can take place (Harold & Corcoran, 2013).

However, whilst the use of reinforcement and punishment remains a staple aspect of school behaviour management (McCluskey et al., 2013), questions are being asked as to the effectiveness and appropriateness of approaches which rely on external rewards and sanctions which aim to modify the behaviour (and ultimately the individual) rather than the environment or actions of others (Harold & Corcoran, 2013). In a systematic synthesis exploring perspectives of young people in secondary schools on in-school punitive behaviour management policies and practices, it was found that young people have concerns about the fairness and consistency of punitive consequences (Jones et al., 2024). They also have concerns about the long term effectiveness of such approaches (Jones et al., 2024). In line with this view, Nash et al., (2016) argue that that for the most troubled pupils, effective behaviour management at school necessitates a more nurturing and collaborative approach alongside current disciplinary policy (Nash et al., 2016).

Despite calls for more nurturing and inclusive approaches, schools in England and Wales continue to use punitive approaches (Bear, 2020; Jones et al., 2024; Kwari & Bodinga, 2016). This may not be surprising given the OFSTED criteria on which schools are judged as; "having clear and effective behaviour and attendance policies with clearly defined consequences" (Ofsted, 2024, para. 14). Similarly, Estyn's inspection guidance in Wales highlights the need for schools to "have a clear behaviour policy that is implemented consistently and fairly" (Estyn, 2024, p. 7). Exploring the reasons why schools continue to endorse punitive approaches, Oxley (2021) found that staff perceive barriers to the implementation of non-punitive or more relational strategies. These include a lack of time and resources, pressures from perceptions of parents and the wider community and risk aversion (school leaders may be hesitant to try new approaches). Oxley suggested that with adequate support, schools could overcome these barriers and implement more effective, non–punitive measures (Oxley, 2021). Indeed, it has been suggested that shaming children through the use of punitive

measures such as use of detentions and writing their name on the board is one of the most ineffective ways to support them (Carter & Borret 2023).

2.2 Sociopolitical ideologies and their influences on evolving teacher approaches to behaviour in schools

Understanding why punitive attitudes to behaviour continue to prevail in schools (Carter & Borrett, 2023; Oxley, 2021) could involve an exploration of the sociopolitical context influencing them. Ideology is a morality of the social order, and ideological judgments can thus be characterized as moral judgments about what sociopolitical institutions such as schools ought to exist and how those institutions ought to behave (Eibach, 2021). There are a wide variety of such ideologies, but many can be mapped onto a bipolar left–right spectrum (Jost et al., 2009). In America and elsewhere, it is becoming increasingly common to substitute "liberal" and "conservative" for "left" and "right," respectively, and this equation expresses well the long-lasting ideological divide concerning preferences for change versus stability, which goes back at least as far as 1789 (Jost et al., 2013).

Ideological self-placement also has important effects on justice judgments and attributions for social stratification, with conservatives emphasizing principles of equity, ability, effort, and meritocracy as well as adopting a more punitive stance and being more likely to make internal attributions for others' outcomes in life in comparison with liberals (e.g., Altemeyer, 1998; Skitka et al., 2002). System justification theory (SJT) provides a particularly rich analysis of psychological factors that determine the relative appeal of ideologies on the right versus the left of the political spectrum (Eibach, 2021). SJT posits that the motivation to justify the system emerges from more basic epistemic, existential, and social relational needs (Jost et al., 2013). These epistemic needs involve seeking an ordered, structured, and predictable experience of the world and the need to view the status quo in a positive light (Eibach, 2021).

Classical conservatism represents a prototypic example of a system-justifying ideology because conservatives tend to support traditional norms and institutions, whereas liberals tend to advocate for changes that disrupt the system's norms and traditional practices (Jost et al., 2009). Therefore, the idea that conservatism enjoys a psychological advantage over liberalism comes from research on system justification, which suggests that most people (including liberals) are motivated to adapt to and even rationalize aspects of the status quo, that is, to develop and maintain relatively favourable opinions about existing institutions and authorities and to dismiss or reject the possibility of change (Jost et al., 2009). Indeed, research exploring right-wing authoritarianism shows that highly threatening situations including change, are frequently (but not always) associated with ideological shifts to the right (Eibach, 2021).

Therefore, it logically follows that the adoption of non-punitive measures towards the end of the 20th century would be received differently by various individuals and their respective ideologies, depending on their

attitudes towards authority (Harold & Corcoran, 2013) and system justifying cognitions (Eibach, 2021). For example, it has been shown that the motivation to trust the system is so compelling that, when people are induced to feel dependent on the system, they actively avoid learning about relevant issues out of fear that learning might shake their confidence in the adequacy of the system's handling of those issues (Shepherd & Kay, 2012). In the school context, Mackie et al., (2017), argue for a rejection of approaches to school discipline which are rooted in behaviourist notions of causality; they argue that in systems such as schools, teachers must first embark on their own process of emancipation before they can facilitate the emancipation of their students (Mackie et al., 2017). This necessitates an openness to change and a progressive vision.

Non-punitive measures involve more relational and attachment informed approaches to behaviour that might be associated with more liberal, progressive and humanist values (Cooper, 2023a). These relational approaches might be described in the literature using terms including but not limited to; restorative approaches (Harold & Corcoran, 2013; Morrison, 2007), trauma aware or trauma-informed approaches (Brunzell, 2021), attachment based approaches (Robertson et al., 2021) or approaches using positive behavioural interventions and supports (Blackwood & Farrow, 2023a). Key terms will be later defined in sections 3 and 5.

2.3 Psychological perspectives underpinning a relational approach to behaviour

Towards the middle of the 20th century, there was a growing interest in developmental psychology and the role of the environment in shaping development such as attachment theory (Bowlby, 1969) and ecological/ family systems theory (Dore, 2008). Politically, there was a rise in progressivism and in many Western countries, social democratic ideologies were influential, advocating for a balance between free-market capitalism and state intervention to ensure social justice and equality (Eibach, 2021). This included support for public education systems that aimed to provide equal opportunities for all students (Eibach, 2021).

Psychologists such as John Bowlby were influential and emphasised the importance of early relationships in shaping behaviour and emotional development through his work on attachment theory (Bowlby, 1969). Attachment theory defines attachment as a strong, enduring bond that develops between the child and the caregiver, essential for the child's survival and development and Bowlby suggested that there is a sensitive period (from birth to approximately 3 years of age) during which attachment must occur (Bowlby, 1969, p210). According to Bowlby, if enduring and strong attachments do not form within this timeframe, the child may struggle with emotional and social development. However, the idea that early attachment experiences permanently shape personality can be seen as overly deterministic; Rutter (1995) argued that early adversity does not necessarily lead to later dysfunction and highlighted the role of brain plasticity and resilience in children's development (Rutter, 1995).

Nevertheless, Bowlby's ideas continue to be influential today. Bowlby used the term 'internal working model' to describe the process of how children develop mental representations of themselves and their relationships

which form the basis for future relationships (Bowlby, 1969). A later review of how attachment styles develop in childhood and influence adult relationships confirmed that early attachment experiences shape internal working models and that these models influence how individuals perceive and interact with others in their adult relationships (Shaver & Mikulincer, 2016). The review also highlights the crucial role of attachment styles in emotional regulation, affecting how individuals cope with stress and emotional challenges. Therefore, this work underpins the significance of attachment theory in understanding social functioning and mental health and the vital role that attachment informed practice may have in schools (Blackwood & Farrow, 2023b; Hickey & Riddle, 2022; Ljungblad, 2021).

Following Bowlby's work, empirical research was carried out by Ainsworth & Bell (1970) in order to investigate attachment styles in infants, expanding on Bowlby's theory. She investigated this through the use of the 'strange situation' which involved observing children's reactions to a series of separations and reunions with their caregivers in a controlled environment (Ainsworth & Bell, 1970). Her findings demonstrated how different attachment styles develop based on the caregiver's responsiveness to the child's needs. She categorised the infants in her study into 3 different attachment styles based on their behaviour in the strange situation. These included secure attachment (distressed on separation, comforted on caregivers return), insecure resistant (intensely distressed on separation and difficulty being comforted on caregivers return) and insecure avoidant (very little distress on separation and a lack of interest on caregivers return with little eye contact) (Ainsworth & Bell, 1970). A further type of disorganised attachment was added by Main & Solomon in 1986, called 'disorganised' attachment. The authors observed the strange situation and found that infants in this category showed a lack of a coherent strategy for dealing with separation and reunion. Their behaviours included freezing, contradictory actions, and apprehension towards the caregiver (Main & Solomon, 1986).

Although the work of Ainsworth & Bell's research and Main & Solomon's research has been criticised for its cultural bias, primarily due to its focus on middle class American families which may not be representative of other cultural contexts (Van Ijzendoorn & Kroonenberg, 1988), the findings were significant because they laid the groundwork for modern attachment theory, influencing subsequent research and clinical practices. In more recent literature, Siegel (2020) defines attachment as "an inborn system" that influences and organizes "motivational, emotional, and memory processes with respect to significant caregiving figures." This system is what motivates babies to "seek proximity to parents" and "establish communication" (Siegel, 2020, p. 167). These behaviours allow babies to respond to their caregivers for their basic needs, such as protection, food, and hygiene. Attachments are extremely important for infants as they are completely dependent on the care of their parents or other guardians (Ainsworth & Bell, 1970; Bowlby, 1969; Siegel, 2020). In the event of a trauma such as physical and emotional neglect, research has found that this trauma was positively related to insecure attachment styles (fearful, preoccupied, and dismissing) and negatively related to secure attachment styles (Erozkan, 2016). This research has implications for the role of early attachment experiences in shaping

long-term outcomes and the importance of supportive relationships and interventions to mitigate the effects of early trauma (Wier, 2014).

Moving from an individual to an environmental view of interactions and relationships, Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) proposed that individual's development in any given area is primarily shaped by the interactions and relationships between the individual and different layers of surroundings (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). According to the ecological view, a thorough study of human development can best be achieved by the analysis of these different levels and contexts of person–environment interactions (Özdoğru, 2011). Research suggests that there needs to be further acknowledgement of the complexity of systems surrounding a child if we are to take a more contextual approach to understanding behaviour (Chafouleas et al., 2021; M. S. Thomas et al., 2019) and this can be achieved by understanding the systems around the child proposed by Bronfenbrenner in his ecological systems theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). See Table 1 for a table describing the nested layers of the environment around the child:

Microsystem	This is the immediate environment in which a person interacts, such as family, school, peers, and neighbourhood. It includes direct interactions with social agents like parents, teachers, and friends.
Mesosystem	This level refers to the interconnections between the microsystems. For example, the relationship between a child's home and school environments, or the interaction between family and peer groups.
Exosystem	This system encompasses broader social settings that indirectly affect the individual. These include parents' workplaces, community services, and local government policies. The individual does not directly interact with these settings, but they still have an impact on their development.
Macrosystem	This level includes the larger cultural and societal context in which the individual lives. It encompasses cultural values, economic conditions, and political systems that shape the other systems.
Chronosystem	This dimension adds the element of time, reflecting the changes and continuities in the individual's environment over their lifespan. It includes life transitions, socio-historical events, and changes in family structure.

Table 1: Summarizing the ecological systems around the child as proposed by Bronfenbrenner (1979).
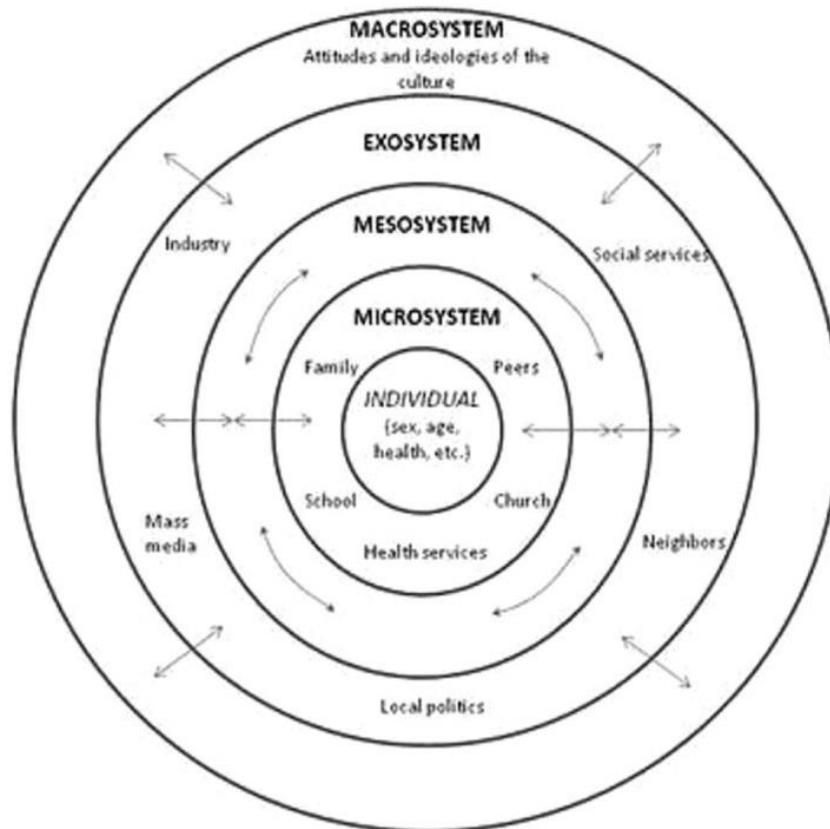
Figure 1: Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Theory of Human Development (Vélez-Agosto et al., 2017, p. 902).

Adversity or trauma such as neglect, isolation and relationship difficulties can affect a child's functioning and their interactions at any level of the system (Loomis, 2021). Using Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory, Antony (2022) argues that resilience from adverse events or traumas early in life can be taught during childhood, from the complex social interactions that children have with parents to the interactions they have in school at the level of the microsystem (Antony, 2022). Bronfenbrenner added a later addition of his model in 1995 (Bronfenbrenner, 1995) to reflect the interaction of within child factors, such as the child's brain and nervous system (Siegel, 2020) with the interconnected environmental systems. This revision is particularly significant in light of trauma research, which highlights that recovery often requires a combination of therapeutic relationships and physiological regulation to help rewire the brain's stress responses (Van der Kolk, 2014). Therefore, schools are in a unique position to foster protective factors for children at each level of the system, from the implementation of positive behavioural interventions and supports (M. A. Brown, 2015) to promoting resilience among children by providing specific support and resources to parents and teachers (Finstad et al., 2021).

Trauma, along with associated terminology will be defined in the following sections.

3. Defining Trauma

The term *trauma* originates from the Greek word for "wound" and was historically used in medical contexts to describe physical injury. In psychological discourse, it began to take shape following the First and Second World Wars, where soldiers experiencing "shell shock" or "war neuroses" exhibited symptoms of psychological distress (Herman, 1992). However, it was not until the aftermath of the Vietnam War that trauma gained clinical recognition (Van der Kolk, 2014). Veterans began presenting with complex symptoms that eventually became known as Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-III) in 1980 (American Psychiatric Association., 1980). This medicalisation of trauma emphasised single-event, life-threatening experiences with measurable psychological consequences (Van der Kolk, 2014).

Over time, however, the concept of trauma has broadened significantly to include a wider range of adverse experiences, including those that are chronic, relational, or systemic in nature (Felitti et al., 1998). The term began to be applied in clinical systems contexts in the early 2000s (Harris & Fallot, 2001) and only later extended into educational frameworks from around 2010 onward (Overstreet & Chafouleas, 2016). While this expansion has enabled more inclusive and compassionate responses to student needs, it also raises challenges. Broader, subjective definitions, though valuable, can risk over-identifying trauma by pathologizing common stress responses, or under-identifying it when cultural or systemic sources of harm go unrecognised (Ferrara et al., 2023; Goldin et al., 2023).

On the other hand, it has been argued that appreciating the subjectivity involved in how an event might be appraised as traumatic is important because the same event could be experienced by two people in very different ways (Winfrey & Perry, 2021). In recognition of this inherent subjectivity, the widely cited Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) used the 'three E's' definition of trauma "an event, series of events, or set of circumstances that is experienced by an individual as physically or emotionally harmful or life threatening and that has lasting adverse effects on the individual's functioning and mental, physical, social, emotional, or spiritual well-being" (SAMHSA, 2014, p. 8). This definition is arguably helpful because it places focus on how an event is psychologically appraised, rather than emphasising the event itself (Winfrey & Perry, 2021).

The term 'Adverse Childhood Experiences' (ACES) has also been used interchangeably with 'traumatic event' to describe adversity that children might be exposed to in their lives. The first study to be conducted on ACES found a positive correlation between the amount of ACES participants had experienced and the risk for psychological and physical health problems later in life (Felitti et al., 1998). Ten categories of ACES were described in this study which included but were not limited to; parental separation and divorce, physical and emotional abuse, neglect and substance abuse. More recently however, this study has been criticized for its simplicity; a person with one of these ACES might experience more mental health issues than a person with

five ACES because of the potential for differences in intensity of distress or presence of protective and healing factors (Winfrey & Perry, 2021).

Indeed, for some children, stress does not become trauma while for others, their response to threat and danger causes enduring negative psychological, physical, and spiritual harm and this response has been defined as trauma (Venet, 2023). Mayor (2018) takes this further, defining trauma as a social justice issue, rather than an isolated individual event. They describe the process whereby students from a minority ethnic background and lower socioeconomic (SES) group are disproportionately more likely to experience chronic trauma events, but are regularly punished or ignored by the school system, which is traumatic in itself. They define trauma as the process whereby one group has the power to harm another and to deny its occurrence (Mayor, 2018a). Therefore trauma is a multifaceted term which is consistently identified in recent literature as being subjective to an individual or group of individuals, depending upon their background and experiences (Bilbrey et al., 2024; Ferrara et al., 2023; Mayor, 2018b).

Furthermore, research demonstrates that the meaning making professionals assign to trauma can significantly impact actions related to trauma-informed care (Brunzell et al., 2022; Ferrara et al., 2023; Panisch et al., 2024). In a study exploring school staff definitions of childhood trauma, Ferrara et al, (2023) found that educators did not have a unified definition of what it is. Approximately half of school professionals identified the long-term effects of trauma on students. However, most commonly, school professionals listed general negative effects instead of effects on specific domains such as behaviour or emotions (Ferrara et al., 2023). For example, participants did not reference racism as a form of trauma, pertaining to a culturally centric view of trauma (Goldin et al., 2023).

This culturally centric view has been echoed in the wider literature in studies such as Mayor (2018) who argues that forces of whiteness, neoliberalism and governmentality determine how trauma is defined and criticises other studies for failing to address the needs of racialized and lower socioeconomic students who are disproportionately more likely to experience single event and chronic trauma events, but are regularly punished or ignored by the school system (Mayor, 2018b). Overall, it is the assertion of the author that the spectrum of possible definitions for trauma highlight the need for practitioners to engage critically with the language and frameworks they use when working in trauma-informed ways.

4. Prevalence and impact of trauma in England and Wales

As aforementioned, adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) are stressful or traumatic events that occur during childhood or adolescence (Emsley et al., 2022). It is estimated that trauma and ACES such as exposure to violence, abuse and neglect affect approximately a third of school-aged children in England and Wales (Long, 2022a). People experiencing socio-economic disadvantage, minoritized ethnic groups, women and the LGBTQ+ community are disproportionally affected by violence and trauma (Coulter et al., 2022). Given the

prevalence of exposure to traumatic events for our young people in England and Wales, it is imperative to develop initiatives to prevent childhood adversity and mitigate its impact which might begin with an understanding of the long-term effect of adversity so that schools can respond accordingly (ACE Hub Wales & Trauma Stress Wales., 2022). Indeed, the crisis of poor mental health is calculated at £300 billion a year alone, twice the NHS annual budget (S. Hughes, 2024). In order to meet these rising mental health needs, it is vital that schools have systems in place for identifying pupils with mental health needs and one of the ways this can be achieved is by improving teacher awareness about mental health.

Over the last few years, the prevalence and knowledge of trauma experienced by children have made public headlines (Castro Schepers, 2023). Ongoing exposure to traumatic experiences early in life are linked to a wide array of detrimental social, behavioural and economic outcomes impacting long term well-being and success in school (L. M. Brown, 2022, 2022; de Stigter et al., 2024; Hickey & Riddle, 2022). The negative school outcomes associated with traumatic exposure in childhood include but are not limited to; lower cognitive functioning, academic performance, school connectedness, greater likelihood to attend special education placement, and absenteeism (McIntyre et al., 2019). More specifically, some common trauma responses may include (a) difficulty trusting adults, including the inability to form positive relationships with adults (S. Kim et al., 2021), (b) deficits with emotional self-regulation and displays of aggression (Loomis, 2021) (c) poor executive functioning, difficulties with memory, delays with both expressive and receptive language delays (Jolivette et al., 2024) and (d) difficulties with organizational skills (Brunzell et al., 2018).

Mental health charities such as 'Mind' have urged governments to act now to deal with the root causes of poor mental health and make sure people with a mental health problem get the right support when they need it (S. Hughes, 2024). It is possible that schools have a unique opportunity to improve outcomes for children who have faced ACEs (King et al., 2021) and the movement toward trauma-informed schools is reflective of the growing understanding of the prevalence of trauma among youth and requires the application of effective practices (Thomas et al., 2019).

5. A trauma-informed approach

The concept "trauma-informed" or "trauma–aware" has been defined as the understanding of the potential effects of trauma on children and adults, recognising and responding to the effects of trauma on children and adults, recognising and responding to the effects of trauma, and trying to avoid re-traumatising individuals (SAMSHA, 2014). Trauma-informed 'practice' therefore, as defined by Treisman (2017, 2024), refers to a systemic and relational approach that prioritises psychological and physical safety, fosters trust and recognises the pervasive impact of trauma (Treisman, 2017, 2024a). For schools to be trauma-informed, personnel must have a basic understanding of how trauma affects learning and behaviour, and schools must comprehensively implement effective practices, programs, and procedures into their organizational structure and culture (Chafouleas et al., 2016).

The act of implementing these structures, programmes and practices is commonly known as 'trauma-informed practice' across the evidence base (Brunzell et al., 2022; Harper & Neubauer, 2021; Hoffman, 2024; S. Hughes, 2024; S. Kim et al., 2021). The paradigms of "trauma-aware" and "trauma-informed" are proposed as a tools for change in the education system in order to help children who have suffered adverse experiences (Garay et al., 2024). See section 6 for examples of specific approaches.

Recently, the UK government formalised its position in the 2022 Working Definition of Trauma-Informed Practice (TIP), which emphasised the need for health and care services, including schools, to recognise the long-term impacts of trauma and ensure services are psychologically and physically safe. There are 6 principles of trauma-informed practice: safety, trust, choice, collaboration, empowerment and cultural consideration:

"Trauma-informed practice is an approach to health and care interventions which is grounded in the understanding that trauma exposure can impact an individual's neurological, biological, psychological and social development."

 (Office for Health Improvement and Disparities, 2022, para. 1).

Similarly, Welsh guidance for schools suggests that a trauma-informed approach in Wales recognises and understands the adverse and traumatic experiences that people can be exposed to and it is underpinned by a set of 5 principles that are outlined below;

1. *A universal approach that proactively supports and encompasses community led approaches*
2. *A person centred approach which takes a co-productive and collaborative approach to understanding and supporting a young persons' needs. It also promotes psychological and physical safety by promoting choice and transparency.*
3. *It is relationship focused, supportive and empathetic. Trusting relationships are central to a trauma-informed approach*
4. *It is resilience and strengths focused across individuals, families and communities*
5. *It is inclusive and recognises the impact of cultural, historic and gender inequalities as well as the impact of diversity, discrimination and racism.*

(ACE Hub Wales & Trauma Stress Wales., 2022, p. 11)

The growing body of research in recent years documenting the impact of traumatic stress on child development, has resulted in a call to action for TIP as a priority (Bilbrey et al., 2024). Some examples of key models underpinning these practices are provided below.

6. Psychological models underpinning trauma-informed practice

6.1 The trauma recovery model

The trauma recovery model (TRM) (Skuse & Mathews, 2015) is a staged framework developed to guide interventions for young people affected by trauma. Drawing on Maslow's hierarchy of needs (Maslow, 1943), the model outlines a sequence of psychological and developmental stages, each associated with particular therapeutic and relational goals. The aim is to provide practitioners with a structured approach that contextualises behaviour and ensures interventions are appropriately times and matched to the child's level of emotional readiness (Skuse & Mathews, 2015).

According to Day & Malvaso (2024) the first two levels of the TRM pyramid emphasise the foundational importance of physical and emotional safety through consistent, predictable, and reliable practice (Day & Malvaso, 2024) . The subsequent level prioritises the development of trust and emotional connection which is often described as a secure base. This secure base provides the means through which opportunities for co-regulation, attunement and interactive repair can be maximised, all of which are key drivers and maintainers of healthy development (Morgan et al., 2015).

Casework at this level can also be understood in terms of the need to offer as much consistency as possible, thus creating a secure base for the child from which trauma and adversity can begin to be processed with more conventional mental health interventions then considered by schools (Day & Malvaso, 2024). These interventions might involve school based counselling (Cooper, 2013), adapted behaviour interventions and supports (Guest et al., 2024) and emotional literacy support sessions (McEwen, 2019).
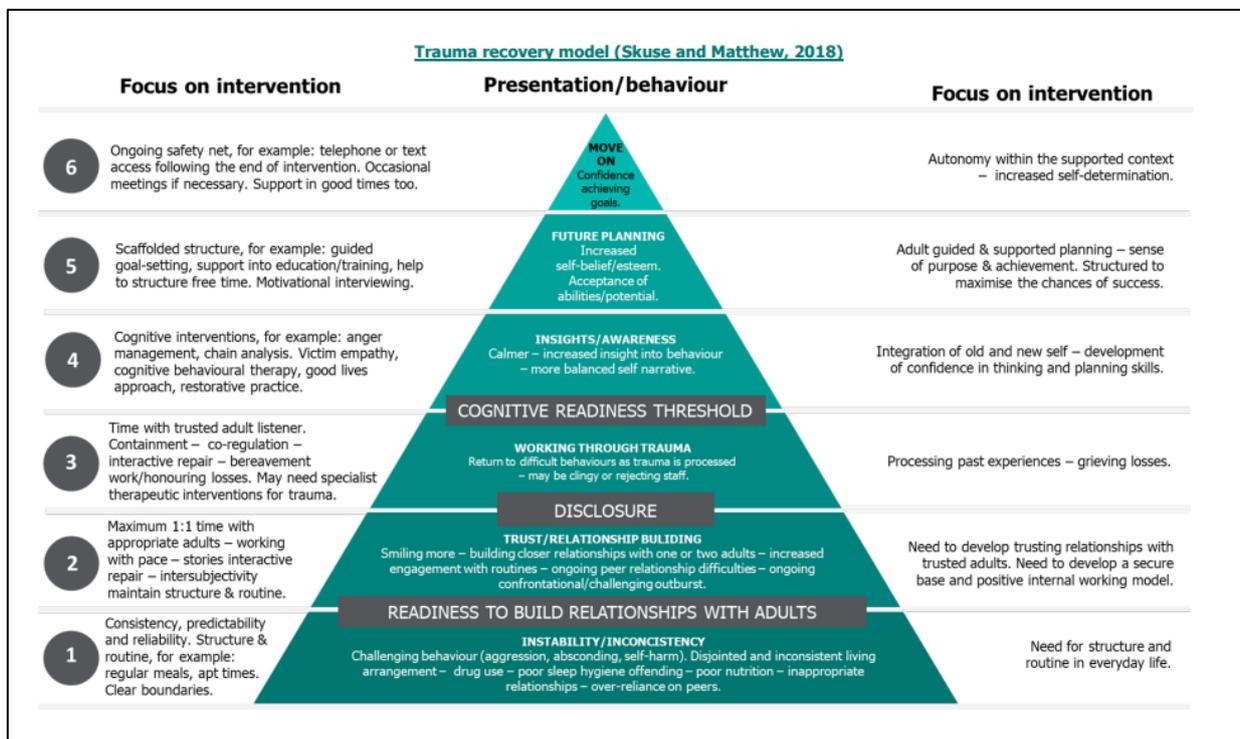
Figure 2: The trauma recovery model Skuse & Mathews (2018) image taken from
https://www.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/hmiprobation/wp-content/uploads/sites/5/2022/04/Trauma-recovery-model.pdf

While the TRM is a useful framework, it is important to critically examine its foundation in Maslow's hierarchy of needs (Maslow, 1943). Maslow's model has been influential in psychology and education but it has also been critiqued for being overly linear, individualistic and rooted in western cultural assumptions (Kenrick et al., 2010). The hierarchical structure assumes that certain needs must be met before others can emerge; a notion that may not reflect the lived experiences of young people facing chronic adversity, marginalisation or structural oppression (Sanders, 2024). Furthermore, Cooper (2023) argues that Maslow's hierarchy neglects other human needs such as identity, meaning and agency which are particularly salient for young people navigating trauma. For instance, having a sense of belonging or cultural affirmation may be just as fundamental to a trauma affected child as having food or shelter, particularly for minoritised groups (Cooper, 2023a). Therefore, it is important to consider individual differences in needs whilst using this framework in practice.

6.2 The Neurosequential model of education

Dr. Bruce Perry's Neurosequential Model in Education (NME) applies principles of neurodevelopment to help educators understand and address the impact of trauma on student behaviour and learning (B. Perry, 2006). Perry describes how information coming into our senses are processed in a sequential fashion from the bottom up. Perry (2006) relates this to education through guiding practitioners to respond to behaviour in a sequential manner that the developing brain can engage with i.e. first regulate, then relate and finally, reason.

Winfrey & Perry (2021) asserts that to reason with another person, we need to effectively get through the lower areas of their brain and reach their cortex, the part responsible for thinking, including problem-solving and reflective cognition. But if someone is stressed, angry, frustrated, or otherwise dysregulated, the incoming input will be short-circuited, leading to inefficient, distorted input to the cortex (Winfrey & Perry, 2021). The neurosequential model has been applied in educational settings and it has been found that knowledge of the model has increased teacher, teaching assistant, and student knowledge about the brain, brain development, and the impact trauma has on the brain, and provided tools to help with student self-regulation, preparing the classroom atmosphere for improved learning (Walter, 2016).
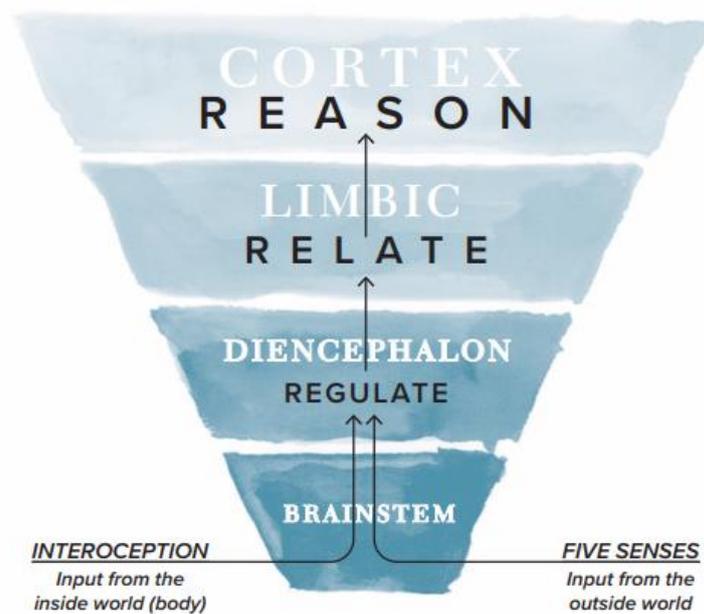
Figure 3: Shows depicts the neurosequential process (Winfrey & Perry, 2021, p. 45).

6.3 The PACE approach

PACE is an approach that stands for Playfulness, Acceptance, Curiosity and Empathy. developed by Dr. Dan Hughes almost 20 years ago (Hughes, 2006). Implementing the approach in interactions is a form of active engagement which can help carers respond to the past experiences of a young person. A brief summary of each component is given below:

Table 2: PACE Approach.

1. **Playfulness**:	Creating a light-hearted and joyful atmosphere to help children feel safe and reduce their defensiveness. Using play can help develop empathy in children, and how these practices could be applied to mainstream early years and primary education to foster long-term benefits for ethical and fulfilling lives (Waite & Rees, 2014).

2. **Acceptance**	Accepting the child's inner life and experiences without judgment, which helps in building trust and security.
3. **Curiosity**	Showing genuine interest in understanding the reasons behind a child's behaviour, which encourages openness and communication.
4. **Empathy**	Demonstrating understanding and sharing the child's feelings, which fosters a supportive and connected relationship.

In a therapeutic context, the PACE approach has been found to provide a safe space for the child or young person and allowed the development of trust in the patient child relationship (Golding & Hughes, 2012). Whilst PACE strategies have their foundations in therapeutic counselling, these methods have begun to emerge in schools as a way for teachers to effectively and positively engage with children and young people impacted by trauma (Louth & Willis, 2024).

7. Trauma-informed training programmes in the UK

Trauma-informed training programmes in the UK provide information about the prevalence and effects of trauma exposure with the goals of increasing staff knowledge, improving attitudes, and changing behaviour (Thomas et al., 2019). Purtle (2020) highlights the effectiveness of Trauma-informed training programmes in their systematic review. They note that UK training programs significantly improve school staff's ability to support students who have experienced trauma. The review emphasizes that a trauma-informed approach helps create a supportive and understanding school environment, which is crucial for the well-being and academic success of students (Purtle, 2020). However, while training may raise awareness, it does not always translate into sustained changes in practice or equip staff with the practical skills needed to manage trauma-related behaviours in real-world classroom settings (McIntyre et al., 2019). Furthermore, training is often delivered as a one-off session without follow-up, which limits opportunities for reflection, practice, and long-term impact (Maynard et al., 2019). This suggests that while trauma-informed training has value, it must be part of a broader, ongoing whole-school approach to be truly effective.

Trauma-informed schools UK (TIS UK) is a community-based organisation that integrates these evidence-based psychological models to develop training on trauma-informed care for schools. TISUK is the largest trauma-informed schools training programme in the UK and is internationally recognised. Their mission is:

"To provide appropriate training for schools, communities and organisations so that they become trauma-informed and mentally healthy places for all"

Within their mission statement, TISUK place particular emphasis on the emotional well-being of staff and suggest that this is treated at all times as a priority. However, TIP models have been informed by a body of research into the psychological and physiological impacts of stress on children's development rather than program evaluation in schools (Berger & Martin, 2021). In order to support the staff, it is important that research explores the way in which teachers experience the use of a trauma-informed approach to behaviour in the classroom (Robertson et al., 2021).

A trauma-informed approach underpinned by frameworks such as this might assist schools in creating 'trauma-sensitive' environments and cultures (Erickson & Harvey, 2023, p. 668). Although, the reality is that shifting classroom practices in response to an understanding of the psychological effects of trauma on children requires intentionality on the part of educators (Craig, 2017). To have an intentional mindset means that knowledge of trauma informs all aspects of the classroom environment; "the emotional tone, the choice of materials, and the sequence of activities that are introduced" (Craig, 2017, p. 103). This might be considered a strong ask of educators given their heavy workloads (Castro Schepers, 2023) and as such, it is important to begin to consider how educators are experiencing these frameworks in the present, post COVID-19 pandemic national context.

8. Impact of COVID-19 on Educators ability to support trauma affected children

In March 2020, the world grappled with the unprecedented impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. Schools closed in 188 countries around the world affecting more than 1.7 billion students with many children and young people having to be educated at home through online learning and by their families (Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), 2020; Gallegos et al., 2022). The 2020–2021 school year presented unique challenges for teachers, who had to find new ways to support their students, their families, and themselves (McMakin et al., 2023). In a survey exploring teacher confidence supporting students in the aftermath of the pandemic, Lowry et al. (2022) found that in the UK only 40% of teachers felt equipped to support children with mental health needs and that over half were not confident in supporting trauma affected or grieving children following the COVID-19 pandemic (Lowry et al., 2022). This is particularly problematic given that external support services cannot keep up with demand and many children referred by schools for mental health services face long waits (Frearson & Duncan, 2024).

As a result, the arrival of the COVID pandemic demanded that educators move swiftly to adopt new ways of teaching, advising, and mentoring (Harper & Neubauer, 2021). A national study comparing rates of verbal and

physical aggression against various school stakeholders before and after the COVID-19 restrictions found that teachers experienced the highest increase in rates of verbal and physical violence from students. This experience of violence was also associated with teachers' intentions to transfer positions or leave their profession (McMahon, Worrell, et al., 2024). The authors argue that the findings of their study indicate a high need for specific types of training both during and after COVID-19 restrictions, including trauma-informed practices, socioemotional learning approaches, working with diverse groups, de-escalation strategies, restorative justice practices, behaviour and classroom management, threat assessment, and staff team building (McMahon, Worrell, et al., 2024).

This specific call to train teachers in TIP is echoed in the wider literature since the pandemic restrictions (Kelly, 2021; McMakin et al., 2023; Mullin et al., 2024). Additionally, it was recognized that training new teachers during the pandemic should be viewed from the perspective of trauma, and that teacher preparation programs should purposely embed TIPs to ensure the social and emotional needs of teacher trainees are met (Mullin et al., 2024).

Although the COVID-19 pandemic can be conveyed as representing a mass traumatic event, a key lesson from teaching in the time of COVID-19 is that college students and educators are resilient (Adelman, 2021). A survey commissioned by the UK government during this time found that two-thirds of students surveyed reported increases in supporting others, receiving information about mental health, and using healthy coping strategies; further, 77% said they felt optimistic or hopeful about their future school and job-related goals (House of Commons Education Committee., 2023). Despite the challenges and isolation, a majority of faculty staff members surveyed praised their institution's response to the pandemic and reported feeling supported during it (Harper & Neubauer, 2021). Overall, the research demonstrating the possibility for post traumatic growth following mass traumatic events such as COVID indicates the need for a trauma-informed approach to foster positive coping strategies in both children and adults (Sigad, 2024) which are an essential tool for maintaining resilience and in turn, good psychological health (Bagley, 2023).

9. The need to understand the educators who support the children

Since the pandemic, there has been increased attention to trauma and its effects on children's cognitive, emotional and social development (Loomis et al., 2024; Maynard et al., 2019). As a result, educators are becoming more aware of what student behaviour might be communicating (M. Brown et al., 2022). However, far less is known about how trauma is experienced by educators themselves and how these experiences differ across identity, role and professional background (Olive et al., 2024). In a large-scale survey, Olive et al., (2024) found that Hispanic educators, as well as those identifying as gay or bisexual, reported significantly higher adverse experiences (ACEs) than their white or heterosexual peers. These findings underscore the need to take an identity conscious approach to TIP, recognising that some staff may be navigating both personal and secondary trauma simultaneously (Olive et al., 2024). Critical trauma theory offers a useful lens, situating

trauma within broader sociopolitical systems of oppression (Vickroy, 2015). For example, educators from ethnic minority backgrounds may have personal or familial histories of trauma related to systemic racism, discrimination, and marginalization and this historical trauma can compound the emotional burden experienced in their professional roles (Pratt et al., 2024).

Indeed, TIP is not only about recognising trauma in students but also about creating psychologically safe environments for staff. While clinical interventions like cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) and acceptance commitment therapy (ACT) play an important role, they do not address the everyday conditions within schools that may may retraumatise or emotionally exhaust staff (Purtle, 2020). Trauma-informed training programmes suggest that trauma-informed cultures should be systemic, embedded across leadership, policy and school routines (Long, 2022a) and these organisational structures and development practices can either support or constrain educators in implementing relational attuned practices (Cafaro et al., 2023).

Several frameworks advocate for system wide implementation. For instance, (SAMHSA, 2014) emphasises that all professionals in a system, not just clinicians, should be trained to understand, recognise and respond to trauma. Yet in practice, there is often a disconnect between this aspiration and educators lived realities. Harland et al., (2015) found that while most teachers felt confident identifying behaviour linked to mental health needs, only a third (32%) reported receiving adequate training (Harland et al., 2015). Leadership engagement is therefore crucial to ensuring staff buy in and sustainable implementation (Russell B.S. et al., 2024). Therefore, ensuring TIP is sustainable and embedded through a whole school approach includes revisiting organisational policies, professional development models and leadership systems that can either promote or hinder teacher's use of caring and nurturing strategies (Long, 2022a).

Furthermore, the psychological cost of care is widely cited across trauma informed disciplines including not only education, but healthcare and social work (Arbour et al., 2024; Guest et al., 2024). Those who are regularly exposed to emotional pain and adversity may be at risk of compassion fatigue which is defined as "a reduced empathic capacity or client interest manifested through behavioural and emotional reactions from exposure to the traumatising experiences of others" (Cieslak et al., 2014, p. 76). Closely related to this is secondary traumatisation or retraumatisation, where staff may develop trauma-like symptoms through empathic engagement with those who have experienced trauma (O'Toole & Dobutowitsch, 2023). While some evidence highlights the protective effects of high-quality training and self-efficacy (Oberg et al., 2023), such outcomes are contingent on supportive leadership and emotionally attuned supervision sessions (Boylan et al., 2023a; Long, 2022b). Therefore, it is important to understand how educators are experiencing these organisational structures in formally trained trauma-informed schools.

Notably, most research to date has focused on primary school settings where nurturing classroom environments may be more congruent with trauma-informed values (Heck et al., 2023). This focus is also

justified; early intervention is indeed crucial in promoting secure attachment, emotional regulation and resilience in young children (Bilbrey et al., 2024; Loomis, 2021). The early years provide a vital window of neurodevelopmental plasticity, making them particularly receptive to relational approaches that mitigate the effects of trauma (B. Perry, 2006). However, secondary/ high school environments often prioritise academic attainment and behaviour management which can sit in tension with relational approaches that aim to support the broader growth of students (Wilson et al., 2023). It has been found that although primary and secondary educators shared similar attitudes toward TIP, primary teachers implemented significantly more TIP strategies than secondary educators (Heck et al., 2023), suggesting there may be structural or cultural barriers to be explored within secondary settings.

Additionally, adolescents present unique developmental challenges, including heightened sensitivity to perceived threat, identity formation and increased social vulnerability, all of which intersect with trauma in complex ways (Cafaro et al., 2023). Also, Cohen & Baron's (2021) systematic review points to a lack of robust research exploring trauma-informed practice specifically in secondary/ high school contexts. There are calls to better understand exactly what high schools are doing when they say they are implementing a trauma-informed approach (Maynard et al., 2019).

Additionally, non-teaching staff such as pastoral workers, teaching assistants and office administrators in high schools, play an essential but often overlooked role in delivering trauma-informed approaches. Howel et al., (2019) argue that since non-teaching staff are integrated within school routines, have ongoing relationships with students, teachers, and staff, they are well-positioned to enact implementation of trauma-informed programs in five key domains: (a) supporting staff development; (b) creating a safe and supportive environment;(c) assessing needs and planning services; (d) involving consumers; and (e) adapting practices (Howell et al., 2019). Non-teaching staff are rarely included in training or decision making but their inclusion is vital to fostering school wide consistency and relational safety (Garcia, 2021; Stokes, 2022). Therefore, it is important to understand their experiences of trauma-informed care.

Given this, further research is warranted to understand how secondary school staff are making sense of trauma-informed approaches in their relative contexts and roles. This includes not only classroom teachers but the wider workforce who contribute to the emotional and relational climate of the school.

Part A2 – Semi - Systematic Literature Review

1. Rationale for proposed semi-systematic literature review

Given the rise in student mental health concerns since the COVID-19 lockdown (Kelly, 2021) and calls to better understand educator experiences of TIP in secondary/ high schools (C. E. Cohen & Barron, 2021; Heck et al., 2023), it is important to explore how *secondary/ high* school staff perceive, experience, and implement trauma-informed approaches. Knowledge of this will be crucial to developing contextually sensitive, sustainable and equity-focused interventions.

This literature review aims to make a case for the reported research on the basis of an important and contextualised question (Braun & Clarke, 2013). A semi-systematic literature review (Snyder, 2019) was conducted to answer the question:

What can the literature tell us about how secondary/ high school staff experience and perceive the use of a trauma-informed approach in their practice?

The purpose of a 'semi-systematic' review is to map a field of research that has developed over time, synthesize the state of knowledge, and create an agenda for further research (Snyder, 2019a, p. 335). The semi-systematic review seeks to synthesize this research using meta-narratives (Wong et al., 2013) which differs from the rigorous systematic approach of measuring effect sizes by combining results across different studies in order to find a knowledge gap to be filled (Davis et al., 2014). The strict systematic approach that succumbs to the positivist-empiricist notion that research is truth finding (Braun & Clarke, 2022), would not be suitable for the present study since TIP is a broad and multidisciplinary topic that has been conceptualized differently and studied by various groups of researchers (Wong et al., 2013). Furthermore, this semi-systematic review is not intended to uncover universal truths but to critically explore how staff experiences have been represented and understood across existing research. It considers how contextual factors, discourses, and power relations shape implementation, and attends to which voices are privileged or marginalised within the literature.

However, the approach holds that the research process should be transparent and should have a developed strategy that enables readers to assess whether the arguments for the judgments made were reasonable, both for the chosen topic and from a methodological perspective (Snyder, 2019b). To reflect this element of transparency, the search strategy that was employed is illustrated by the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses [PRISMA] (Page et al., 2021) model in Figure 4.

2. Search strategy and study selection

The semi-systematic search was conducted using databases most relevant to education and psychology. These included Ovid via Medline, APA PsychInfo, Proquest, and Scopus. These databases were purposely selected due to their focus within the social sciences and education disciplines, enabling access to literature pertaining to staff experiences of TIP. The search was conducted twice with a final search carried out in December 2024. The specific search terms used on all databases can be found in appendix B. Other appropriate literature was identified using a snowball technique through search engines such as Google Scholar and scanning reference lists (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Unpublished doctoral theses were included if they met the inclusion criteria (see table 2).

3. Method

Studies exploring 'perspectives' or 'experiences' are usually, but not always, 'qualitative' in nature (Harden & Thomas, 2005). The term 'qualitative' is in inverted commas because in practice it is often difficult to classify research as being either 'qualitative' or 'quantitative' as much research contains aspects of both (Harden & Thomas, 2005). It naturally follows in this semi-systematic literature search of teacher 'perceptions' and 'experiences' that most of the research found was 'qualitative', with the exception of two mixed methods papers. Therefore, a qualitative systematic review methodology—drawing on thematic synthesis and interpretive approaches (J. Thomas & Harden, 2008), was selected to enable the identification of patterns and divergences in findings while preserving the richness of participants' lived experiences. This approach ensures the review remains grounded in contextually situated understandings, helping to inform the empirical research questions developed at the end of this section. The findings from this review provide the foundation for the empirical research study in part 2 of the overall thesis, and outline implications for educational psychology (EP) practice and future research.

Identification of studies from databases

Identification of studies from elsewhere

Identification

Total records identified through database searching (n=189)

Scopus (n=49)

Proquest (n=95)

OVID via medline incl APA psychinfo (n=45)

Records removed *before screening*:

Duplicate records removed

(n = 21)

Total records identified from elsewhere (n=1)

Citation harvesting (n=1)

Screening

Records screened by titles and abstract

(n = 168)

Records excluded*

(n =117)

Eligibility

Reports assessed for eligibility

(n =51)

Reports excluded (n=32):

Did not focus on secondary school staff experiences (n = 13)

Participants did not have formal training in TIP (n = 5)

Research was published before 2017 (n = 10)

Data used was quantitative only so didn't focus on depth of experience and perspectives (n=3)

Full text unavailable (n= 1)

Included

Studies included in the semi-systematic review (excluding the 'implications for Educational Psychology practice' section)

(n = 20)

Figure 4: PRISMA diagram.

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4. Approach to critical appraisal

Most of the literature found was from the United States of America and Australia, except for one qualitative study from England (see Frearson & Duncan, 2024 in appendix C) and one study from Canada (see Kim et al., 2021 in appendix C). To the authors knowledge, there did not exist any peer reviewed research or dissertations from Wales that focused on the experiences of trauma-informed teachers at the time the search was conducted. Since all studies included in this review employed a qualitative, mixed methods or systematic review paradigm to explore the perceptions and experiences of school staff, the Critical skills appraisal programme (CASP) qualitative checklist, the CASP mixed methods checklist and the CASP systematic reviews checklist was chosen as a guide to critically appraise the studies found (CASP, 2018).

Additionally, the CASP tool enhances methodological transparency, which is essential for trust in findings. As Harden and Thomas (2005) note, literature reviews "enable readers to access the findings of a wider range of research than would otherwise be the case" and must avoid selection bias by ensuring studies are "trustworthy" and "accurately represented." (Harden & Thomas, 2005, p. 259). To provide a clear audit trail of how each study was evaluated, I have included a CASP evaluation table (see appendix C), allowing readers to see at a glance, how individual studies met or fell short of key quality criteria.

5. Inclusion and Exclusion criteria

Table 3: Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria.

Inclusion criteria	Exclusion criteria	Rationale
Participants formally trained in trauma-informed approaches/ practice. Participant sample can be teaching or non-teaching.	Studies in which participants have been trained in 'relational approaches' more generally or where there is no mention of TIP specifically.	From a critical realist perspective, this criterion ensures that the actual mechanisms and structures (i.e. formal training and systemic implementation) that shape educator behaviour and experience are explored. This research is interested in how school staff construct meaning around their experiences of TIP which does presuppose some degree of identifiable practice.
Papers specifically focused on the **perspectives** and	Papers that do not specifically focus on the	The criterion aligns directly with the literature review question which is concerned with educator experiences. Within the social

experiences of educators. This might include mixed methods papers or systematic/ narrative review papers as well qualitative papers.	perspectives, experiences or views of educators.	constructionist epistemology that this research has adopted, the subjective meanings and discourses that educators construct around TIP are the core focus of this research. Including studies that centre other stakeholder groups such as students or parents would dilute the focus of this synthesis.
Papers published from 2017 to ensure contextual relevance.	Papers published before 2017 excluded.	This is informed by a policy and practice shift in the UK and internationally (Department of Health & Department for Education., 2017; National Assembly for Wales Children, Young People and Education Committee., 2018). See appendix B for a detailed rationale.
Papers wherein the Participant sample consists of professionals working with students who are at secondary/ middle/ high school age (age 11+ years).	Any research where the majority or all of the participant sample represent the primary or elementary school experience as this is not relevant to the systematic search question which is about the secondary school context.	This review is specifically concerned with secondary/ high school contexts which differ from primary/ elementary school contexts in terms of school culture, behaviour management systems and relational dynamics (Ayre et al., 2022a; Bilbrey et al., 2024). Many secondary/ high school teachers across the UK and internationally are leaving the profession , citing reasons such as stress and burnout from the challenges of managing student behaviour (Castro Schepers, 2023; Oberg et al., 2023). Additionally, data from the Department for Education reveals that 57% of secondary school teachers in England felt their workload was unmanageable, compared to 53% of primary teachers (Foster, 2023). Therefore, it is vital to gain insights from the secondary/ high school teacher experience that might inform how systems can enhance teacher efficacy and job satisfaction within trauma-informed contexts.

6. Introduction to literature review

Trauma-informed practice (TIP) has gained significant traction within educational research in recent years, particularly in response to increasing awareness of the psychological impact of trauma on student wellbeing and behaviour (Mullin et al., 2024). This literature review offers a thematic synthesis of 20 studies, exploring secondary/ high school educator experiences of TIP. Using the CASP framework to assess the quality of included studies, this review identifies 4 key themes, recurring tensions and implications for systemic change.

7. TIP as a Relational and Emotionally Complex Practice

A dominant pattern across studies was the emphasis on relational practice as both the key ingredient and the challenge of trauma-informed pedagogy. Teachers in multiple studies (e.g., Easterling, 2023; Ellison & Walton-Fisette, 2022; Ganigan, 2021) described TIP as grounded in empathy, attunement, and connection, often framing relationships as the primary mechanism through which restorative healing and learning could occur. In one California school district, Hinton-Pollard (2020) conducted in depth interviews with 8 middle school teachers and found that teachers strategically integrated trauma-informed practices in their classrooms, such as building relationships, creating safe spaces, and balancing student-centred and teacher-centred approaches. Teachers also identified positive impacts of trauma-informed practices on student behaviour, academics, and self-advocacy (Hinton-Pollard, 2020). These findings were consistent with an in depth case study (Ganigan, 2021) finding that teacher experiences emphasized how practices such as fostering positive relationships and creating safe spaces created the foundation for positive learning environments, decreased the exhibition of high-risk behaviours, increasing overall academic achievement and levels of peer collaboration (Ganigan, 2021).

However, this emphasis on relational practice can be emotionally taxing. Eubanks (2022) found that teachers noted the difficulties of remaining emotionally available when dealing with high levels of student dysregulation (Eubanks, 2023). Similarly Frearson & Duncan (2024) found that staff instinctively tried to respond with compassion but felt unsupported by pastoral staff, revealing a mismatch between individual intentions and systemic constraints (Frearson & Duncan, 2024). Frearson & Duncan (2024) recognise the emotional burden that trauma-informed practice can bring onto teachers and suggests that leadership teams have a role to play in mitigating teacher stress. Dealing with classroom based childhood trauma with minimal support brings risks to teachers' mental health and can contribute to feelings of depression, a sense of professional inadequacy and burnout, increasing the likelihood of teachers leaving the profession (Frearson & Duncan, 2024). Although Frearson & Duncan's research and Eubanks' research took place in two different contexts (UK and USA respectively), the experience of educators was similar. This suggests that compassion

fatigue and emotional burnout might be an unintended consequence of trauma-informed practice, despite differences in educational policy and context between countries.

In a particularly nuanced account, Gleaton (2023) highlights how teachers of colour bring cultural intuition to relational work but are often under-recognised or unsupported (Gleaton, 2024). This might be concerning also in light of Ganigan's findings that perceived challenges included 'difficulties in building a capacity for cultural empathy' in classrooms regardless of their exposure or knowledge of trauma and 'a lack of proper training and educator support' (Ganigan, 2021, p86). In this way, the relational demands of TIP seem to intersect with racialised and professional identities, reinforcing the need to embed TIP in broader equity frameworks that support educators and the children.

Prioritising relationships between teacher and student has been identified as a fundamental aspect of trauma-informed practice in other research. For instance, Ellison & Walton-Fisette (2022) explored the experiences and knowledge of 27 physical education teachers in the United States related to trauma and trauma-informed practices. The author found that teachers' pedagogical decisions and relationship-building were crucial in developing student responsibility and self-regulation skills (Ellison & Walton-Fisette, 2022). Although this research was based on a specific subset of PE teachers and cannot be applied to the experiences of teachers who are specialists in other subject domains, the study offered a nuanced insight into the intuitive ability of educators to respond compassionately to student needs.

8. Educator wellbeing and emotional labour

Closely linked to the relational demands of TIP is the emotional toll it can take on educators. Multiple studies in this review (e.g., Eubanks, 2023; Frearson & Duncan, 2024; Luthar & Mendes, 2020a; Southall et al., 2023) highlighted the risk of compassion fatigue and emotional burnout. Teachers frequently described feeling depleted, unsupported and vulnerable to secondary trauma- especially in schools lacking adequate supervision, reflective practice or leadership support (E. Berger & Samuel, 2020; M. Brown & L'Estrange, 2023). This calls into question the reasons why there is a perceived lack of support and what can be done about this. Easterling (2023) makes a suggestion that ongoing training should address exactly how trauma-informed theory relates to trauma-informed practice (Easterling, 2023). In an interview, one participant specifically stated "I think learning how to de-escalate situations is something that needs to taught. It is a skill. It is not something that a person knows naturally how to do." (Easterling, 2023, p. 92).

This could speak to the perceived ambiguity involved in implementing a trauma-informed approach, which could be remedied through dedicated supervision and reflection time (Southall et al., 2023). For instance, Southall et al., (2023) presented an intervention through the reflective circle education model (RCEM) which allowed educators to explore their own emotional responses in a structured, collegial setting. Teachers in this study reported increased self-regulation and empathy through collective reflection. Whilst this study offers

valuable insights into the potential of structured reflective spaces to enhance teacher wellbeing, it is important to consider the role of researcher influence in shaping participant's reported experiences. This is particularly salient given the model itself was novel and co-developed by the school which may have further increased staff reluctance to offer critical feedback.

Despite the possible methodological flaws with Southall's research, other research in this review suggests that these reflective spaces are deeply necessary; many studies found that educators felt unsupported, describing deep emotion exhaustion and a lack of trust in institutional interventions (Blitz & Mulcahy, 2017; Eubanks, 2023; Luthar & Mendes, 2020). Moreover, Blitz & Mulcahy (2017) reported scepticism and resistance among educators when trauma-informed implementation lacked meaningful buy-in or was perceived as tokenistic. Taken together these studies suggest reflective supervision can be powerful, but its success likely depends on trust and relational safety between leadership and teaching staff.

Brunzell et al., (2021, 2022) further emphasized that teacher wellbeing is not merely an outcome of TIP but a precondition for its effectiveness. Their findings suggest that when teachers applied trauma-informed strategies to themselves as well as their students, both resilience and pedagogical efficacy increased; highlighting the importance of applying the principles of trauma-informed practice to both students and the teachers themselves.

9. Barriers to implementation: systemic inconsistency

Research suggests that there is widespread inconsistency in how TIP is implemented schools. Multiple studies (e.g. (E. Berger & Samuel, 2020; Eubanks, 2023; Luthar & Mendes, 2020) found that despite general enthusiasm for trauma-informed principles, educators were constrained by lack of training, buy in and poor leadership support. In an interpretive phenomenological analysis of teachers lived experiences, Frearson & Duncan (2024) found that teachers experience senior management to have high expectations of student achievement, but feel their support is inconsistent (Frearson & Duncan, 2024). The authors suggest that clear communication from leadership teams to identify trauma-affected pupils to their teachers is needed as this informs how teachers manage behaviour and enables them to adopt an empathic and compassionate approach (Frearson & Duncan, 2024). This widespread inconsistency in support might suggest a significant gap between the values of TIP and the structures of performative schooling (M. Brown & L'Estrange, 2023).

This perceived lack of support also extends to non-teaching staff. In an exploration of the experiences and perceptions of school mental health workers, Berger & Samual (2020) found that although participants identified helpful factors, such as consistency in routines and procedural support from colleagues, the most prominent themes in participants' narratives reflected the challenges of providing optimal training for staff regarding student traumatic exposure (E. Berger & Samuel, 2020). School mental health workers indicated that there is a lack of adequate emotional support for school staff. Participants noted that to promote good self-

care, there needs to be a "self-care policy" for staff "because if we're not okay, then we can't look after anyone else" (E. Berger & Samuel, 2020, p. 502). This phenomenon is what Karen Treisman notes as the importance of 'containing the container' (Treisman, 2024a, p. 304) because teachers need to feel regulated before they can regulate their students.

Participants in Berger & Samual's research also felt that current training only serves as a refresher of knowledge, rather than extending their current knowledge and expertise and there was a call for external support through supervision to extend and deepen their knowledge (Berger & Samuel, 2020). This support should be specific and contextualised to their setting in order for them to do their work effectively. For example, in remote Australian settings this means preparing teachers with cultural awareness and relevant trauma-informed training (M. Brown & L'Estrange, 2023).

10. The need for whole school integration of trauma-informed approaches

Whilst much of the research in this review criticised leadership support for trauma-informed practices, some identified some elements of support that could be very useful such as training, coaching or implementation support (Ganigan, 2021; Haynes et al., 2023; S. Kim et al., 2021). Haynes et al., (2023) reported that equity-centred professional development enhanced cultural responsiveness and relational intent, suggesting that when professional development addresses not just trauma but its intersections with race and identity, it becomes more transformative on a whole school level.

Haynes et al., (2023) used journal reflections and semi structured interviews to gather data from their participants. Three overarching themes were identified: (a) Enriching the soil of knowledge and awareness (i.e., racial trauma knowledge and awareness, social awareness, and self-awareness), (b) Growing roots of intentionality (i.e., deliberate and purposeful thoughts for interacting with students), and (c) Budding of social change agents (i.e., educators' transformative potential and desire to engage in social action efforts) (Haynes et al., 2023, p15). This knowledge and awareness shift is consistent with other research in this review indicating that trauma-informed professional development helps to increase knowledge, change mindsets, and enhance trauma-informed attitudes of educators (Brunzell et al., 2022; Easterling, 2023; Ganigan, 2021).

However, Haynes et al., (2023) found that some participants responses reflect colour blindness and a lack of critical awareness or understanding that racially marginalized students experience racial stress, especially in schools (Haynes et al., 2023). The authors also emphasise the importance of a cultural shift at leadership level stating that school leaders should move beyond general self-care and wellness to address educators' trauma and social-emotional well-being. Instead, leaders must acknowledge institutional practices that may perpetuate trauma/racial trauma for their staff and students and work to address such systemic practices. Therefore, just as teachers and school staff participate in trauma-informed professional development promoting anti-racism, school leaders should do the same (Haynes et al., 2023).

Blitz & Mulcahy (2017), Southall et al., (2023) and Brunzell et al., (2021) found that when TIP was integrated at a whole school level with leadership modelling, staff wellbeing support and shared values; implementation was more coherent and sustainable. For example, Southall's Reflective Circle model was especially effective in bridging individual reflection with collective learning. Likewise, Brunzell et al. (2021) developed a model for 'trauma-informed teacher wellbeing' that positions wellbeing as a relational, organisational responsibility; not a personal task. However, despite this call for school leaders to foster a whole school culture shift to trauma-informed practice (Haynes et al., 2023), it is not always achieved.

In a study exploring the perspectives of educators and education support professionals regarding the benefits and barriers of a trauma-informed approach for African-American students facing community or personal trauma, it was found that TIPs often do not align consistently with existing school values and cultural norms (Eubanks, 2023). For example, participants shared their frustration regarding attempting to support the immediate needs of students when the priority of expectations given by the district and state focus on standardized academic expectations (Eubanks, 2023). These competing priorities to help foster positive wellbeing and academic success in students was a factor contributing to stress and burnout in other studies included in this review (Brunzell et al., 2021; Frearson & Duncan, 2024). Participants also expressed their concerns that some teachers don't want to be included in school or community events that would help them understand the cultural significance of the school and students (Eubanks, 2023), which is likely to further impede their ability to effectively engage students in their learning.

In their narrative review, Oberg et al., (2023) emphasise that without formal support structures, staff may be left emotionally overwhelmed despite good intentions. Moreover, TIP trainings have been criticised as being overly conceptual or ineffective without structural change, with educators reverting to punitive models when under stress (Hinton-Pollard, 2020; Mullin et al., 2024). This reinforces the need for systems level thinking and raises critical questions about the evidence base behind popular TIP narratives. Taken together, the full range of studies reviewed-spanning qualitative inquiry (M. Brown & L'Estrange, 2023; Eubanks, 2023; Frearson & Duncan, 2024), mixed methods research (e.g., (S. Kim et al., 2021; Mullin et al., 2024) and systemic reviews (C. E. Cohen & Barron, 2021; Oberg et al., 2023) highlight the layered and often inconsistent experiences of educators tasked with trauma-informed implementation.

11. Implications for educational psychology practice

The above synthesis of research highlights several implications for the evolving role of educational psychologists (EPs) in supporting TIP in schools. These implications can span individual, relational and systems level work. Experts in the field of trauma-informed practice suggest EPs are well placed to help schools on a journey toward becoming more trauma-informed and trauma responsive (Triesman, 2021).

Southall et al., (2023) and Brunzell et al., (2021, 2022) demonstrate that structured reflective spaces such as the reflective circle education model; can foster teacher insight, emotional regulation and relational capacity. EPs are well placed to draw on supervision frameworks and trauma theory to co-create these reflective spaces that are psychologically safe; particularly in schools where relational trust is fragile or staff are emotionally depleted (Eubanks, 2023; Luthar & Mendes, 2020). EPs may also be able to use sessions with staff to encourage the use of creative and empowering methods to help pupils make sense of their experiences such as techniques found within narrative therapy; which situate blame outside of the person, viewing people as separate to their problems (Triesman, 2021).

However, it is imperative that EPs do change work *with* schools rather than *to* schools by gathering a sound cultural and historical understanding of the school, that promotes minority perspectives and contributions (Tettegah et al., 2023). The present review highlighted a lack of critical awareness that racially marginalised students experience racial stress (Eubanks, 2023; Ganigan, 2021) which signals the possibility that there may be a vital role for EPs in raising this awareness by promoting the voices of racially marginalised students in our schools (Wright, 2020).

Indeed, there may be a need for greater "conscientization" or critical consciousness raising among educational psychologists to drive change in schools (Wright, 2020). It is possible that this can be achieved through asking questions about cultural background, including family dynamics, in order to encourage a greater understanding about possible hypotheses. This should contribute towards a more cognisant formulation of strengths and needs of pupils and their families in their communities (Carr-Jones & Ellis, 2024), facilitating a more positive experience for teachers when addressing the needs of marginalised students and their families.

Finally, the literature illustrates a lack of coherence in how TIP is conceptualised and enacted across schools (C. E. Cohen & Barron, 2021; Mullin et al., 2024). EPs can contribute to the development and evaluation of school specific trauma-informed frameworks by ensuring TIP efforts are scaffolded with staff wellbeing initiatives, supervision and leadership support or supervision which were critical enablers identified across the evidence base (E. Berger & Samuel, 2020; Frearson & Duncan, 2024; Ganigan, 2021; Oberg et al., 2023).

12. Research rationale for current study

This semi-systematic review highlighted several common themes in experiences and perceptions of trauma-informed practice. These included: TIP as a relationally and emotionally complex practice, highlighting the need for reflection and supervision (E. Berger & Samuel, 2020; M. Brown & L'Estrange, 2023; Frearson & Duncan, 2024); the need for a focus on educator wellbeing (Luthar & Mendes, 2020; A. E. Southall et al., 2023); barriers to implementation including systemic inconsistency (E. Berger & Samuel, 2020; Blitz & Mulcahy, 2017; Haynes et al., 2023) and the need for a whole school integration of trauma informed approaches to enable to the whole school culture shift (C. E. Cohen & Barron, 2021; Eubanks, 2023; Oberg

et al., 2023; Treisman, 2024a). These were valuable insights which had implications for ways that EPs might work with educators in secondary schools across England and Wales.

However, as highlighted in the current systematic review, the empirical literature on educator experiences of TIP remains fragmented, largely descriptive and heavily weighted toward research conducted outside of the UK; particularly in the USA and Australia. While a number of studies have explored the perceived benefits and implementation challenges of TIP (Brunzell et al., 2022; S. Kim et al., 2021; A. E. Southall et al., 2023), relatively few have critically examined how educators understandings and practices are shaped by their broader ideological, cultural and systemic contexts.

Moreover, the review revealed a tendency in the literature to focus on the psychological and relational dimensions of TIP such as empathy, wellbeing and burnout (S. Kim et al., 2021; Mullin et al., 2024; Oberg et al., 2023), while often overlooking the social and political forces that shape how trauma is constructed, how care is given and how behaviour is managed in schools. For example, only a handful of studies (e.g. (Gleaton, 2024; Haynes et al., 2023) explicitly engaged with issues of race, adultism, or the influence of neoliberal policy frameworks on school culture and staff perceptions. Yet, as educators work within systems increasingly driven by standardisation , accountability and performativity (Wilson et al., 2023), their ability to implement trauma-informed approaches may be constrained or shaped by dominant ideologies about discipline, authority and what 'good teaching' looks like. These ideologies have been unexamined in the current literature, leading to a lack of exploration around the sociopolitical dimensions of TIP.

Methodologically, most studies identified in the semi-systematic review adopted thematic analysis (E. Berger & Samuel, 2020; Ellison & Walton-Fisette, 2022; Eubanks, 2023; A. E. Southall et al., 2023) or a descriptive case study approach (Ganigan, 2021) without explicitly drawing on critical frameworks that would allow for deeper interrogation of the power dynamics, assumptions and structural forces underpinning educator narratives. As a result, there is a risk that research may produce uncritical accounts of TIP that are disconnected from the realities of educational policy, social inequality and cultural discourse. The author did not find any research at the time the searches were conducted that used critical thematic analysis (Lawless & Chen, 2019) to explore how TIP is experienced and perceived by secondary/ high school educators in England and Wales (see methodology section in part 2 of this thesis) in relation to the ideological systems within which they operate.

Also with the exception of Berger & Samual (2020) who explored the views of school mental health workers working in trauma-informed schools and Blitz & Mulcahy (2017) who included a range of school staff in their participatory research, the studies included in this review explored a relatively homogenous sample of teaching staff. It is unclear why there is a perceived lack of support from senior leadership to enable the whole school trauma-informed culture shift (E. Berger & Samuel, 2020; Easterling, 2023), therefore the voices of non-

teaching and/ or leadership staff should be included in research on TIP implementation. By including a broader range of school staff in the present study (see part 2), this research recognises the distributed nature of trauma-informed work and seeks to generate insights that can support a more cohesive and system-wide cultural shift.

13. Research questions

The present study seeks to contribute to the knowledge base and deepen understanding (Braun & Clarke, 2022) on TIP implementation in the English and Welsh context. These research questions will be explored using a combined approach of critical and thematic analysis (see part 2 of this thesis).

1. What are the perceptions and experiences of secondary school staff in England and Wales who implement a trauma-informed approach in their practice?

2. How might staff experiences be influenced by wider contextual factors such as social and political ideologies?
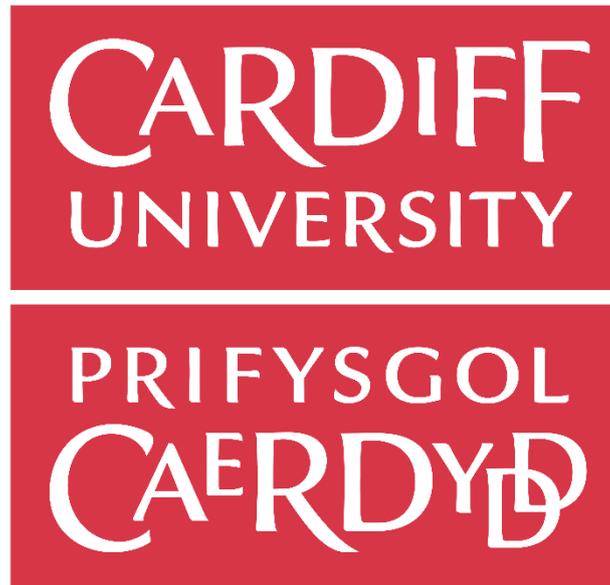
Part B: Empirical Research Paper

Word Count: 12, 109 (excluding tables and references)

Abstract

Aim

This thesis explores how secondary school staff in England and Wales perceive and experience the implementation of trauma-informed practice (TIP). The study responds to calls to better understand educator experiences of TIP, particularly the lack of UK-based research focused on secondary schools and the need to understand how social, political, and ideological factors influence educators' interpretations of TIP. Two research questions guide the inquiry: (1) What are the perceptions and experiences of secondary school staff in England and Wales who implement a trauma-informed approach in their practice? (2) How might these experiences be influenced by wider contextual factors such as social and political ideologies?

Method

Adopting a critical realist ontology and a social constructionist epistemology, the research employed a qualitative design using semi-structured interviews with ten secondary school staff from a range of roles and school types across England and Wales. Participants were purposively sampled based on their completion of formal trauma-informed training through Trauma-informed Schools UK (TISUK). Ethical approval was secured, and all data were collected and managed in accordance with university policy.

Analysis

Data were analysed using a combined approach of Reflexive Thematic Analysis (RTA) and Critical Thematic Analysis (CTA). Braun and Clarke's (2022) six-step framework was employed, with additional emphasis on identifying discursive patterns of power and ideology as suggested by Lawless and Chen (2019). Open and closed coding strategies were used to generate themes that reflected both participant meaning-making and the sociopolitical conditions shaping their practice.

Conclusions

Findings revealed a deep commitment to relational and compassionate pedagogy among participants, alongside tensions with performative accountability systems, rigid behaviour policies, and inconsistent leadership support. Participants often experienced internal conflict between trauma-informed values and institutional pressures or expectations. The influence of broader ideologies such as neoliberalism and adultism was evident in how staff described their work and its challenges. The study contributes original insights into the contextual complexities of implementing trauma-informed approaches in secondary schools and offers implications for educational psychology, whole-school reform, and staff wellbeing. A practitioner-facing framework: the Relational Regulation Framework (RRF)- is proposed to help bridge trauma-informed theory with trauma-informed practice in schools.

Part B – Empirical Research Paper

1. Introduction

In recent years, there has been a notable shift towards relational models of behaviour support, particularly in response to increasing levels of adversity and unmet need among children and young people (E. Berger et al., 2023). This shift reflects broader societal and political developments, including heightened awareness of mental health challenges, particularly in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic (McMakin et al., 2023) and increasing policy attention on the importance of mental health provision in schools (Department for Education (DfE), 2021, 2024a; Labour party, 2024). More schools in the UK are reporting rising levels of distress, anxiety and dysregulation among students (S. Hughes, 2024; National Assembly for Wales Children, Young People and Education Committee., 2018) and these psychological or emotional responses might become defined as traumas (Venet, 2023). As a result, trauma-informed approaches are gaining traction in UK policy discourse and school-based training initiatives (e.g., TISUK), positioning TIP as a key framework for school wellbeing (Long, 2022b).

Trauma-informed practice (TIP) is a term that was first formally introduced in clinical contexts in 2001 (Harris & Fallot, 2001). TIP in educational contexts, as defined by Treisman (2017, 2024), refers to a systemic and relational approach that prioritises psychological and physical safety, fosters trust and recognises the pervasive impact of trauma (Treisman, 2017, 2024a). The literature emphasises that TIP in schools is not a one size fits all intervention or isolated behaviour strategy but rather an ethos and philosophy of care that recognises how developmental, relational and systemic trauma can affect both learning and behaviour (Bear & Soltys, 2020; Boylan et al., 2023a; C. E. Cohen & Barron, 2021; Long, 2022b; Maynard et al., 2019). At the present time, differing perspectives are held by educational experts, psychologists and researchers regarding how schools can create calm and supportive environments where children and young people can learn and thrive (Jones et al., 2024). Nonetheless, much of the literature concurs that trauma-informed approaches have potential to bring about positive outcomes for students in terms of their socio-emotional development, cognition and learning (Aldrup et al., 2022; Bear & Soltys, 2020; Maynard et al., 2019).

Despite this momentum toward trauma-informed ways of working, the literature has paid comparatively less attention to how educators themselves experience the implementation of TIP, particularly within secondary school contexts (C. E. Cohen & Barron, 2021). However, it is known that the demands involved in cultivating prosocial behaviours in children and reducing disruptive behaviours has long been a source of stress for high school staff (Ayre et al., 2022b; Bear & Soltys, 2020; Mackie et al., 2017), and a fiercely debated topic in the research (Jones et al., 2024). This debate concerns how schools can provide a relational, reflective and compassionate approach to education which focuses on wellbeing, under a neoliberal educational culture which prioritizes performance metrics, standardisation and accountability (Kumar, 2019). These competing

pressures have caused teachers to feel stress and frustration when providing compassionate care because they are constrained by systemic conditions wherein teacher worth is tied to quantifiable outcomes rather than relational or ethical practice (Wilson et al., 2023).

In light of these tensions, it is imperative to better understand the experience and perspectives of educators working in trauma-informed contexts so that they can be supported to meet the needs of trauma affected children. Current literature on educator experiences of TIP focuses on attitudes or teacher knowledge post training (Bilbrey et al., 2024; S. Kim et al., 2021; McMakin et al., 2023), with limited exploration of how school staff perceive and navigate TIP in their day to day roles, especially in the UK context. Even less is known about how these experiences are shaped by wider contextual factors such as school culture, leadership support and wider sociopolitical influences (Brunzell et al., 2021; Oberg et al., 2023). Many studies exploring educator perspectives of TIP have employed a homogenous sample of teaching staff who report feeling a lack of support from senior leadership staff to enable the whole school trauma-informed culture shift (E. Berger & Samuel, 2020; Easterling, 2023). Therefore, the voices of non-teaching and/ or leadership staff should be included in research on trauma-informed practice implementation which seeks to generate insights that can support a more cohesive and system-wide cultural shift.

From a critical realist position (Braun & Clarke, 2022), this study seeks to explore the experiences and perceptions of trauma-informed secondary school educators (RQ1) at not only the level of the school, but also at the broader societal, political and cultural level of influence (RQ2). To the author's knowledge, this is the first qualitative study to explore the experiences and perceptions of secondary/ high school staff in England and Wales whilst considering the broader sociopolitical context of the schools in which they work.

2. Research questions (RQs)

1. What are the perceptions and experiences of secondary school staff in England and Wales who implement a trauma-informed approach in their practice?
2. How might staff experiences be influenced by wider contextual factors such as social and political ideologies?

3. Methodology

3.1 Research paradigm

According to Brown & Dueñas (2020), it is important to choose a paradigm that is 'in keeping with your beliefs regarding the nature of reality' (Brown & Dueñas, 2020a, p. 547). These beliefs about reality are what is known as ontology (Brown & Dueñas, 2020a). This research is situated within a critical realist ontology, which posits that while there is a reality that exists independently of human perception, our understanding of

that reality is inevitably shaped by social, historical and cultural contexts (Braun & Clarke, 2022). Critical realism provides a 'third way' between positivism and relativism (House, 1991) allowing for the recognition of objective structures such as school systems, policy environments and institutional practices whilst also acknowledging that human knowledge of these structures is mediated by interpretation, discourse and meaning making (Fletcher, 2017).

This ontological stance is particularly suited to the current study which seeks to understand how secondary school staff in England and Wales experience and perceive the implementation of TIP in their everyday work (RQ 1). Critical realism permits an exploration of how these experiences are influenced by broader structural conditions such as trauma-informed training models (e.g. TIS UK), national education policy (DfE, 2021; DfE, 2024) and the embedded norms of school cultured while also attending to individual agency and subjective meaning-making. For example, a practitioner's perception of a trauma-informed approach may be shaped both by institutional training and by their own professional history and contextual pressures.

Aligned with this ontological stance, the study adopts a social constructionist epistemology. According to Brown & Dueñas (2020), "Epistemology seeks to answer two questions-one, what is knowledge, and two, how is knowledge acquired?" (Brown & Dueñas, 2020a, p. 578). A social constructionist epistemology recognises that knowledge is not passively received but actively constructed through social interaction, language and culture (Burr, 2015). Social constructionism takes a critical stance towards taken-for-granted assumptions, examining how understandings of the self, others and social phenomena are co-produced within specific sociocultural contexts (Lyons & Coyle, 2021). In this view, truth is not fixed or singular, but is contingent upon discursive practices and the power relations within which meaning is generated (Bryman, 1984; Willig, 1999).

This epistemological position supports the aim of exploring how participants construct their understandings of TIP and how these are shaped by both their professional environments and wider ideological conditions; these include policy discourses, social accountability frameworks and dominant behavioural paradigms (RQ 2). Participant accounts are treated as meaningful, without assuming there is one universal experience of implementing TIP. Instead, the analysis recognises that participants may hold multiple meanings that are shaped by their specific roles (e.g. teacher, pastoral staff, senior leader), as well as the school's ethos and external sociopolitical forces.

In terms of sociopolitical positioning, it is important to be aware that this research is informed by the researcher's progressive and humanistic values, which underpin an interest in exploring how TIPs are constructed and implemented by educators. Progressivism in the context of education, emphasises critical thinking and democratic values: it challenges traditional, authoritarian approaches to schooling and behaviour,

advocating instead for systems that foster equity, inclusion and the holistic development of the learner (Blake, 2008). This resonates strongly with the principles of TIP which call for a shift away from punitive behaviour models toward approaches that are more relational, compassionate and sensitive to student's life experiences (Valdebenito et al., 2019).

Humanism, meanwhile is rooted in the belief in the inherent dignity, agency and potential of every individual (Brunzell et al., 2016). In education, a humanistic perspective centres the emotional and psychological wellbeing of both students and teachers, highlighting the importance of empathy, authenticity and mutual respect in the learning environment (Noddings, 2012). It aligns with the ethos of TIP, which emphasises safety, trust, empowerment and connection as foundational to learning and development (Triesman, 2021). The researcher's alignment with humanistic values informs an interest in how educators might navigate the emotional demands of their roles, particularly in supporting students who have experienced trauma and how they are finding meaning and purpose in their professional relationships.

Mick Cooper's Psychology at the Heart of Social Change (2023) has further influenced and affirmed these commitments. Cooper argues for a psychology that is not ideologically neutral but ethically and politically engaged; one that aims to support human flourishing while actively challenging injustice and inequality. He calls for practitioners and researchers to stand alongside those who are marginalised or harmed by existing systems, and to develop practices grounded in empathy, relational depth and solidarity (Cooper, 2023a). His work has helped crystallise my own positioning as a researcher who views education as a place where relational and socially just approaches like TIP can offer meaningful support for both students and staff.

Given this positioning, it is important to orient myself as a reflexive and ethically engaged researcher by acknowledging my role within the education system and the broader power dynamics of research. My aim is not to take a neutral stance but to centre the voices and lived experiences of educators, recognising the structural and relational factors that shape their work. Acknowledging my positionality as researcher is also essential when conducting reflexive and critical thematic analysis (CTA) (Braun & Clarke, 2022; Lawless & Chen, 2019) as this approach explicitly recognises that data interpretation is shaped by the researcher's values and theoretical lens.

3.2 Research design

In keeping with a critical realist ontology and social constructionist epistemology, Semi-structured interviews were selected as the primary method of data collection. This approach allowed for an in-depth exploration of how participants construct their understandings of TIP while also acknowledging the broader structural and contextual factors that influence their experiences. Semi-structured interviews were particularly well suited to

this paradigm, offering flexibility to explore shared patterns across narratives while remaining sensitive to the unique meaning-making of each individual (Braun & Clarke, 2022; Lindlof & Taylor, 2011).

The possibility of gathering data via a focus group was also considered since participants all share a similar experience in working with children using a trauma-informed approach. However, it has been argued that participants are vulnerable in focus groups since they are not only persuaded by facilitators to disclose their views but that they do this in front of peers (Barbour & Kitzinger, 1999). Given this risk of inhibited disclosure or potential for discomfort, individual semi-structured interviews was chosen as the method of gathering data. The researcher felt this would facilitate psychological safety (Porges, 2022) and maximise opportunities for candid, reflective and meaningful responses.

An interview schedule (see appendix A) was developed to guide the conversations whilst maintaining curiosity and openness to emergent insights. Probes and possible unplanned questions were included with a view to support narrative depth and allow participants to elaborate on areas most salient to their own experiences, a key factor in interactive data collection (Reinhartz, 1993). The interviews were expected to last up to one hour in person or via Microsoft teams (depending on participant preference) and they were transcribed verbatim once they had all been carried out to aid immersion in the data prior to analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2022). Participants were also given the option to review their transcripts prior to analysis for accuracy.

3.3 Participant information and recruitment

Participants were recruited using purposive sampling, in which teachers were selected because they have the characteristics required of the sample; teachers and leaders working in secondary schools who have attended the trauma-informed schools UK (TIS-UK) diploma training. Given that the researcher worked within the EPS within the local area in which the research was carried out, she invited all trauma-informed schools in the local authority which warranted the use of a gatekeeper. In this case, the gatekeeper was the head teachers of the trauma-informed schools of interest (see gatekeeper letter in appendix A). The researcher sent an email to the headteachers of the schools of interest asking permission to attend a staff meeting where I introduced myself and the research. If teachers wished to take part in the research, they got in touch with the researcher and the researcher gained their informed consent. No payments or incentives were given, and it was made clear to participants that their decision to participate will bear no influence on their job role.

3.4 Description of Participants

Participants were recruited through purposive sampling to ensure relevance to the research questions. Inclusion criteria with a rationale is provided in the table below:

Table 4: Inclusion Criteria.

Inclusion criteria	Exclusion criteria	Rationale
Mainstream and specialist schools will be included.	The researcher didn't exclude any particular type of school at the recruitment stage.	Trauma does not discriminate by school type, and students with trauma histories are found in both mainstream and specialist provisions. In fact, students in specialist settings, such as those with social, emotional and mental health (SEMH) needs may have heightened exposure to ACEs, including early attachment disruptions and complex trauma (Diggins, 2021). Educators in these settings often encounter high levels of behavioural and relational complexity which places additional demands on staff (Castro Schepers, 2023). Therefore, it is important to centre their voices and experiences as staff in these schools are frequently at the frontline of trauma informed practice.
A minimum of two years experience working in a secondary school setting.	Those who have worked in secondary education for less than two years.	Research suggests that early careers teachers often face role confusion and high stress which may impact on their ability to reflect on practice systematically (Luthar & Mendes, 2020). By including teachers or pastoral staff with more than 2 years experience, the study captures staff who might be more embedded in their school's ethos and relational networks.
Teachers in schools who completed their training through Trauma-informed Schools UK (TISUK) and disseminated the training.	Teachers in schools who completed their trauma-informed schools training through other 'one off' or short term training	Using TIS-UK trained participants ensures consistency in the training content and underlying psychological models that the participants were exposed to. This helps to control for variation in interpretation and application of trauma-informed practices (E. Berger et al., 2023). It has also been posited that training provided through one off workshops or ad hoc school led sessions may vary in depth, content and theoretical grounding (Bilbrey et al., 2024). Therefore, excluding participants that have received this type of training ensures all participants have received comparable foundational training in TIP.

Teachers were eligible for the study if they were trained directly by TISUK or if they were trained by the delegates who attended the training.	programmes. Teachers not eligible for the study if they were not part of a school who had disseminated the TIS training at whole school level.

Recruitment was facilitated through school gatekeepers, typically senior leaders, who disseminated information sheets and consent forms (see ethics documents in appendix A). 15 participants expressed interest to attend a semi-structured interview, while five initially interested participants withdrew due to illness or workload demands. 10 participants signed and returned their consent forms to participate.

This study prioritized diversity of role and experience to capture a broad range of perspectives on trauma-informed implementation. In keeping with guidance from Braun & Clarke (2022, 2024), sample adequacy was judged on the richness and quality of data rather than numerical thresholds. A final sample of ten participants from five secondary schools (four mainstream, one specialist social, emotional and mental health (SEMH) provision) was deemed sufficient to address the studies research questions. Participants held various roles including classroom teachers, teaching assistants, wellbeing leads, and school leaders. Eight participants were based in Wales, and two were based in England. Two participants identified as White British, eight participants identified as White, Welsh; six identified as male, and four as female.

The table below provides an overview of basic participant demographics, anonymised to protect identities, which is in line with recent recommendations on balancing contextual richness with confidentiality (Braun & Clarke, 2024), as well as the project's commitment to high quality ethical practice (see appendix A).

Table 5: Participant Demographic.

School	Role	Time in Role	M/F	Age category

A	Assistant head (with teaching role)	7 years	M	35 – 45
	Wellbeing intervention lead (pastoral, non-teaching role)	12 years	F	35 - 45
B	Teacher	10 years	F	24-34
	Teacher	9 years	F	24-34
C	Teaching assistant (pastoral and teaching role)	3 years	M	46 – 56
	Head teacher (with teaching role)	30 years	M	35 – 45
D	Head teacher (non-teaching role)	36 years	M	56+
	Teacher	5 years	F	24 - 34
E	Assistant head (with teaching role)	25 years	M	46 – 56
	Assistant head (with teaching role)	18 years	M	35 - 45

3.5 Ethical considerations

In September 2024, the Cardiff University School of Psychology Ethics committee approved this project. The approved ethics reference number is (EC.24.05.14.7016A). Key documents pertaining to informed consent and debriefing can be found in appendix A of this thesis. Ethical considerations are also discussed in greater depth in part 3 of this thesis.

3.6 TIS UK ethical considerations

All participants in this study were qualified educators who had received training from Trauma-Informed Schools UK (TISUK), a private organisation that delivers professional development and accreditation in trauma-informed practice. While the insights of these participants were valuable in exploring the lived experience of implementing trauma-informed approaches, the involvement of a single training provider raises ethical considerations. Specifically, TISUK is a profit-making organisation with a clear commercial interest in promoting its methodology and framework. For example, schools seeking the TISUK Trauma-Informed Award must receive supervision exclusively from TIS-trained supervisors, which may introduce a perceived conflict of interest and raises questions about the independence and criticality of those embedded in the system.

To mitigate these concerns, the research design included measures to ensure reflexivity and transparency. Participants were not recruited or recommended by TISUK directly, and participation was entirely voluntary and anonymous. The researcher also included participants from TISUK trained schools who may not have received the award but had disseminated the training within their schools. The interview schedule was constructed to explore educators' personal interpretations and applications of trauma-informed practice, rather than to evaluate the effectiveness of TISUK training per se. Additionally, this thesis critically engages with the broader landscape of trauma-informed education, drawing on multiple frameworks and perspectives beyond TISUK, to avoid aligning uncritically with one commercial model. This approach was intended to preserve the academic integrity of the research while still honouring the situated expertise of participants.

3.7 Procedure

The following procedure was followed to recruit participants and conduct the semi-structured interviews for this study. The procedure was designed to ensure ethical compliance, participant clarity, and consistency in data collection. A flow diagram outlining the key steps is provided below.

1. Gatekeeper recruitment: All headteachers of schools in England and Wales with staff trained through TISUK were emailed.

2. Gatekeeper letter: Interested headteachers received a gatekeeper letter (see appendix A) and an information sheet about the study.

3. Consent distribution: Headteachers who agreed to assist printed and distributed consent forms to relevant school staff.

4. Participant contact: Consenting staff returned signed consent forms via email and arranged a suitable interview time.

5. Interview arrangements: Interviews were scheduled for up to 60 minutes. Three were conducted online (Microsoft Teams), and seven in person.

6. Interview procedure: Interviews followed a semi-structured format using a prepared prompt schedule. Questions were open-ended and non-leading.

7. Online interviews were audio-recorded (not video). Participants could opt to keep cameras off. In-person interviews were recorded using a password-secured device.

8. Transcription: Interviews were transcribed verbatim by the researcher to support immersion in the data.

9. Data security: Audio recordings were permanently deleted three weeks after interview. Anonymised transcripts are securely stored by Cardiff University for up to 7 years.
Participant awareness: All data handling and ethical details were outlined in the participant information and debrief sheets.

Figure 5: Research Procedure Flow Diagram.

3.8 Data analysis

This study employed a combined approach of Reflexive and Thematic Analysis (RTA) (Braun & Clarke, 2022) and Critical Thematic analysis (CTA) (Lawless & Chen, 2019) to analyse the semi-structured interview data. The integration of RTA and CTA enabled both inductive theme generation (see appendix D) and a critical interrogation of power, discourse, and ideology embedded within participants' accounts. This was important because it is necessary to critically engage with power dynamics through discourse (Lawless & Chen, 2019). CTA was particularly appropriate for this research, as it supported exploration of the sociopolitical and hierarchical contexts in which TIP is implemented. Through attention to recurrence, repetition, and forcefulness in language (see appendix D), CTA allowed connections between participants' experiences and wider social discourses and power dynamics to be identified (Lawless & Chen, 2019). CTA involves a two-step process of open and closed coding. Open coding was an inductive process which involved codes emerging from the data, allowing unexpected meanings to occur. Closed coding was a deductive process, using theory to interrogate power, discourse and structural inequality. Open and closed coding was used during stage 2 of RTA (A detailed step by step depiction of how I combined the approaches is provided in appendix D). The

coding and theme generation process was carried out using NVIVO software which streamlined the process (see appendix E for examples of utilisation of this software for RTA and CTA). Attention to the authors rationale regarding NVIVO is given in part 3 of this thesis.

Furthermore, in line with the values of RTA, the active role of the researcher in meaning-making was acknowledged in theme generation (Braun & Clarke, 2024). Additionally, RTA acknowledges the inescapable subjectivity of the researcher as an important tool and one reflecting the complex human nature of reality (Braun & Clarke, 2022). This is particularly pertinent to the present study because the researcher was herself a trauma-informed teacher in a previous role (see reflective comments in appendix E). Therefore, it was vital that the researcher was continually reflective and reflexive in order to mitigate any potential for researcher influence from becoming a drawback rather than a strength, impacting on the authenticity of the data collected (see part 3 for an in-depth reflection on the analysis stage). As Burr, (2015) argues, reflexivity involves understanding participant accounts as both descriptions and constructions of experience, rather than objective truth. This aligns with the study's epistemological stance and allows the researcher to take a critical stance to taken-for granted knowledge (Lawless & Chen, 2019).

4. Findings and Discussion

4.1 Structural Overview of findings and discussion

In order to avoid the findings and discussion section being treated as separate entities, an integrative approach to analysis was taken for this report because strong connections were interpreted to exist with existing research and it was felt that a combined approach would avoid repetition (Braun & Clarke, 2022). Firstly, an analysis of the findings is reported in the context of existing research which aims to offer interpretive depth (Braun & Clarke, 2025), followed by a critical discussion which will expand on this with exploration of theoretical and wider contextual interconnections and implications (Braun & Clarke, 2022).

The combined approach of RTA (Braun & Clarke, 2022) and CTA (Lawless & Chen, 2019) will be reflected in this combined reporting approach with the latter taking precedence in the critical discussion section. More specifically, the critical discussion will make links to the wider sociopolitical context in answer to the second research question in considering how this context might be shaping educator perceptions and experiences. Finally, implications for educational psychology practice will be explored, followed by a proposed original contribution and considerations of the strengths and limitations of the current study.

4.2 Overview of Themes

A thematic map (see Figure 6) illustrates the four core themes and six subthemes that were generated for this analysis and how they might be linked. In the interest of providing an overview, a table of each core theme as the central organising concept (Braun & Clarke, 2022) along with a brief description of each theme is provided below:

Table 6: Themes and Subthemes.

Theme	Description
Recognising the subjective nature of trauma	A strong recognition of trauma as a subjective response to an event, rather than the event itself, which influenced empathy with and validation of student experiences.
Entrenched punitive mindsets Subthemes: The elusive balance between relational and punitive approaches,	The prevailing influence of punitive values which can at times act as a barrier to change. Perceptions that approaches to behaviour in schools should match the way that behaviour is addressed in society was critically analysed. Furthermore, the tendency of educators to demonstrate an epistemic need for

dissonant approaches, authoritarian assurance	certainty and predictability in their need for 'structure' and process' was experienced as unmet for some educators.
The ambiguity of relational practice Subthemes: navigating nuance and subtle dynamics, the centrality of relationships, the pillars of trust	This theme is related to the above in that participants struggled to remedy their need for structure and process with the ambiguity of trauma-informed practice. The need for a trauma-informed approach to permeate the entire school culture in order to bring about positive outcomes was emphasised.
The echoes of trauma	This theme spoke to the compassion fatigue and secondary traumatisation that educators experienced which was perceived as a significant cost of caring and nurturing in trauma-informed schools.

In line with APA 7 guidelines, participant quotes are presented in two ways depending on their length.

- **Short quotes** (fewer than 40 words) are enclosed in quotation marks and may be presented in a visually boxed format to foreground participant voice.

- **Long quotes** (40 words or more) are presented in indented block format, without quotation marks, and may also appear in a boxed layout for clarity.

All quotes are anonymised and attributed to participants using pseudonymous IDs (e.g., P1, P2, etc.) to protect confidentiality. Quotes have been minimally edited for readability (e.g., removal of filler words or repetitions) where necessary, without altering the meaning or tone of the original response.

This formatting approach aims to highlight the richness of participant voice while ensuring clarity, consistency, and alignment with APA 7 expectations.

The elusive balance between punitive and relational approaches

Entrenched punitive mindsets

Authoritarian assurance

Dissonant approaches

Recognising the subjective nature of trauma

Navigating nuances and subtle dynamics

The centrality of relationships

The ambiguity of relational practice

The Echoes of Trauma

The Pillars of Trust
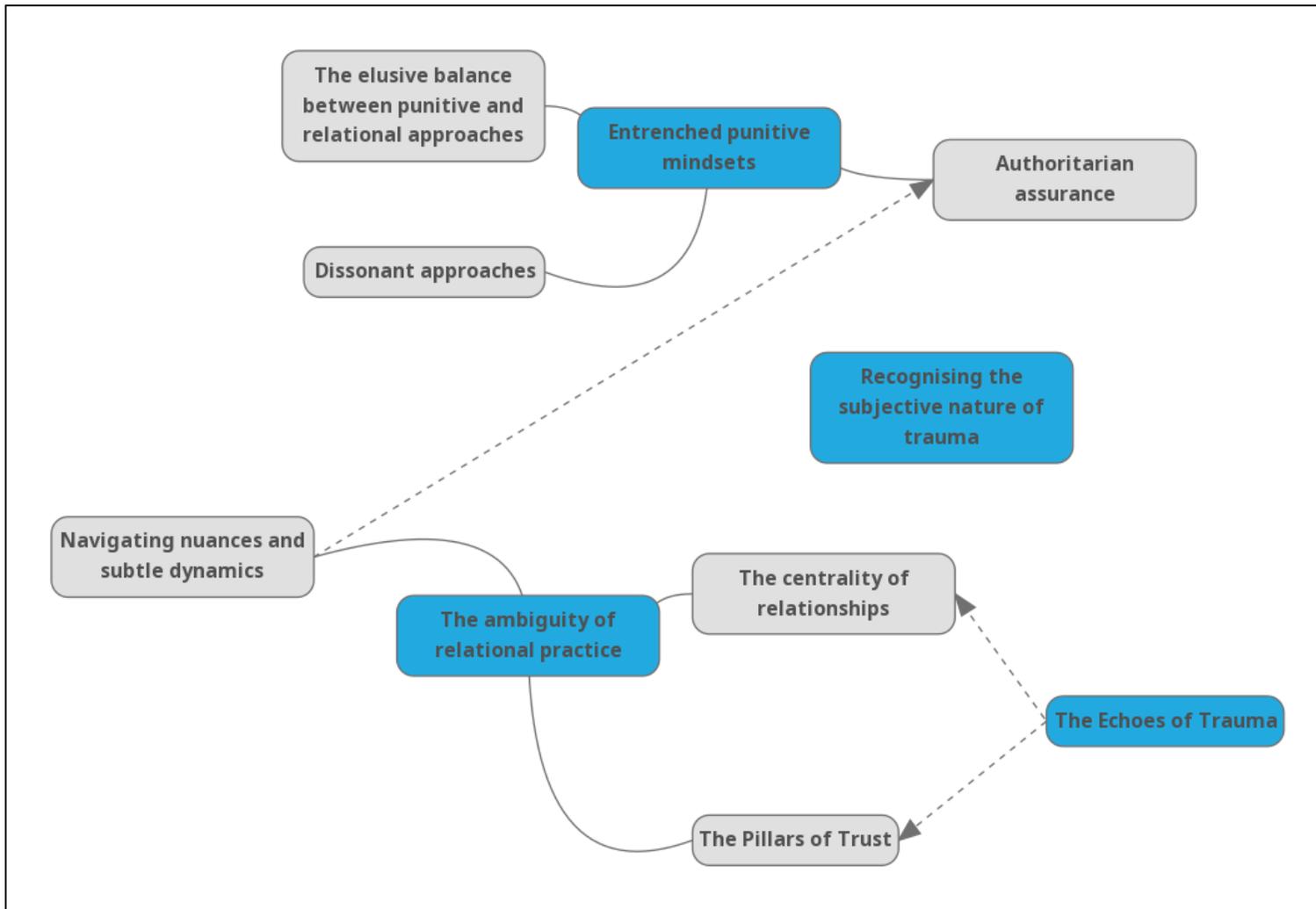
Key:

Blue boxes: core themes

Grey boxes: subthemes

Solid line arrow: subthemes related to the core themes.

Dotted line arrow: subthemes and core themes that may be interrelated

Figure 6: Thematic Map.

5. Analysis of Findings

5.1 Theme 1: Recognising the subjective nature of trauma

It was important to explore how participants construct the meaning of trauma as the epistemological position of social constructionism asserts that the meaning individuals assign to constructs is intrinsically linked to action (Burr, 2015) and in this study, participant recollections of their actions and experiences. The core theme in the meaning individuals assign to trauma is that they all appreciate the subjectivity involved in how one might experience a traumatic event. For example, participant 2 articulated the importance they assign to the notion that trauma isn't necessarily an event per se, but the way in which that trauma is subjectively appraised;

> **P2:**
>
> I think too many people think that being traumatised by your parents separating isn't a valid thing when someone else has lost a parent… But it is about how you experience it, isn't it? Everything is relative and we shouldn't compare.

Throughout participant interviews, there was a recurring pattern of the recognition that a singular event can be experienced in very different ways (see text ID 1.1-1.3 in appendix F). It is suggested that appraised meanings determine individuals reactions to events (Park, 2022). Therefore, through being open minded and recognizing the subjective nature of trauma, staff may be more likely to be more validating of students' experiences and their associated emotions (A. Southall, 2024). Educators also recognised the subjective experience of trauma in terms of its chronic or acute nature and did not make judgements about the event of trauma itself. Participant 4 illustrated this recognition giving examples of a broad range of traumatic events:

> **P4:**
>
> Trauma can be generational, it could be an event that's happened, it could be… um something that happens when they were babies in the womb um so yeah, I do think it does presents differently and yeah… it's a really broad term, trauma.

Appreciating the longevity of trauma is important and demonstrates that practitioners acknowledge that the human bodies nervous system will be impacted by a traumatic event, even if the person is not consciously aware of it (Van der Kolk, 2014). Indeed, the need to protect oneself from perceived threats is stored in the memory and emotional centres of the brain, such as the hippocampus and amygdala (Van der Kolk, 2014). It may be true that the more educated someone is about trauma, the more likely it is that they will recognise the impact that trauma can have at any time in a child's life (Ferrara et al., 2023). This recognition may facilitate

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unconditional positive regard (J. Kim et al., 2020) and empathy for students, as the significance of trauma is not judged by the trauma event itself but by the subjective experience of the trauma affected individual.

5.2 Theme 2: The entrenchment of punitive mindsets

A common theme across participant transcripts was the perception that punitive attitudes continue to prevail, despite leadership measures taken to achieve a trauma-informed and more relational culture shift within the system. Some participants demonstrated authoritarian attitudes in their own responses (see text ID 2.1 in appendix F), whilst some spoke of the authoritarian attitudes of others (see text ID 2.2 in appendix F). Based on patterns in participant responses, this theme was interpreted as being divisible into 3 subthemes. These included 'The elusive balance between punitive and relational approaches', 'Dissonant approaches' and perceptions of 'Authoritarian assurance'.

5.3 Subtheme 1: The elusive balance between punitive and relational approaches

A recurring thread of meaning through participant interviews was the construction that TIP might exist on the extreme end of an 'approaches to behaviour spectrum' with disciplinarian approaches on the opposite end. There was an assumption that there was an inherent balance to achieve on this 'spectrum' and that there was a perception that 'getting the balance right' constitutes best practice. For example, participant 1 and 8 stated with conviction;

P1:   "It is **dangerous** if we don't get the balance of relational and authoritative right."
P8:   "There has got to be a **balance**. If we went trauma-informed school *all in*, we would never positively handle. And there are times and places for that to still be needed."

Participant 2 also concurred with these views and expanded on it, relating their view of establishing a 'balance' as especially important to the secondary school context;

P2:

I think also if teachers don't have clear standards, so if teachers think a trauma-informed approach is just kind of giving the kids an easy ride, then you end up with children who just take the mick and actually it…. it's almost detrimental to whatever trauma they've had, because actually it's inconsistent and that inconsistency makes kids feel unsafe…. Which in a secondary school I think is a massive, massive issue because they might see they might see 6… yes 6 teachers a day. Yeah and you know, that's before they've seen break time, lunchtime and after school staff. **Consistency** is so important.

The acknowledgement that trauma affected high school children need consistency and predictability is in line with research on the neuroscience of trauma (Porges, 2022; Van der Kolk, 2014) and trauma recovery (Skuse & Mathews, 2015). These findings are also consistent with the Social Discipline Window model (Wachtel, 2012) which suggests that a balanced approach combining high expectations with high support, can be more effective than a permissive approach that combines high support with low amounts of expectations and discipline (Wachtel, 2012, p. 3). It might be that combining a relational, nurturing approach alongside clear, consistent boundaries and consequences helps children feel safe (Jones et al., 2024).

On the other hand, within these views, participants may be succumbing to what has been described as the ontic fallacy of 'there must be consequences' (Mackie et al., 2017). It has been suggested that an ontologically flat consequence model of school discipline cannot function in an emancipatory way for students in schools with relational behaviour policies (Harold & Corcoran, 2013). In addition, consequence-driven models risk undermining the agency and autonomy of trauma-affected pupils, whose experiences may have already involved disempowerment and loss of control. Trauma research emphasises that reasserting control over one's environment is a critical part of healing (Van der Kolk, 2014); thus, approaches that impose rigid, top-down consequences without collaboration can inadvertently retraumatise pupils by replicating dynamics of powerlessness (Bath, 2008). This is because the underlying principles of trauma-informed care; emphasising empowerment, collaboration, and trust; are fundamentally at odds with more disciplinarian approaches (Jones et al., 2024). It also poses the question of whether trauma-informed approaches are being implemented with fidelity if participants in this study are not 'trauma-informed' in *all* of their professional decision making.

A contradiction of views may also underlie the reason why the research consistently cites a lack of leadership support and resources for trauma-informed practice within trauma-informed schools (E. Berger & Samuel, 2020; Brunzell et al., 2022; Ganigan, 2021; A. Southall, 2024). It would certainly be challenging to ensure the whole school culture shift if the underlying values and attitudes of leadership or teaching staff are not fully endorsing trauma-informed approaches, attempting to achieve this fallacy of 'balance'.

5.4 Subtheme 2: Authoritarian assurance

Across educator views, there was a consistent call for a system of consequences to follow, which appeared to offer participants reassurance and support. However, there was some concern expressed that this assurance of consequences could stand to contradict the principles and values of trauma-informed practice. Participant 9 articulated this concern;

P9:

"I think the biggest challenge is bringing about a change of culture in school. Some still believe that behaviour must be addressed. Poor behaviour should not go unpunished. But that is quite punitive."

This participant forcefully stressed the words 'addressed' and 'unpunished' to highlight how influential fundamental participant values are, and how they act as a barrier to change when aiming to bring about the change of culture within a school. These views might be evident of conservatist ideology which may be more resistant to change than more progressive standpoints (Jost et al., 2009, 2013). Participant 1, 6 and 10 also gave detailed descriptions of how punitive ways of thinking inform the ways in which their staff might instinctively respond to behaviours, despite being trained in trauma-informed approaches (see text ID 2.2, 2.3 and 2.4 in appendix F). It is possible that these teachers feel that punitive measures provide a clear and structured framework for managing behaviour, which aligns with their intuitive need for stability and control in the classroom. Letting go of these measures might feel like losing a reliable system that maintains order and this might feel threatening (Eibach, 2021).

However, seeing behaviour as either 'good' or 'bad' and needing 'reward' or 'consequence' (see text ID 2.4 appendix F) could be seen as black and white thinking, which can be highly satisfying in the short term, but fails to bring about long-term benefits that getting to the underlying cause of the behaviour might bring (Cooper, 2023a). Some participants had views that related to more progressive and social ideologies regarding fairness and equality;

P5:

The challenge is in getting staff to understand that being trauma-informed doesn't mean let them get away with what they like.... because a young person will push boundaries, but they don't necessarily need a consequence... that is a short-term fix.... Ultimately it is about speaking to them and understanding where they are coming from and what is going on for them.

Attitudes recognizing the importance of delaying gratification in the interest of long term benefits (Cooper, 2023b), are likely to inform more inclusive behaviours and compassionate trauma-informed care (O'Toole & Dobutowitsch, 2023). Research also suggests that views such as this may be more likely to come from those with lower epistemic needs for control, order and familiarity (Jost et al., 2009). This will be further discussed in the critical discussions section.

Another aspect of this subtheme was the perception that older teachers seemed to require more authoritarian assurance than younger teachers and that older teachers held less favourable attitudes towards TIP;

P1:

"Some teachers, especially older teachers, have been raised in a very punitive system to believe in a very punitive system."

There was a recurrent pattern of perceptions of a polarisation in educator attitudes as it related to their age which is illustrated by quotes from participant 8, 3 and 5 in appendix F (see text ID 2.6, 2.7 and 2.8). This particular finding contradicts with other recent research examining participant demographics and how it predicts attitudes to trauma-informed practice; A survey conducted by O'Toole & Dobutowitsch, (2023) found that older teachers were more likely to display positive attitudes toward trauma-informed care. However, their data came from surveys that was not triangulated with qualitative data that might otherwise explain why this might be the case. More comparative research is needed to explore the reasons why this difference exists. The discrepancy between these findings highlights the need for further comparative and mixed-methods research. One possible interpretation, grounded in sociopolitical developments, is that younger educators i.e. those trained or socialised into the profession during or after the early 2000s, may have been more influenced by inclusive and child-centred educational reforms such as *Every Child Matters*, (2003) and subsequent legislative developments (UK Parliment, 2014). These broader shifts toward holistic education may have contributed to a generational divergence in professional values and attitudes.

It is important to acknowledge, however, that most participants in this study were in the younger age groups. This may have influenced the emergence of this finding as it reflects predominantly younger educators' perceptions of their older colleagues. The qualitative nature of this study means that these accounts offer rich insight into professional dynamics, but they are not always transferable (Yardley, 2017). Future research that includes a more balanced age distribution could offer a fuller understanding of how age interacts with attitudes toward TIP.

5.5 Subtheme 3: Dissonant approaches

A common thread of meaning through educator perceptions was the perceived misalignment between trauma-informed practice and societal norms. Common beliefs were held that one of the main purposes of education should be to prepare pupils to function in society and to do this, systems within school should mirror systems in society. Participant 3 articulated this:

P3:

We're training these pupils up to be a valued member of society. When they're 16 or 18 and they leave school and they do something wrong…. It is not just a conversation, there is a sanction. There's a consequence alongside it. So I think they need that understanding to match society.

This idea was echoed by others and quotes to illustrate this are provided in appendix F under text ID 2.9 and 2.10. These points of view are in line with traditional educational models, where a strong focus is placed on behaviour management systems that reinforce consequences for misbehaviour. Research on such systems (e.g. Warren et al., 2006) supports the idea that consequences are intended to promote responsibility and prepare students for life beyond school. Consistent with this, perceptions that punitive measures can still play a role in maintaining order and discipline in schools continue to influence school values and culture (Valdebenito et al., 2019). However, research by Van der Kolk, (2014) and Blaustein & Kinniburgh, (2017) argue that trauma-informed schools will create environments where students are equipped with the emotional and psychological support necessary to manage their trauma-related behaviours. This in turn, will enable them to build the self-regulation skills and resilience to embrace challenges in the future and manage their emotions when things go wrong (Antony, 2022). Therefore the extent to which dissonant approaches between school and society is problematic, remains in debate and will be further explored in the critical discussion.

5.6 Theme 3: The Ambiguity of relational practice

This overarching theme reflects the complexity and challenges teachers face when implementing trauma-informed practices, particularly in building and maintaining relationships with students. While relationships are foundational to TIP (Brunzell et al., 2022), many teachers in this study expressed that establishing successful, trusting relationships with students is a nuanced, ongoing struggle. They highlighted that relational practices are not simply about showing empathy or care but involve a range of subtle and context-dependent skills, such as recognizing and responding to the emotional states of students, understanding trauma's impact on behaviour, and navigating the balance between empathy and authority (Jones et al., 2024). This theme was sub divided into 3 subthemes; 1) The centrality of relationships, 2) Navigating nuance and subtle dynamics and 3) The pillars of trust.

5.7 Subtheme 1: The centrality of relationships

Throughout the interviews, participants were forceful in their tone of voice when discussing relationships, to convey their perspective about how fundamental the formation of relationships are to engaging students which enables them to learn and thrive;

> **P3**:
>
> "The *relationship* is the core of everything."

The repetition of the word 'relationships' throughout the interviews (see text ID 3.1 – 3.5 in appendix F) signalled how fundamentally important relationship building, maintaining and nurturing is as part of the trauma-informed practice across all secondary schools in the present study, which is consistent with prior research on teacher experiences of TIP (Brown & L'Estrange, 2023; Brunzell et al., 2022). Indeed, developing nurturing and supportive relationships is central to maintaining a trauma-sensitive environment. Positive interactions build trust between students and teachers and can go a long way in preventing challenging behaviours and meeting the needs of students where they are (Bilbrey et al., 2022). The emphasis on the importance of being able to 'relate' echoes the findings of previous research on teacher experiences of trauma-informed approaches. For instance, Gleaton (2024) found that the relatability of teachers to students was fundamental to the formation of successful relationships and that the participants in their study achieved this by finding commonalities in cultural backgrounds and experiences (Gleaton, 2024).

Furthermore, all participants valued relationships as a way of finding meaning and satisfaction in their roles, which is consistent in other research on teacher experiences of TIP implementation (Brunzell et al., 2022; Easterling, 2022; Frearson & Duncan, 2024; J. Kim et al., 2020; S. Kim et al., 2021; A. Southall, 2024). In order to maintain positive relationships, participants in this study spoke of the skill involved in 'repairing' relationships once they are broken and that this is often achieved through 'restorative conversations' (see text ID 3.3, appendix F). Restorative conversations are a core element of relational practices (Morrison, 2007), which focus on repairing harm, rebuilding trust, and fostering accountability in a way that strengthens relationships rather than punishes behaviour (Easterling, 2022).

5.8 Subtheme 2: Navigating nuances and subtle dynamics

This subtheme highlighted the idea that relationship building is a skill fraught with ambiguity and heavily reliant on intuition; a finding in line with recent research on teacher perspectives of TIP (Easterling, 2022; A. E. Southall et al., 2023). There are many different constructions of what a good relationship looks like and how to achieve one. Many participants referenced how challenging it can be to teach or coach colleagues in relationship building e.g. participant 9 talked about their difficulties mentoring a new member of staff;

P9:

One of our newly qualified teachers just couldn't get her knowledge to the children because... She couldn't relate to them. We've had student teachers and young teachers here who have had double firsts. We've had student teachers, teachers with masters and whatever from Oxford and Cambridge. Oh, I remember this young lady who taught History… And she just could not establish, you know, relationships and just couldn't get her knowledge to the children because... She couldn't relate to them. How do we teach her? We tried… but she just couldn't do it.

This recurring pattern of meaning regarding the challenges teaching the nuance of relationship building was echoed by other participants (see text ID 3.6, 3.7 and 3.8 in appendix F). Relationship building is inherently nuanced, as it involves a range of emotional factors such as empathy, warmth, and emotional intelligence; qualities that are difficult to teach in a standardized way (Ljungblad, 2021). Research posits that emotions that are constructed in the context of social situations can change in moment to moment interactions and so can be said to mutually constitute each other (Boiger & Mesquita, 2012). These emotional competencies are ongoing, dynamic, and interactive processes that are socially constructed and deeply personal (Boiger & Mesquita, 2012). For this reason, they may not always be easily transferable through formal training or professional development, as they rely on an individual's ability to connect authentically with students (Sanders, 2024). This may underlie one of the reasons why prior research indicates that teachers perceive a lack of ongoing professional development and support with trauma-informed approaches (Ellison & Walton-Fisette, 2022; Ganigan, 2021; Gleaton, 2024). The lack of support might be due to the challenge of supporting staff with a skill that may not be tangibly teachable.

However, some participants in the study were able to identify one tangible and teachable tenet of relationship building by stating 'an adult saying sorry to a young person is one of the most powerful things' (see text ID 3.71 appendix F). Participant 10 demonstrated how an adult apology might be given by themselves in their school by offering an example;

P10:

You know, we've all lost it with a child. But if you can't look at it and go right, do you know what? OK, I was quick to anger there. I could have done this, this and this. But actually, your behaviour was unacceptable. If there is that give and take, we are modelling healthy relationships.

By apologising to children in this way, professionals could be seen to be modelling healthy relationships. The importance of modelling prosocial behaviour is echoed by researchers as far back as Bandura et al., (1961)

and (Bowlby, 1969). By modelling mistakes and apologizing sincerely, adults are demonstrating the self-regulation skills which can help equip young people with the tools to manage their own emotions and build respectful relationships (Van der Kolk, 2014). Furthermore, apologizing to children is likely to promote a growth mindset by demonstrating that mistakes are a normal part of learning and relationship building (Dweck, 2008) and not a sign of failure. Adult apologies may also help to foster trust and emotional safety in the classroom which is consistent with the findings of the review of research on teacher experiences as one of the key benefits of TIP (Ellison & Walton-Fisette, 2022; Ganigan, 2021). Additionally, adult apologies also help avoid adultist discourses (Ball, 1995), which are discussed further in the critical discussion section.

5.9 Subtheme 3: Pillars of trust

This subtheme was about fostering relationships with all pillars of the system, as well as the young people. These relationships at each level of the system can be thought of in terms of Bronfenbrenner's ecological system's theory which can be seen in figure 1 in part 1 of this thesis. Bronfenbrenner (1979) emphasized the importance of relationships at multiple levels within a system, ranging from the individual to the broader environmental context. In the context of TIP, relationships between students, teachers, staff, leadership and parents are all interrelated and crucial for creating a supportive and effective school environment.

P1:

"Since we have been trauma-informed, everyone's more aware of other people's well-being"

Participants highlighted the significance of relationships not just at the student level but across all levels of the system including the microsystem, mesosystem and exosystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 1995). Participant 1's observation suggests that a trauma-informed approach is most effective when it becomes a whole school ethos, not just an isolated intervention (Oberg et al., 2023). Where there are positive associations between staff wellbeing and perceptions of support, a trauma-informed approach to behaviour is more likely to be implemented effectively (Brunzell et al., 2022).

Also, Participant 2 expressed their belief of the importance of leadership trust before anything else;

P2:

"I think a trauma-informed approach can only work if the leadership team have a respect for it and respects each member of staff as an individual."

This viewpoint aligns with the ideology that hierarchical power dynamics within organizations should be balanced and that individuals should be treated with respect, regardless of their position within the hierarchy (Eibach, 2021). Indeed, 'a democratic system at every level, can be defined as one in which all needs and wants can be heard' (Cooper, 2023a, p. 146). Therefore, by treating others as agentic beings who are able to make and receive change, will help to ensure, at least to some extent, that power is equalised (Laing, 1967). In one school, a participant felt safe to make mistakes because their school had incorporated a trauma-informed approach into all areas of practice;

P7:

"Sometimes people don't get it right. And occasionally people say the wrong thing. That is ok, as long as you talk it through with a colleague and resolve to do better next time."

This participant is experiencing trust from leadership, which according to Cooper (2023) is the key to leading co-operative, synergistic and co-operative systems. As Fisher et al (1981) emphasise, it is important to appreciate the interests behind the other person's position rather than blaming them for holding a particular stance or acting a particular way' (Fisher et al., 1981, p. 56). As Cooper writes, power needn't be a 'dirty word' in progressive visions associated with dominance and oppression (Cooper, 2023a, p. 147). Instead, Mutual trust is key for balancing dynamics and creating an environment where creativity can flourish because teachers and students, are free to take risks and learn from mistakes (Frearson & Duncan, 2024).

5.10   Theme 4: The echoes of trauma

This theme captures a recurring pattern of meaning throughout interviews that teachers are being retraumatised and triggered in their practice. Retraumatization occurs when individuals are exposed to traumatic stimuli that trigger memories of past trauma, causing them to relive distressing experiences (O'Toole & Dobutowitsch, 2023). Many participants described their experience of being triggered, retraumatised or struggling with the emotional burden of trauma-informed care (see text ID 4.1 – 4.8 in appendix F). Participant 2 used vivid imagery to articulate the vital need for staff to be shown care, before they can be expected to care for the children;

P2:

It feels like trying to be emotionally available inside a pressure cooker about to explode… It is difficult for others who don't teach to imagine. We need to show up for ourselves before we can show up for the children.

This experience of burnout and overwhelm is consistent with much of the literature (Ellison & Walton-Fisette, 2022; Frearson & Duncan, 2024; Ganigan, 2021; O'Toole & Dobutowitsch, 2023) and appears to be a phenomenon that is not just specific to practice in England and Wales. Treisman (2017) emphasises that just as students require regulation, safety, and containment from trusted adults, staff themselves must be emotionally held and supported in order to remain present and effective in their roles (Treisman, 2017).

As participant 1 put it;

P1:

Some teachers come into the profession with their own trauma. One of our teachers was a victim of domestic abuse and she started allowing her trauma to impact her practice. She was very triggered by teenage boys acting aggressively and she had difficulties regulating herself during incidents.

Van der Kolk, (2014) notes that trauma impacts emotional regulation and can complicate relationship dynamics, making it even more difficult for teachers to establish and maintain trust with students, especially those with complex trauma histories. Furthermore, it has been found that secondary traumatic stress or vicarious trauma is commonly experienced by individuals who provide care and support to trauma affected people (O'Toole & Dobutowitsch, 2023). It makes sense that the participants in this study experience symptoms of trauma such as hypervigilance, avoidance and anxiety (Hickey & Riddle, 2022; Loomis, 2021; McIntyre et al., 2019) when working with trauma affected young people.

Recent literature suggests that having an increased capacity for empathy, through learning about the psychological impact of stress on children through TIP trainings, does not mitigate against secondary trauma because even if ill informed, most teachers have innate compassion and understanding prior to training regardless (Frearson & Duncan, 2024). Therefore, in order to understand the process of retraumatisation and how to mitigate against it, it is important to understand psychological theories of the process and what implications this has for how schools can build resilience in teachers. Attention to this will be given in the critical discussion.

6. Critical discussion

This research provides a nuanced insight into the complex attitudes educators hold toward TIP. Critically drawing on wider psychological theory and the sociopolitical context that underpins educator experiences of TIP, should contribute to valuable insights for how educators might be best supported in secondary schools to meet the needs of students.

When interrogating issues of power in discourse, there was a recurring tendency among participants in positions of authority to describe punitive attitudes as characteristic of *other* educators, typically older or less progressive staff, rather than acknowledging any personal alignment with such beliefs (see table 13, appendix D). This rhetorical distancing may be a form of moral positioning (Harré & van Langenhove, 1999), where educators construct narratives that align themselves with the moral high-ground of TIP, while implicitly discrediting others. Such positioning can serve identity-protective functions (Olive et al., 2024), allowing individuals to uphold their own self-image as progressive or child-centred, while avoiding accountability for systemic practices that might still be punitive. Indeed, when powerholders externalise blame, it may limit honest reflection and collaborative learning which are key components in trauma-informed cultures (Brunzell et al., 2022; A. E. Southall et al., 2023).

Additionally, despite recognition of trauma's subjectivity and complexity (theme 1), many participants held contradictory beliefs that simultaneously endorsed trauma-informed values while defaulting to punitive traditions. This "balance" rhetoric, particularly evident in Theme 2, Subtheme 1, may serve as a cognitive and emotional compromise (Festinger, 1957). The term offers ideological comfort by maintaining a link to behaviourist norms while gesturing toward progressiveness (Cooper, 2023a). This may also may reflect cognitive dissonance (Festinger, 1957), where conflicting attitudes and behaviours are held simultaneously to reduce discomfort in adapting to new paradigms.

Internal dissonance might be further compounded by external systemic forces. Neoliberalism, which emphasises individual responsibility, competition, and performance metrics (Wilson et al., 2023), exerts a powerful influence on school culture and priorities. The continuing emphasis on sanctions, compliance, and standardisation (Department for Education (DfE), 2021, 2024a) aligns closely with neoliberal values. These expectations constrain trauma-informed implementation, which demands a shift toward relationality, emotional attunement, and flexibility which are more in line with progressive values (Cooper, 2023b). Teachers' repeated concerns about preparing students for a "punitive society" (Theme 2, Subtheme 3) might reflect the internalisation of these neoliberal logics (Jost et al., 2013). Indeed, Wilson et al., (2023) suggest in the findings of their study exploring teacher wellbeing, that we need to reimagine the concept of 'doing well' as an educational professional to 'being well' (Wilson et al., 2023, p. 11). Neoliberal educational culture may be constraining teachers from applying this philosophy to themselves.

In parallel, authoritarian ideologies persist in shaping beliefs about discipline, authority, and control. These ideologies often promote hierarchical power structures where compliance is prioritised over curiosity or relational engagement (Harold & Corcoran, 2013). In the present study, recurring language around "consequences," "structure," and "authority" often served to maintain existing power dynamics. Indeed, research on the aforementioned system justification theory (SJT) (Eibach, 2021; Jost et al., 2009) suggests

that most people possess a motivated tendency to justify the status quo of the systems in which they are engaged, even if these systems are disadvantageous or inequitable (B. J. Thomas & Harris, 2021), which can act as a barrier to change and more progressive visions. This barrier is difficult to overcome because people's system-justification motive is at the unconscious level, thought to arise from the psychological threat or anxiety produced by acknowledging that a particular system one is embedded in is flawed or illegitimate (Jost et al., 2013).

The desire for "authoritarian assurance" (Theme 2, Subtheme 2) can be understood not simply as pedagogical preference, but as a deeper ideological commitment to a model of order and discipline that is incompatible with the ethos of trauma-informed care (Haynes et al., 2023). As Zembylas (2022) argues, authoritarian educational approaches operate affectively; evoking fear, control, and certainty to reinforce normative standards. The appeal of consequence-based systems also reflects the psychological need for clarity and certainty, often afforded by conservatist ideologies (Cooper, 2023b). According to Jost et al. (2009), individuals high in epistemic need for order may gravitate toward traditional systems. This is compounded by affect ideology (Zembylas, 2022), where policy and discourse such as behaviour guidance from the DfE and other policies, cultivate fear of chaos to justify strict behavioural controls.

The theory of availability bias might explain process (Tversky & Kahneman, 1973). If punitive methods rooted in behaviourist thinking are more available in memory and easier to bring to mind (Tversky & Kahneman, 1973), this may bias their decision making for managing behaviour when an incident occurs, leading to habitual and automatic behaviour that is difficult to change. This may explain why teachers revert to familiar strategies under stress to harness a sense of safety (Porges, 2022), even when those strategies contradict their stated values. However, if adults in positions of authority can be more intentional in making decisions "*with* children rather than the permissive mode of *for* them or the punitive mode of *to* them" (Wachtel, 2012, p. 3), they might be successful in fostering better co-operation.

However, it is important to acknowledge that positioning trauma-informed practice and punitive approaches as entirely oppositional may risk reinforcing a false binary (Morrison, 2007; Valdebenito et al., 2019). While authoritarian systems tend to rely on control and fear, trauma-informed approaches are not inherently permissive or devoid of boundaries. Rather, they can and arguably must, incorporate consistent consequences and clear expectations within a relational framework (Wachtel, 2012). When consequences are delivered with empathy, predictability, and an emphasis on repair rather than punishment, they can support safety and structure in ways that align with trauma-informed principles (Triesman, 2021). This distinction is crucial: the presence of correction does not negate relationality, and in some cases, boundaries can enhance trust by providing a felt sense of containment for both students and staff (Triesman, 2021).

The ideology of adultism is also significant in understanding the resistance to trauma-informed shifts. Adultism is the assumption that adults possess inherently superior wisdom, experience, and judgment, and that children should comply unquestioningly (Ball, 1995). In this study, adultist discourses surfaced in participants' justification of punitive responses as preparation for "real life," and in assumptions that young people must have consequences to "learn how to behave". These assumptions position children as passive recipients of adult knowledge and lacking agency (Cooper, 2023b), undermining the trauma-informed emphasis on relational co-construction of meaning and mutual regulation. However, adultist discourses were challenged in other contexts (Theme 3, subtheme 2) by highlighting the power of the adult apology in repairing relationships. This suggests the importance of acknowledging the impact of beliefs on action. Attitude change theories, such as the Elaboration Likelihood Model (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986), suggest that enduring change in beliefs and practices requires engagement with core values and affective drivers—not just knowledge acquisition. Therefore, unless adultist and authoritarian ideologies are surfaced and interrogated at the cultural level, possibly through ongoing reflection, training alone is unlikely to shift practice (A. E. Southall et al., 2023).

Beyond ideological influences, some professionals may be drawn to systems that emphasise order and structure as a way of compensating for a perceived lack of personal agency in managing complex behaviours (Eibach, 2021). Internal factors, such as low confidence, may also shape how staff perceive and respond to trauma-informed approaches. For example, Bilbrey et al. (2022) conducted a survey exploring teacher confidence in implementing trauma-informed practices and found that many participants reported feeling unprepared to de-escalate and manage challenging behaviour, identify signs of trauma, or support students with trauma histories. While self-report data is susceptible to limitations such as social desirability bias, these findings suggest that a lack of confidence may lead some staff to lean heavily on leadership or fixed systems of consequence for reassurance and direction (Jost et al., 2013). Consistent with this, Zion & Sadeh (2018) discuss how teachers' experiences, background, and training shape their confidence about their pedagogical choices.

Furthermore, internal emotional conflict may also help explain some of the contradictory perspectives evident in participant accounts. Drawing on Cooper's (2023) work in The Psychology of Social Change, human behaviour is often shaped by tensions between internal needs and external demands (Cooper, 2023a). Cooper advances Maslow's ideas (Maslow, 1943), arguing that individuals hold multiple, sometimes conflicting, motivations: the need for security and predictability, and the need for authenticity and autonomy. Educators may simultaneously desire emotionally safe, relationally attuned environments and the reassurance of behaviourist systems that promise consistency and control. These tensions, if unacknowledged, may contribute to defensive professional responses when faced with the uncertainties and vulnerabilities of trauma-informed work. For example, Cooper notes that systems change is often resisted not due to ideological conviction alone,

but because it threatens deep-seated psychological needs such as the need to feel competent, effective, and safe (Cooper, 2023b). TIP, with its emphasis on emotional exposure and relational ambiguity, may inadvertently trigger feelings of inadequacy or fear among staff who feel unprepared or unsupported.

The centrality of relationships, acknowledged in Theme 3, contrasts sharply with the systemic conditions under neoliberalism. By highlighting relationships as central, participants implicitly challenge the hierarchical power structures embedded in traditional schooling. However, the affective and relational labour required for trauma-informed teaching is often invisible, unmeasured, and unrewarded in performance-driven cultures (Wilson et al., 2023). The belief that relational skill is innate; "you've either got it or you don't" (see text ID 3.6, appendix F) reflects a fixed mindset (Dweck, 2008), which can hinder professional learning and reinforces exclusionary notions of what makes an effective teacher (Ainscow, 2020). Nevertheless, it is important this research centres participant perspectives and remedies the issue of relational ambiguity. In response to this, a possible original contribution is offered in Section 9 to propose a practitioner-oriented framework for managing behavioural incidents in a trauma-informed manner.

Finally, secondary trauma, outlined in Theme 4 as 'the echoes of trauma', is increasingly recognised in the literature as a systemic issue, not merely an individual challenge (Oberg et al., 2023; Southall, 2024). Teachers are unlikely to effectively teach in the classroom unless they, themselves feel safe. Challenging behaviours displayed by students are likely to threaten teacher feelings of safety (A. Southall, 2024), triggering their stress response and leading to feelings of burnout and inadequacy (O'Toole & Dobutowitsch, 2023). Porges' (1998) polyvagal theory offers a helpful framework to understand how stress disrupts relational capacities. When teachers encounter challenging behaviours, their own nervous system may interpret these as threats, triggering a stress response (Oberg et al., 2023). This may be especially true for teachers with their own trauma histories as their nervous system might be more sensitive to such triggers (Castro Schepers, 2023). Dr Simon Porges' Polyvagal theory (Porges, 1998) explains how our autonomic nervous system influences our emotional and physical reactions. Polyvagal Theory currently identifies three primary states (White, 2024):

1. Social Engagement State: When we feel safe, our parasympathetic nervous system, mediated by the ventral vagal complex, enables us to engage socially, communicate effectively, and learn optimally.

2. Fight or Flight State: When we perceive danger, our sympathetic nervous system activates, preparing us to confront or escape threats. In this state, learning and social engagement are compromised.

3. Shutdown or Freeze State: When danger feels overwhelming and escape seems impossible, the dorsal vagal complex can lead to a shutdown response, characterised by withdrawal and disconnection.

It is proposed that the social engagement state provides the neural platform for cooperative behaviours, both supporting physiological systems and enabling accessibility to higher brain structures for learning and creativity (Porges, 2022). However, Grossman, (2023) challenges Porges assertion about autonomic states, arguing that the theory's distinction between the dorsal and ventral vagal complexes, particularly their respective roles in passive defence responses and social engagement, lacks robust empirical support (Grossman, 2023). Nevertheless, polyvagal theory offers a helpful and accessible framework for understanding why our ability to reason or engage socially are compromised when we are in a state of dissociation or defence (White, 2024), which may help educators build self-awareness and improve their own self-regulation skills.

Not all teachers had experiences of secondary trauma. Some participants in the present study had developed coping strategies to help regulate themselves. Some were very self-aware and self-reflective, showing awareness and recognition of how their traumas might affect them (see text ID 4.2, 4.4 and 4.6 in appendix F). Additionally, protective factors identified by participants; collective reflection, adaptive scheduling, wellbeing initiatives (see text ID 4.5 in appendix F); echo Noddings' (2012) model of relational ethics. They suggest that when staff are cared for relationally, they are better positioned to offer relational care to students (Noddings, 2012). These systems-level interventions also align with emerging international models of trauma-informed education (E. Berger & Samuel, 2020; Frearson & Duncan, 2024). Without structural support; such as reflective supervision, flexible timetabling, and emotionally attuned leadership; teachers may remain in survival states that preclude connection and learning.

Overall, given the emotional, relational and practical challenges for educators that this study has highlighted, there might be a pressing need to tackle trauma and the constraining influence of neoliberal educational culture upstream, rather than downstream. Relying on TIP as being a solution to deeply systemic and complex problems, puts unnecessary pressure on teachers. Initiatives such as education around healthy relationships to prevent domestic violence, early intervention programmes to support families facing systemic disadvantage and community based mental health literacy campaigns could help break intergenerational cycles of trauma (Perry, 2006; Wilson et al., 2023). This should address the social determinants of adversity rather than merely reacting to its symptoms within schools. A balanced combination of the two, is likely to lead to the best outcomes for our children and our educators.

7. Implications for Educational Psychologist's (EPs) in practice

The findings of this study offer several meaningful implications for the role of EPs in promoting trauma-informed and trauma-responsive environments (Triesman, 2021). These implications span individual, group,

and systemic levels of practice which capitalises on EPs' unique positioning to support staff, students, wider school systems and the community.

Firstly, EPs can help educators explore and address internal emotional conflicts that may arise from tensions between their innate psychological needs such as autonomy, security and connection (Cooper, 2023) and the external demands of performance-driven, neoliberal school cultures. Many participants in this study reflected a sense of conflict between maintaining relational integrity and meeting accountability demands such as standardised testing, sanctions and behaviour policies rooted in competition and compliance (Kumar, 2019). EPs can support educators to explore these tensions through models of consultation such as motivational interviewing (Miller & Rollnick, 1991) which respects ambivalence and supports intrinsic motivation to change (Ryan & Deci, 2000).

Secondly, the present research supports the findings of the systematic review in part 1 of this thesis, by highlighting the need for ongoing trauma-informed supervision and professional development to protect staff-wellbeing and promote effective practice (Long, 2022b). EPs are ideally positioned to provide reflective spaces where staff can explore emotionally demanding experiences, build self-awareness and problem solve complex-cases (A. Southall, 2024). This may also include supporting the implementation of wellbeing initiatives such as meditative spaces (S. Kim et al., 2021) and delivering training to develop trauma-informed practice skills (Ganigan, 2021). In doing so, EPs help embed a whole-school culture of emotional resilience and mutual support.

This is particularly important in light of a recent publication by an expert in the field, Lisa Cherry (2021). She acknowledges the importance of reflective supervision by discussing the chain of pain which refers to the cycle in which unresolved trauma in adults can be unconsciously passed on to children (Cherry, 2021). Additionally, Treisman (2017) emphasises that schools must create containment for the adults working with children who have experienced trauma; if school staff are emotionally supported by leadership and given space to reflect then educators will be placed in the best position to offer the relational safety and consistency that trauma affected students need (Treisman, 2017). The work of Cherry (2021) and Treisman (2017) suggest that if educators are not given the opportunity to share their experiences and emotional burdens then they risk internalising stress and in turn may respond to students in ways that might not align with trauma-informed principles.

Additionally, EPs can make valuable contributions at the strategic and policy level. The findings of this study underscore how ideological undercurrents; such as neoliberalism, authoritarianism, and adultism; continue to shape the dominant narratives around behaviour (Eibach, 2021; Kumar, 2019; Zembylas, 2022). Through systemic consultation and leadership dialogue, EPs can support schools in reframing behaviour policies to

align more closely with trauma-informed principles. This might include influencing how behaviour is monitored, guiding leadership narratives around relational discipline, and advocating for relational alternatives to exclusion and sanctions in schools. They are also well positioned to tackle adversity upstream by utilising multi-agency working to support interventions within the community that address disadvantage (Ramoutar & Hampton, 2024).

In summary, by addressing intrapersonal, interpersonal, and organisational needs (Cooper, 2023b), EPs help foster safe, relationally grounded school cultures. As a practical response to the call for more clarity in relational behaviour support, this study proposes the Relational Regulation Framework (RRF), described in section 9, as a tool to guide practice in emotionally charged moments. EPs might choose to use this as a psychologically informed tool in consultation for supporting educators to reflect on their relational practice. It may also be used by EPs as a supervision tool to help facilitate reflective spaces for educators.

8. Conclusion

In summary, this study uncovers how ideological, systemic, psychological, and emotional contradictions complicate trauma-informed implementation. Neoliberalism, authoritarianism, and adultism form powerful undercurrents that shape both resistance to and adoption of, trauma-informed ideals. Added to these are internal conflicts between innate needs for security, autonomy, and connection (Cooper, 2023a) and system justifying cognitions (Jost et al., 2009; B. J. Thomas & Harris, 2021), which may manifest in defensive or ambivalent professional behaviours in educators. However, the findings also reveal opportunities for EPs and school leaders to intervene; not only through training, but by supporting critical reflection, surfacing ideology, fostering collective care, and reimagining schools as spaces of relational possibility rather than behavioural control.

9. Original contribution

This research highlighted the discomfort of ambiguity in trauma-informed approaches and a desire for dependable systems to fall back on during moments of behavioural escalation. Educators in leadership positions perceived that teaching the nuanced principles of trauma-informed relationship building requires emotional sensitivity and adaptability (Ljungblad, 2021), which presents a very challenging and abstract task for educators. However, defaulting to consequence-based approaches contradicts the ethos of trauma-informed care. Therefore, this author has developed the Relational Regulation Framework (RRF) which provides a structured yet relational alternative.

The RRF also attends to the values, beliefs, experiences, and cultural contexts that shape how trauma-informed practice is understood and enacted in schools. Educators' beliefs about behaviour and discipline are not formed

in a vacuum; they are influenced by personal experiences, professional socialisation and the broader sociopolitical discourse. The RRF invites educators to reflect not only on student behaviour but on their own internal responses, assumptions, and values. By doing so, it positions relational regulation as both an interpersonal and intrapersonal process (Cooper, 2023a). It is grounded in:

- The Trauma Recovery Model (Skuse & Mathews, 2015)
- The PACE approach (Golding & Hughes, 2012; D. A. Hughes, 2006)
- Regulate–Relate–Reason (Winfrey & Perry, 2021)
- Cooper's Psychology of Social Change (Cooper, 2023b)
- Restorative practices (Morrison, 2007; Wachtel, 2012)

9.1 Framework Principles

The RRF assumes behaviour is communication and seeks to preserve safety and connection before reasoning or correction/ consequence. It consists of four interlinked stages:

1. **Observe & Regulate while providing *consistency* in classroom routine and rituals**

- Read the behaviour as a nervous system response (e.g., fight/flight/freeze).
- Is the adult regulated enough to respond appropriately?
- Offer co-regulation through breath, tone, presence.

2. **Relate & Validate through providing opportunities for *connection***

- Connect relationally without judgment.
- Use language like: "I can see this is really hard for you. I'm here. You're safe."

3. Restore & Reconnect through showing you *care*

- Facilitate a restorative moment or agreement e.g. What could we both do better next time?
- Share perspectives on the matter.
- Validate emotions, rebuild trust.

4. Reflect & Reason while reminding students of the need for *correction*

- Once calm and connected, explore what happened.
- Use open questions: What were you feeling? What did you need? How did you think your actions impacted those around you? What can we do better next time?
- Remind students of the natural consequences of their behaviour or need for correction e.g. they may not be able to attend breaktime for a day in order to reflect on the incident and keep everyone safe.

The adult moves back and forth between these phases depending on the emotional state of the pupil (and themselves). Crucially, the RRF supports a relational ethos while acknowledging the complexity of working within institutional systems that may not always align with trauma-informed values. In doing so, it positions TIP not as a fixed method but as a dynamic, context-sensitive process rooted in reflection, regulation, and relationship. Please see a diagram of the framework below, with reflective prompts:

The RRF invites educators to reflect not only on student behaviour but on their own internal responses, assumptions, and values. By doing so, it positions relational regulation as both an interpersonal and intrapersonal process (Cooper, 2023a).

Reflection questions/ prompts

Beliefs about Behaviour and Discipline

- Where do my beliefs about "acceptable" behaviour come from?
- Have I internalised ideas of control, compliance, or punishment from my training or school culture?
- How do I define "respect" in the classroom and who taught me that?

Cultural and Societal Norms

- How do cultural narratives around trauma, resilience, and emotional expression influence how I interpret student behaviour?
- What unspoken cultural expectations exist in my school community?
- Are there any cultural biases in how I interpret and respond to distress in students?

Policy and Accountability Pressures

- How do school policies or national education reforms influence how I work with students in distress?
- How do inspection frameworks (e.g. Ofsted or Estyn) impact the way trauma-informed principles are or aren't valued in practice?

Personal Experience and Identity

- How do my own experiences of education, discipline, or care influence how I relate to students?
- In what ways might my own nervous system responses (e.g., stress, fear of being judged) shape how I respond during escalations?
- What professional experiences have shaped how I see my role in supporting student wellbeing?

Language and Discourse

- How do I describe student behaviour; do I consider what it might be communicating, and do I separate behaviour from the identity of the child?
- How have dominant educational discourses (e.g., "zero tolerance" behaviour policies) influenced the way I think about trauma?

Figure 7: Relational Regulation Framework Diagram.

10. Strengths

This research will not be judged according to the traditional scientific aspiration to obtain 'objective' knowledge (Yardley, 2017) because the difference in epistemological assumptions underpinning qualitative and scientific psychological traditions are very different (Bryman, 1984). This research aimed to provide a deep and rich analysis of educator experiences and perceptions of TIP within the unique social, cultural and emotional environments in which they work. Therefore, one of the central strengths of this research lies in what Lucy Yardly (2000) calls 'sensitivity to context' as one of 4 characteristics of good qualitative research (Yardley, 2000, p. 219). This research foregrounded participants voices and situated their experiences within the wider sociopolitical context that shape educational practice.

The use of a combined approach of RTA (Braun & Clarke, 2022) and CTA (Lawless & Chen, 2019) enabled a layered exploration of how educators construct and experience trauma-informed practices within wider ideological systems. The combined analytic approach enabled both a reflexive exploration of meaning and a critical interrogation of discourse. RTA supported a nuanced engagement with the data which enabled reflection on my own sociopolitical positioning and values I was bringing to the research as a prior teacher. CTA brought attention to how language and ideology reproduce certain truths and marginalise others. This combined approach to analysis allowed for both depth and criticality of meaning making, while challenging dominant narratives around approaches to behaviour in education.

Finally, a key strength of this study lies in the impact and importance of the research (Yardley, 2000, p. 219) due to its contribution to applied psychology. By identifying tensions within trauma-informed practice implementation and by proposing the RRF as a practitioner-oriented tool, the study moves beyond analysis and findings toward a usable and theory informed framework which demonstrates the potential for qualitative research to generate practical impact (Yardley, 2017). Also analysis of the socio-political influences on perceptions of trauma-informed practice can help to work towards the social justice goals of education; by helping to highlight how progressive attitudes work towards equality (Cooper, 2023b) and attend to the needs of trauma affected individuals in schools. At the same time, the study highlights the sociopolitical conditions that constrain the progressive vision of trauma-informed school environments from being realised.

11. Limitations

Despite the studies key strengths as judged according to qualitative research assessment guidance (Braun & Clarke, 2022, 2024; Yardley, 2000, 2017), key limitations must be acknowledged. Firstly, the concept of transferability will be used to judge the extent to which this contextualised, qualitative research can be safely transferred to another context or setting (Braun & Clarke, 2022). This term will be used in the place of the widely used term 'generalisability' which is rooted in more positivist paradigms.

The participant group in this study was relatively homogenous: all identified as White, British or White, Welsh secondary educators working within a specific geographical region in South Wales or South of England. As such, the findings are situated within this cultural, socioeconomic and institutional context. This may limit the transferability of the findings to more diverse populations such as those from racially minoritised backgrounds. This homogeneity restricts the extent to which the findings can speak to the perspectives of educators from racially minoritised backgrounds whose experiences of TIP may be shaped by the qualitatively different social, historical and institutional realities. For example, educators who have themselves experienced racial trauma (Mayor, 2018a) or have navigated systems that have historically excluded or oppressed them may bring distinct relational and ideological orientations to the work of trauma-informed care. For example, they might be more sensitive to how certain disciplinary policies disproportionately impact racially minoritised students. Suggestions for future research in this domain are provided in the next section.

Therefore, educators positioned outside dominant social norms may face additional emotional demands when promoting inclusive approaches in systems that may not always affirm their identities or values (Zembylas, 2022). This may be limiting since the present research cannot claim to fully address the plurality of experiences within the teaching profession. Furthermore, cultural constructions of trauma, behaviour and authority may differ across contexts, meaning the discourses identified in this study might not fully capture the complexity or variability of perspectives in other schools or communities. While rich and contextualised insight was generated, readers should consider these contextual boundaries when applying the findings to other secondary school contexts and communities.

Additionally, differences in context between school types may have influenced the findings. For example, participants from the Social, Emotional, and Mental Health (SEMH) school expressed consistently more positive attitudes toward trauma-informed practice compared to those in mainstream settings. One possible explanation for this divergence is the structural and cultural differences between these environments. SEMH schools typically have significantly smaller class sizes, allowing for more individualised attention and relationship-building which are core components of trauma-informed work (Chudzik et al., 2024). Furthermore, there is often reduced pressure on academic attainment in SEMH contexts, which may create more space for emotionally attuned approaches. In contrast, mainstream schools often face larger class sizes and greater performance-related pressures, which may constrain the implementation of trauma-informed principles (Kumar, 2019; Wilson et al., 2023). These contextual differences should be taken into account when interpreting the data, and future research could further examine how school setting shapes staff attitudes and experiences of TIP.

12. Potential future research avenues

This research surfaced several limitations that open up avenues for future inquiry. In particular, the homogeneity of the participant group and the contextual specificity of the setting raise questions about how transferable these findings are to other educational and demographic contexts. Given the complex interplay between identity, power and professional values within trauma-informed practice, future research might benefit from expanding the lens through which these issues are examined. The following suggestions outline areas for possible further exploration:

- Inclusion of racially and culturally diverse educators: future studies should prioritise the perspectives of educators from racially minoritised and underrepresented groups. These voices will be crucial to understanding how lived experiences of racial trauma and systemic marginalisation shape beliefs about trauma, behaviour and relational practice.

- Comparative studies across school phases and settings: from a different ontological and epistemological perspective, future studies could reveal how trauma-informed practices are interpreted and implemented in different pedagogical and relational contexts. For example, educator confidence implementing these practices could be compared in primary schools, alternative provision and special education contexts.

- Future research could also adopt a strengths-based lens by conducting an appreciative inquiry (AI) within the SEMH school that featured in this study. Given that staff in this setting reported particularly positive attitudes and appeared to have well-developed trauma-informed practices embedded at a whole-school level, an AI approach could help illuminate the conditions, strategies, and relational cultures that enable such success.

- Student perspectives on trauma-informed practice: Since trauma-informed practice is designed to meet the needs of the pupils themselves, future research should incorporate student voice, particularly those from a range of cultural backgrounds with lived experiences of trauma, to understand how relational practices are perceived from their point of view.

- Taking a trauma-informed approach to the deeply complex issues of trauma and mental health is a very difficult task, fraught with nuance. An exploration of how EPs can support upstream initiatives to tackle trauma and adversity within the community might help take some pressure off schools.

- In 2006, the UK government announced a significant policy change regarding the training pathway for EPs. Prior to this, a mandatory requirement for applying to EP training was a minimum of two years of prior teaching experience. Whilst this policy shift broadened access to the profession by allowing individuals with relevant experience working with children that went beyond traditional teaching roles, it may have resulted in a reduced capacity to appreciate the practical realities of

classroom environments. However, this is just a postulation, and certainly a possible avenue for future research, exploring EP views on this policy change.
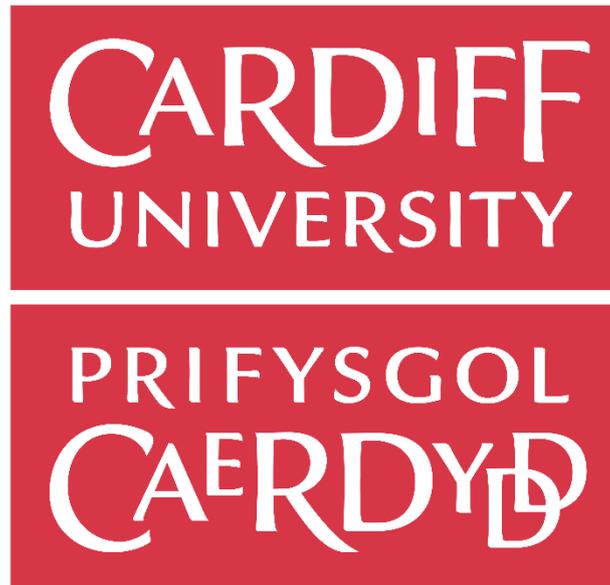
Part C: Critical Appraisal

Word Count: 6,970 words (excluding tables and references)

Part C – Critical Appraisal

1. Introduction

The British Psychological Society (BPS) Code of Human Research Ethics (2021a) asserts that researchers must "be self-reflective", questioning the value psychological learning gives society (BPS, 2021, p. 8). In line with this responsibility, this critical appraisal presents a narrative review of my research journey. It offers an opportunity to be both reflective and reflexive about key decision points throughout the research process. This is essential since very little research in the social or educational field is or can be value-free, therefore a self-reflective appraisal permits the researcher to be able to identify, construct, critique, and articulate their positionality (Cohen et al., 2011). I have chosen to write this appraisal in the first person, reflecting my personal journey and recognising the subjectivity throughout the process (Darwin Holmes, 2020).

The critical account is presented in two parts:

- Critical account of the development of the research practitioner.

- Contribution to knowledge and dissemination

2. Critical account of the development of the research and researcher

2.1 Development of the research topic

I was a secondary school Science and Psychology Teacher in a trauma-informed school for 6 years prior to my research journey. As I transition from teacher to researcher, I am acutely aware of the dual roles I inhabit, therefore reflexivity is critical to maintaining an objective and balanced perspective (R. Berger, 2015). This prior experience deeply informed my choices regarding the research topic. We had received training in the psychological and physiological effects of stress on children which helped us to respond accordingly. However, many teachers, including myself experienced burnout (S. Kim et al., 2021) and compassion fatigue (O'Toole & Dobutowitsch, 2023) in our roles, balancing relational approaches whilst also managing competing accountability pressures. This sparked my interest in educator experiences of relational practice. My previous colleagues would all agree that trauma is awful and therefore we should do everything we can to support trauma affected children. However, the reality of TIP in school felt challenging and this sparked my curiosity about how educators are experiencing TIP in general and what can be done to ensure it benefits both students and the educators themselves.

As public interest grew in trauma-informed approaches post covid, I had begun my research journey at Cardiff university and learned about the role of the EP in supporting trauma-informed approaches in schools. I felt passionate about this new opportunity to use practice-based experience to contribute to the evidence-based knowledge concerning trauma-informed practice. I noticed that there was an abundance of literature focusing on the effectiveness of TIP implementation, but much less concerning the experiences of the educators themselves, especially in the English and Welsh context. Indeed, I recognised that the broader sociocultural and institutional context of my research necessitated a focus on wider systemic and cultural factors that shape TIP implementation (M. S. Thomas et al., 2019). In a scoping review of the literature, I noticed there was a lack of research to date using methodology that could incorporate a critical lens (Lawless & Chen, 2019) on the experiences of educators. This was why I wanted to contextualise the experiences of teachers taking a trauma-informed approach, so that I could explore how wider sociocultural factors could be influencing the teacher experience in the UK. From the outset, it was essential to recognise the importance of researcher reflexivity throughout the process (Finlay, 2002). This reflexivity involved examining how my positionality influenced the research process and acknowledging that knowledge is co-constructed between the researcher and participants (Darwin Holmes, 2020).

2.2 Development of literature review and research questions

The process of conducting an in-depth literature review was very daunting to me. I started by scoping the literature using search engines I was familiar with such as 'google scholar' and 'Cardiff library search'. Initially, I was interested in the teacher experience and so I started my search looking at 'teacher experiences

of trauma-informed practice.' The first thing I noticed was that most of the literature had explored the primary school teacher experience. This led me to get curious about why there was a dearth of literature out there on the secondary teacher experience and found a number of reasons for this in my search including; the idea that primary schools are ideal for addressing trauma and resilience early on (D. L. Perry & Daniels, 2016), primary schools being perceived generally as more nurturing environments so more conducive to TIP (Heck et al., 2023) and the emphasis on close teacher-student relationships which draws more attention to primary school contexts (Puchner & Markowitz, 2023).

I then started to consider the importance of exploring the experiences of TIP implementation from a whole school perspective. I realised that this was necessary to understand the experiences, facilitators and barriers of TIP implementation (Oberle et al., 2016) because it would facilitate understanding of how the EP might work systemically to support TIP with school leaders and other teaching and non-teaching professionals within a school. With this in mind, my search terms evolved from 'teacher experiences' when implementing a trauma-informed approach to 'staff experiences' OR 'head teacher experiences' OR 'classroom assistant experiences' etc (see appendix B). During this search, I was acutely aware that I lacked the experience of conducting a search in a transparent, coherent and systematic manner and so enlisted the support of expertise within Cardiff University library service. I arranged a teams call with a librarian who shared their knowledge of databases relevant to my topic area in order to ensure I would find all relevant literature.

It was immediately apparent that TIP was a broad and multi-disciplinary topic area, necessitating a narrative review in the first instance, to contextualize the area and provide psychological theory and research underpinning the scope of the topic (Siddaway et al., 2019). I needed to conduct a narrative review to piece together the story of why we need to know more about the educator experiences of trauma-informed practice. I did this using the 'upside down triangle' funnelling method of topic development. Before writing anything, I drafted out the structure. See below:
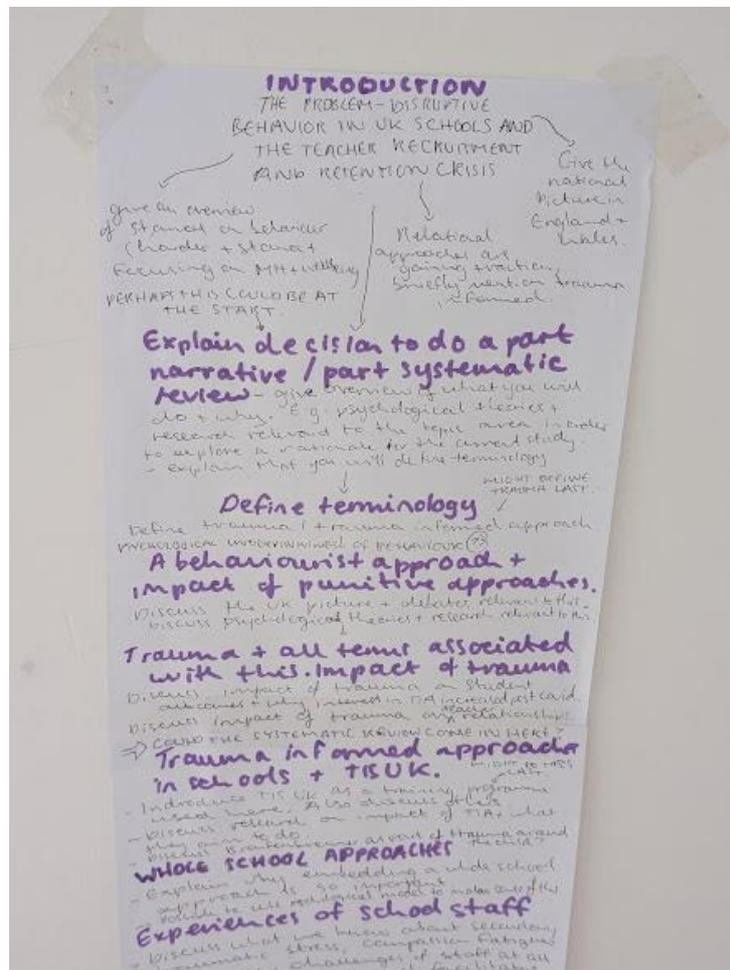
Figure 8: Narrative Review Draft Structure.

On reflection, thinking about the story I wanted to tell from start to finish helped the flow of my writing, however confirmation bias (Peters, 2022) may have led me to tell parts of the story that I was expecting to tell based on my own past experiences. I was aware of this and continually questioned myself when thinking of what part of the story to tell next, ensuring that I was guided by a bottom-up approach from the literature and what I was discovering rather than a top-down approach of telling the story from the angle of what I perceived to make the most sense.

Additionally, narrative reviews have been criticised for lacking transparency and objectivity (Greenhalgh et al., 2018), therefore I knew that at least part of my review needed to provide the reader with a clear question of the literature I was trying to answer and a transparent depiction of how I went about finding the literature in order to answer the question. Therefore, I settled on a part narrative, part semi-systematic review. Following the suggestion that a semi- systematic review offers transparency and allows the author to cover a broad range of research from multiple disciplines (Siddaway et al., 2019), I conducted a semi systematic search of the literature using a number of databases relevant to my topic.

During this process I felt quite uncertain about the part narrative, part semi systematic structure, but felt this approach gave me the flexibility to explore emergent themes that a purely systematic approach might overlook (Greenhalgh et al., 2018). The systematic component provided structure which made me feel that the reader would be confident replicating what I had done and judge whether the arguments I had made were reasonable (Snyder, 2019b).

In the process of conducting a semi-systematic search of the literature, I developed clear inclusion and exclusion criteria in order to ensure my search was explicitly relevant to the question I was asking of the literature. I was surprised to experience this as a very time-consuming process due to the attention to detail required to ensure papers were explicitly relevant. At first, in order to narrow papers down to a reasonable number, I initially set an exclusion criteria of 'published before 2020'. Citing a rationale for this as relating to the significance of the post covid context (Mahmud, 2022; Wilson et al., 2023). However on reflection, I realised that I could have potentially missed out some key papers and knowledge from before this time, especially given shifts in policy legislation in the mid 2010's (Department of Health & Department for Education., 2017; National Assembly for Wales Children, Young People and Education Committee., 2018) in England and Wales (see appendix B for cut-off date for a full explanation of the decision for a final cut-off date of 2017). This helped me feel more confident that I had found a good range of relevant papers.

3. Research aims and questions

During research supervision, we discussed the importance of formulating a research question with a broad and neutral focus, free from assumptions about what the findings might reveal. I wanted my questions to emerge from an inductive, bottom-up approach to ensure they were grounded in participants' experiences rather than being overly influenced by preconceived ideas. This neutrality was essential in maintaining alignment with my research paradigm.

Initially, I was interested in exploring educator experiences and perceptions of trauma-informed practice. However, through my literature review, I discovered that much of the existing research focused on primary school educators, leaving secondary school contexts relatively underexplored. Recognizing this opportunity to deepen knowledge, I refined my focus to contextualize educators' experiences within the UK and analyze them through a sociocultural lens. This led me to expand my research question from:

"What are secondary school staff perceptions and experiences of trauma-informed practice?"

to:

1. *"What are secondary school staff perceptions and experiences of trauma-informed practice"*

and

2. *"How are these influenced by dominant social and political ideologies?"*

This expansion to two questions aligned with my commitment to considering the broader sociopolitical influences on educators' experiences. It also allowed me to apply a critical lens to my analysis, adding a dimension that allowed myself to take a critical stance towards taken-for-granted knowledge (Burr, 2015).

I initially worried that combining these two dimensions might overcomplicate my research. However, I recognized the importance of appreciating the broader dimensions of TIP. This is because TIP is inherently systemic, requiring collaboration across multiple stakeholders, including educators, leadership, and policymakers (M. S. Thomas et al., 2019). Therefore, this dual focus enhanced the originality of my contribution by addressing both the individual and systemic dimensions of the topic. Moreover, it ensured that my findings would reflect the complex interplay of factors shaping educators' experiences, consistent with my underlying philosophical stance.

4. Epistemological and Ontological stance

My understanding of ontology and epistemology has evolved over the past 3 years. Prior to commencing my research journey, I had never considered it as something to pay attention to in research but as I mapped out the positions in my research diary, I started to reflect on what position made most sense to me personally and as a researcher, see below:

Figure 9:Research Diary Extract 1 – Epistemology and Ontology.

Since Critical realism is an all-inclusive philosophy of science because it uses both the positivist and constructivist approaches to provide a thorough account of ontology and epistemology (Lawani, 2021), I felt like this offered the most helpful middle ground and started all of my research planning and formulation planning through this lens.

I wanted to root every decision that I made in my ontology and epistemology in order to offer readers of my research clarity and transparency throughout the process. I spent a long time thinking about what made sense, whilst also grappling with whether or not I could separate my own personal philosophical stance from a researcher stance. Brown & Duanes (2019) assert that ontology and epistemology should be derived from your axiological position; in other words, what motivates you ethically and morally to conduct your research (Brown & Dueñas, 2020b). In my case, I was motivated by social justice and a chance to ultimately better understand how we can work towards social justice goals such as equality in education. As teachers can be considered social change agents in their work inspiring young lives (Butera et al., 2021), it was important to me to consider my positionality when gaining their voices and these voices were coming from real institutions governed by real laws and system constraints. Therefore, it felt only right to choose an ontological position that acknowledged that an external world exists and humans can gain knowledge of it, but this knowledge

relies on perception which is imbued with individual interpretation (Burr, 2015). I felt critical realism captured this best.

When reflecting on the nature of knowledge itself (my epistemological stance), it felt right to consider a position that would complement critical realism, whilst providing an explanation of how perceptions come to be. Since social constructionism posits that knowledge is not a fixed entity but co-constructed through social processes, shaped by history, culture, language and power dynamics (Gergen, 1999), it felt particularly relevant to my research as it allowed for the exploration of multiple truths whilst recognising that each teacher's experience of TIP is uniquely shaped by their sociocultural context, personal history and professional interactions. This fit with the latter part of my research question, since taking a critical lens on the social and political ideologies on my participant's experiences necessitated a stance which considered external influences on perceptions and experiences.

However, given the heterogeneity of my sample of participants, I did also consider a fit of social constructivism. This is because it places greater emphasis on the active process of individual meaning – making (Vygotsky, 1978), which might have been particularly useful in exploring how teachers internalize and implement TIP depending on their particular role within a school. Social constructivism also emphasises the role of dialogue and collaboration in the construction of knowledge which may have aligned well with the relational and interpersonal dimensions of trauma-informed practices (Palincsar, 1998). However, given that the ultimate goal of my research was to contribute to our understanding of how teachers experience the use of a trauma-informed approach in their practice through the lens of social and political influences, I felt that social constructionism was a better fit as it provided the flexibility and depth needed to engage with the nuanced and layered realities of teachers lived experiences. I felt that an ontological and epistemological stance of critical realism and social constructionism would ultimately allow for an acknowledgement that educators' experiences are influenced not only by their personal beliefs but also by wider discourses (Burr, 2015); such as government policy, professional training, and societal attitudes toward trauma and behaviour in schools which all contribute to how TIP is interpreted and implemented. These positions went on to guide all of my decision making throughout the research process.

5. Methodology and Design

At the idea generation stage of my thesis, I spent a lot of time considering what the consequences of ideas would have on the methodology and design of my study. This was important because I wanted to use a methodology that I was secure and competent using, given I was a single researcher with a short time frame in which to conduct the project. I began considering the possibility of discourse analysis (Foucault, 2013) as a method for providing insight into how language constructs meaning around trauma-informed approaches. Given that the language we use and the meaning we make of it is so intrinsically linked to action (Burr, 2015),

it was fascinating to me to start to imagine what knowledge this methodology could provide us with and the sorts of questions this could answer. I brainstormed some research questions that I had formulated from my professional practice and felt that a discourse analysis may be able to answer questions such as;

- *Why are deficit discourses still so common, even in trauma-informed schools?*
- *How are professionals talking about trauma-informed practice?*
- *How are power dynamics being conveyed in discourse?*
- *What language are we using to make sense of relational practice within a more punitive society?*

Considering that Faucauldian discourse analysis (FDA) takes power into consideration, promoting inaudible speakers as legitimate claimants (Khan & MacEachen, 2021), I thought this might be helpful in looking for difference between participants depending on role and power (e.g. headteacher, teacher, teaching assistant) rather than looking for similarity across universal contexts, such as might be the case when taking a social constructionist stance (Burr, 2015) and looking for common themes across different participant voices.

However, I reflected in supervision about what I wanted to achieve in my research and contribute to the knowledge base. I also wanted to consider what would be most practically feasible as a single researcher combined with what might be most practically useful in terms of implications for EPs. For example, discourse analysis has been criticised for focusing narrowly on language and discursive constructions at the expense of considering broader structural factors (Hook, 2001). While it may uncover how TIPs are spoken about, it might not fully explore how teachers experience these practices in day to day settings. In order to support teachers with TIPs, it felt particularly important to better understand TIP from a whole school perspective, which would also support EPs with their systemic work in schools.

In order to achieve this, I chose a combined approach of reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2022) and critical thematic analysis (Lawless & Chen, 2019) because it offered the flexibility and depth needed to explore the rich and nuanced experiences of different professionals implementing trauma-informed practices, with the added layer of a critical lens which considered these experiences within the wider and ever changing sociopolitical context. Additionally, the reflexive nature of this method permitted me to engage in critical self-awareness of my positionality as both researcher and former teacher in a trauma-informed school; experience which could be utilised as a strength (Braun & Clarke, 2024) through due diligence and reflexive practice. I engaged in this reflection at every stage of the thematic analysis process, including coding and theme generation (see appendix E for evidence of reflection).

Using a combined approach was tricky, because I needed to ensure I was adhering to the fidelity of both methods of analysis, whilst combining them in a way that didn't make it seem as though I was trying to execute two separate research projects in one. I spent some time considering how the methods could be weaved together. One option was to complete a process of theme generation by following Braun and Clarke's 6 step

method to thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2022), followed by going back through the data and following the method of critical thematic analysis (Lawless & Chen, 2019), which would have involved looking for patterns of forcefulness, repetition and recurrence in meaning to look for influences of political and social ideologies in language. However, this option would have involved repeating the process of going over the data. Therefore, it felt like the methods could be combined at the coding stage. I experimented with the process with some pilot data first and I noticed how I was critically engaging with the data at all stages of the coding and theme generation process. This helped me to build themes whilst appreciating the significance of patterns of repetition, forcefulness and recurrence as outlined in the Lawless & Chen (2019) paper. I was noticing how themes were being generated in a process of reflexive thematic analysis, with an element of criticality which enabled me to consider the wider social and political context when making sense of my themes (see appendix E).

6. Participant selection and recruitment

I used a significant amount of supervision time discussing my intended sample of participants for my thesis. In my first ethics proposal submission, I had outlined my plan to recruit a homogeneous sample of secondary school teacher participants. I wanted to ensure a depth of analysis which I had assumed could only be achieved with a narrow or singular focus. Initially, I was interested in the research base on teacher experiences of compassion fatigue and secondary traumatisation (O'Toole & Dobutowitsch, 2023). I wanted to understand these phenomenon's in the context of trauma-informed education. Were trauma-informed teachers experiencing compassion fatigue and secondary trauma? I wanted to know more about the psychology of the teacher experience. However, as I conducted a scoping search of the literature, I noticed that it can be difficult to make sense of the teacher experience without hearing from the perspectives of those managing teachers and directing their work. I started to consider the possibility of including participants from a more diverse range of roles across secondary schools in England and Wales in order to see where the common themes in experience of TIP were. From here, I then felt able to understand how TIP is implemented from a whole school perspective and since EPs work with leaders in school to facilitate change, it felt necessary to include the views of all members of the school community.

A drawback of including participants from multiple roles meant that combining these varied perspectives in a single analysis make it harder to identify clear, role-specific themes and patterns which may have potentially limited the depth and focus of the findings (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). For example, I was initially concerned that whilst the diversity of roles could provide a broader understanding of TIP, it risked diluting or obscuring the unique experiences of a specific group such as teachers. Therefore, I set out to recruit a sample of teachers for my study. After a month of recruiting via emails and calls, I was unsuccessful in recruiting this specific group of secondary professionals. I was not getting any interest and I started reflecting on why this might be

the case. Were they too busy? Perhaps they felt there was no benefit to participation? Indeed, due to the busy contact hours on a teacher's timetable and the pressure of preparing pupils for standardised tests (Wilson et al., 2023), they may not have felt able to offer me their time.

I started to consider the benefits of a more heterogeneous sample of participants. I felt optimistic about the potential for a heterogeneous sample to enable me to identify patterns across different levels within the system. I made a bullet pointed list of anticipated benefits in my research diary. See below:
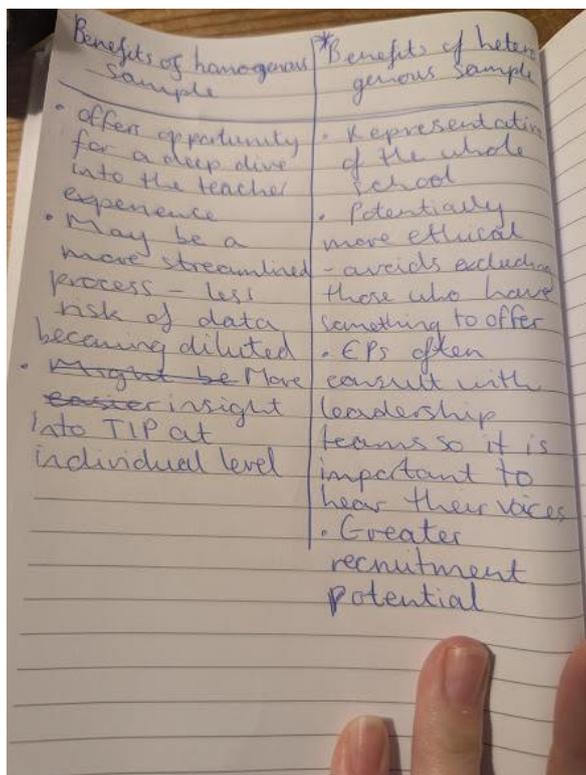
Figure 10: Research Diary Extract 2 - Benefits Analysis.

Overall, I felt that I may have been able to highlight systemic barriers or facilitators of trauma-informed practices by engaging participants from different roles within a school. For example, I hoped my data might offer insights for bridging gaps between policy and practice which involves exploring varied experiences which are influenced by organizational structures and interpersonal relationships (Long, 2022b). Therefore, I needed to change my strategy if I wanted to recruit enough people to give me a rich picture of how educational professionals were experiencing TIP. I re-applied for ethics approval to recruit all staff, including non-teaching staff. I also made myself more personable by giving a presentation about my research at a pastoral leaders meeting. Engaging these gatekeepers *in person* felt like best practice in terms of ethical conduct and by doing this, I was successful in recruiting a total of 10 participants with varied roles within schools from classroom assistant to headteacher.

7. Data Collection

Due to my personal experience of the research subject matter, it was important to me to choose a method that placed emphasis on reflexivity during the data collection process. Semi-structured interviews were chosen due to their ability to balance structure with flexibility, allowing for an in-depth exploration of participant perspectives. Unlike structured interviews which limit responses to predefined questions, I felt semi-structured interviews might offer participants the chance to elaborate on their experiences in meaningful ways (Kallio et al., 2016). I also felt that it was important to use a semi-structured schedule in order to facilitate rapport building, whilst also maintaining consistency across interviews (Adeoye-Olatunde & Olenik, 2021). I felt that the semi-structured interview method also aligned well with a critical realist paradigm which permitted participants to articulate their version of reality based on their unique lived experiences which enhanced the depth and quality of the data.

When developing questions for the semi-structured interview schedule, it was important to me to ensure that my interview questions would answer my research question. My first draft interview questions looked like this:

1. How are you today?

2. What does the term 'trauma' mean to you?

3. What does 'a trauma-informed approach' mean to you in your practice?

4. Can you tell me about your feelings regarding the school's change to a trauma-informed approach? Prompt: how did you experience the change?

5. How has applying the school's trauma-informed approach impacted on your values as a person and as a professional?

6. In your opinion, which aspects of a trauma-informed approach work well in your school and which aspects do not work so well?

When I discussed the appropriateness of these questions in supervision, I was prompted to reflect on the assumptions or expectations that I may have bought to these questions at a conscious or unconscious level. Adeoye-Olatunde & Olenik (2021) prompt researchers to avoid leading questions which direct the interviewee to respond in a biased way. However, in line with my qualitative paradigm, it is important to recognise that subjectivity is not a problem to be managed or controlled, to be gotten rid of, but should be understood and treated as a resource for doing analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2022). I reflected on what assumptions I was bringing to some questions such as 'values'. During supervision, I discussed my experience of working with staff who had very authoritarian views and became interested in how authoritarian values or ideologies might influence perceptions and experiences.

In supervision, we challenged the need to explicitly ask about participant values since this was likely to be something conveyed through responses nonetheless. It was important that I didn't inadvertently influence the direction of the conversation and that my findings came directly from my participants own words. Therefore, I re-drafted my questions taking account for this and arrived at 3 questions that were as neutral as possible;

Initial pleasantries such as 'hi, how are you?' followed by;

1. *What does the term 'trauma' mean to you?*
2. *Tell me about your experiences implementing a trauma-informed approach? Prompt: why do you think that? Can you tell me more about that?*
3. *Can you tell me about your personal and professional feelings regarding a trauma-informed approach?*

I felt like adjusting the neutrality of the questions, reduced the extent to which the questions had the potential to evoke pressure for socially desirable answers (Adams, 2015). For example, instead to asking about values, I asked them about their feelings from which values may or may not have been inferred.

During my first interview, I noticed it was a little clunky because I was attempting to stick rigidly to the order of the questions after initial pleasantries. I don't think my first interviewee was comfortable because their answers to questions were short and they seemed reluctant to expand. On reflection, I could have gone beyond pleasantries to building rapport by using non-threatening questions (Adams, 2015) such as; 'how long have you worked here?' which may have supported their confidence to open up to me more.

It has been recognised that novice researchers can do mock interviews with experienced investigators as another way to practice and gain experience (Adeoye-Olatunde & Olenik, 2021), so I practiced my interview with some fellow researcher colleagues. In this process, I became familiar with my questions and reflected on whether I got responses that were relevant when looking back on my research question. I realised that it may have been more helpful to formally pilot my semi-structured interview schedule (Karatsareas, 2022) prior to my first participant as I imagine that it would have been helpful to practice what to do when interviewee's go too far off topic. Also, it might have been helpful to know how long I might expect Interviewee's to speak for each question and the sorts of prompt questions that may have been helpful to prepare.

Furthermore, it has been suggested to researchers that they should always let interviewees finish and politely ask them to return to the topic of interest (Karatsareas, 2022). I noticed myself becoming more confident with each participant, able to rearrange the order of my questions and able to ask neutral questions to prompt participants to expand on aspects of what they had said. I came to the realisation that the interview schedule is not meant to be read verbatim in the same order with each interview, rather, it is meant to provide structure and focus to the natural flow of conversation for each unique interview (Adeoye-Olatunde & Olenik, 2021). I

didn't conclude my interview until both my participant and I felt that we had covered everything that was intended to cover and felt satisfied at the end of each interview that I had rich and relevant data.

8. Data analysis

I chose a combined approach of Braun and Clarke's (2013, 2022) six stage reflexive thematic analysis (RTA) and Lawless & Chen's (2019) critical thematic analysis (CTA) to analyse my data (see appendix D). I chose a combined method in order to employ a method which offered flexibility, reflexivity and an exploratory nature (Braun & Clarke, 2022) as well as a method which enabled me to take a critical stance towards taken for granted knowledge (Burr, 2015; Lawless & Chen, 2019). In order to remain reflexive by understanding and owning my own experiences and perspectives (Reicher, 2000), I kept a research diary which helped me to write down and acknowledge the way I was relating, or not relating to participants in the interviews and what corresponding emotions this stirred within me. I ensured my reflections were thoughtful and (self)questioning, identifying and then interrogating their positions, values, choices and practices within the research process (Braun & Clarke, 2022).

During the process of interviewing participants, I noticed myself relating to what some participants were saying in terms of their experiences. In one of my earlier interviews with participant 2 I noticed myself verbalising my empathy with the participant, but by doing so, I may have put words in their mouth that they may not have thought to say. I noted this in my research diary. See below:

Diary entry 1:

"I hope I didn't influence what participant 2 was going to say by relating to their experience of challenging attitudes with other members of staff. I said 'that must be tough because these attitudes are deeply ingrained so it must be hard to bring about change' and my participant said 'yes, that is exactly it'. I hope I just helped the participant articulate what they wanted to say rather than put words in their mouth.. Maybe it helped with rapport building. I hope so anyway"

I took these thoughts and feelings to supervision and interrogated the ways I was relating to participants. However, I was pleased to be reassured that we are only human and when engaging in interactions, we should accept that our views are likely to be impacted by our interactions with others (Burr, 2015).

During my interview with participant 6, I noticed they were very knowledgeable about TIP and I found this inspiring. I noticed that I started to imagine what the possible themes might be as they were speaking and got excited about this, but also noticed that I was feeling some tension and anxiety that the topics discussed might not be raised in subsequent interviews. I knew it was important to name this and reflect on it in my research diary. See below:

Diary entry 2:

Participant 6 was so inspiring and knowledgeable. They really embody everything that trauma-informed practice is. They are the only school who has trained every member of staff in trauma-informed practice, so they really seem to know what they are talking about. They also recognise what Karen Triesman calls 'the chain of pain' by nurturing the teachers caring for the children through staff wellbeing practices and open door policies. It is so interesting what they say about newer members of staff being more on board with trauma-informed practice than older members of staff. I wonder if I will find this in my other interviews because this is a very interesting finding.

It was essential to acknowledge and reflect on these feelings in supervision before conducting my next interview. I didn't want to anticipate what I might find before I found it, in order to avoid influencing my participants to talk about a particular topic or to have a particular point of view. I felt that I also needed to acknowledge how inspired I felt by this participant in order to interrogate the possibility of 'over identifying' with this participant and the possible consequences this may have had on my research. Over-identification may result in the interviewer unconsciously projecting their own beliefs onto the data or becoming reluctant to critically analyse participants accounts (Roulston, 2014), therefore it was important to engage in reflexivity after every interview in order to mitigate the possibility of biases throughout the research process. On the other hand, it has been suggested that when the researcher identifies with their participants, they are in an optimal position to elicit narratives or facilitate spaces for interviewees to tell their stories (Koivunen, 2010). This highlights the idea that researcher subjectivity is not always a problem; and instead it can be viewed as an asset (Braun & Clarke, 2022).

When considering how to code my transcripts, I experienced indecision about whether to code by hand or use NVivo software. I considered that manually coding by hand would have allowed for immersive engagement with the data, encouraging a deep level of familiarity with each transcript (Nowell et al., 2017). At the same time, I was considering the time-consuming process of coding all 10 transcripts, which varied in length from 20 minutes to 60 minutes and this felt daunting. I was concerned that hand-coding would be prone to inconsistencies when tracking themes across multiple transcripts. I wanted to be thorough and systematic too. I ultimately chose NVivo because of its ability to streamline the process; it provided a structured way to organise coded data efficiently, reducing the risk of oversight and allowing for easier refinement of themes as I moved through the different phases of RTA (Terry et al., 2017). See appendix E for examples of the coding process using NVivo software.

9. Contribution to knowledge

Despite growing interest in trauma-informed practice in the UK, there is very little research in England and Wales that explores educator experiences of TIP. Most of the literature to date came from America and Australia. With the exception of one paper by Boylan et al., (2023) who explored the perspectives of trainee teachers on the enablers and barriers of trauma-informed practice within the current pollical climate in England (Boylan et al., 2023b), very little research in the UK has so far has contextualised teacher experiences of TIP. By contextualising TIP within the wider sociopolitical context, my research provides insight into how trauma-informed content can be more effectively integrated into national frameworks. This will help us remedy the goals of TIP with the policy constraints of schools.

9.1 Unique contributions of the research

The relational-regulation framework (RRF) provides practical guidance that aligns with trauma-informed principles of safety, connection, and reflection. Feedback from participants and alignment with established models suggest it may serve as a useful tool for bridging the gap between theoretical ideals and the real demands of classroom practice. However, I also recognise the potential risk that the framework could inadvertently contribute to the 'mechanisation' of relational work which is an irony given that trauma-informed care is rooted in emotional presence and authentic human connection. In offering a structured process, there is a danger it could be interpreted as a checklist or reduce nuanced interpersonal dynamics to formulaic stages. This tension reflects a broader challenge within trauma-informed education: the need to balance clarity and consistency with relational responsiveness and critical reflection. The RRF is therefore intended not as a rigid framework, but as a flexible guide that prompts educators to centre connection while remaining reflective about the sociocultural and emotional context of their work. The framework helps ensure that TIP is not just a theoretical framework, but a sustainable lived reality in schools.

9.2 Implications for educational psychology practice and wider systems

It is clear from consideration of implications for EPs in part 1 and 2 of this thesis, that EPs play a pivotal role in guiding schools through this shift, not only by supporting educators but by helping to embed trauma-informed principles into whole school systems. Reflecting on the significance of my research as it applies to EP practice, I hope that it offers EPs with more insight into the frontline experience of school staff which I hope will bridge the psychological theory with practice in schools. I wonder if gaining knowledge of educator perspectives will help facilitate rapport building through increased empathy for educators. This rapport building will be important during supervision sessions, wherein EPs support educators to become more attuned to the needs of children and young people (Callicott & Leadbetter, 2013).

One of the key themes emerging from my research was the emotional impact on educators when working with trauma affected children. EPs have an important role in *containing the container* (Treisman, 2017) because if teachers or leaders are not adequately supported then they cannot effectively support their students. EPs can foster the psychological safety (Maslow, 1943) for staff to process their own emotional responses and challenges. Participants also voiced frustration about the tension between punitive, behaviourist discipline models and the relational, responsive approaches advocated TIP. This presents a unique challenge for EPs, who often work at the intersection of policy and practice. EPs have the potential to advocate for systemic change by supporting schools to develop policies more aligned with trauma-informed principles. However, this also prompts reflection on the importance of "walking the walk" when leading change. Without direct teaching experience, it may be difficult to fully appreciate the complex realities educators face. Since 2006, not all qualifying EPs have come from a teaching background, and while this has broadened the profession's expertise, it may also present challenges in fully empathising with the day-to-day demands of teaching.

10. Considerations for future research

Reflecting on considerations for future research mentioned in part 2, I think it is also important that future research explores best practice in schools that have implemented a trauma-informed approach which has led to measurable student outcomes, such as engagement and academic performance. This is important especially in light of Karen Treisman's concerns that trauma-informed practice runs the risk of becoming diluted and monetised (Treisman, 2024b) if staff deviate away from the fidelity of interventions and the principles that underpin TIP. However, in light of my findings which demonstrate the challenges of TIP, I am left wondering whether TIP is truly something that educators can implement with fidelity, given systemic pressures and constraints. Indeed, Dr Daniel Rossen is quoted in a recent blog post that he fears "TIP is a reductionist solution to a wickedly complex problem" (Rossen, 2023, para. 12) because trauma and mental health are just far too complex for us to utilise our knowledge to help students at scale and the job may be beyond the remit of a classroom teacher (Rossen, 2023). There is a need for further research to get to the bottom of how TIP can be sustainably achieved in our secondary schools.

11. Dissemination of findings

I feel a strong sense of duty to ensure the voices of my participants are heard widely. Promoting the voices of educators serving trauma affected children in England and Wales should ultimately drive positive change in schools and contribute to the overall wellbeing and success of students. As aforementioned, many EPs in the profession do not have prior teaching experience before their doctoral training due to changes in entry requirements to the doctoral course in 2006. This gap in experience of some EPs makes it even more essential to centre the voices and lived experiences of educators. By doing so, we can work collaboratively to bring about meaningful and positive change for children.

In summary, disseminating my research findings is not just about sharing knowledge; it's about advocating for and empowering educators, influencing policy, and ultimately enhancing the educational experiences and well-being of trauma-affected students. Through this work, I hope to contribute to a more compassionate and effective educational system.

Table 7: Dissemination Plan.

Intended action	Plan	Timescale
Share findings with research participants.	Contact participants of the study by email and send them my thesis, including a summary poster of the findings.	September 2025
Share findings with the EPS I am working for.	Develop a PowerPoint presentation sharing the purpose of my research and the findings. To present at a team meeting. Follow up with a copy of the thesis.	Make PowerPoint presentation in August 2025 and deliver presentation in September 2025.
Develop a special interest group on TIP in which educators and EPs are welcome.	Choose trauma-informed practice as my 'champion area' at the EPS and invite colleagues at the EPS and the schools I work in to attend the special interest group which could be a facilitated discussion by me on teams or in person.	Starting October 2025 and ongoing
Share thesis findings on the '*psychbites*' podcast which is publicly accessible.	Contact hosts of the podcast who I am familiar with through the doctorate programme and from	January 2026

	previous work. Offer to present on an episode.	
Offer to share findings of research at the next DedPsy conference.	Contact programme directors and offer to present.	June 2026

12. Personal reflections and closing comments

I am so grateful for the generosity of my research participants, who spoke candidly and openly about their experiences which offered deep insights into the ways that TIP is being perceived and experienced by secondary school staff in England and Wales. I hope this research offers a critical stance on the taken for granted notion that educators are implementing TIP in ways that always benefits students and the educators themselves.

I recognise that my dissemination plan is unlikely to lead to seismic changes in educational settings and EP services, but I hope that it offers an insightful contribution to knowledge concerning how modern approaches in schools are serving our children and our educators. I am struck by how much I have learnt during the research process. I hope this reflexive account offers transparency in how I grappled with the ethical and research dilemmas that arose during the decision-making processes made throughout my research journey.

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Appendix A – Ethics documents

All participants were provided with documents that summarised the research and key information. This included an information sheet to ensure participants had a good understanding of the research to give informed consent. A consent form was given for them to read, sign and send back, after which a suitable date was arranged for an interview. After the interview, a debriefing document was also provided to give participants information about how their data would be used and to provide the researcher's contact details should participants wish to follow up about their involvement. All corresponding documents for the process of ensuring fully informed consent, anonymity and confidentiality is provided on the following pages:

1. Participant information sheet

2. Participant consent form

3. Participant debrief sheet

4. Semi-structured interview questions

5. Headteacher/ gatekeeper email

1. Participant information sheet

I am a trainee Educational Psychologist who would like to conduct a research project. You are being invited to take part in this research project. Before you decide whether you would like to participate it is important for you to understand why the research is being conducted and what it will involve. Please take your time and read the following information carefully and please ask if there is anything you are unclear about or need more information about. Your time is greatly appreciated.

What is the purpose of the project?

The purpose of this project is to understand and explore your experiences of implementing a trauma informed approach in your school. The project is interested in your feelings and thoughts around implementation of the approach. It is hoped that findings may offer insights into how staff can be best supported to implement the TISUK trainings. The findings will be used to form a research thesis which will be submitted as a requirement of my doctoral degree.

What will happen if you take part?

If you wish to take part in this study you will be asked to take part in an interview that shall be voice recorded depending on whether we meet in person or online. If it is online then this will be on Microsoft teams. The semi structured interview will be about your experience of implementing a trauma informed approach in your school. The questions will be based on what your thoughts and feelings are regarding how a trauma informed approach is implemented at classroom or whole school level (depending on your role). Data collected will be stored in a secure location; all participants will be given a pseudonym so will remain anonymous. Only the researcher named on your consent form (Ellie Collinson collinsone@cardiff.ac.uk) and their project supervisor (Dale Bartle bartled@cardiff.ac.uk) will have access to your name and data. Only group data will be presented in the report so that no individual is identifiable in this way either.

Do you have to take part?

Participation in this research is completely voluntary. If you do not wish to participate you do not have to. Should you decide to take part you will be asked to sign a copy of the consent form declaring that you have read and understood the information in this document and that you consent to participate in the research. You

can withdraw from the study if you change your mind without giving a reason until 3 weeks after the interview date. You will not be able to withdraw your data at this point as the interview will be transcribed and anonymised. This means that the information you have provided will not be traceable to you so will not be able to be removed from the data gathered. Should you have any questions or concerns you can contact myself at collinsone@cardiff.ac.uk or my supervisor Dale Bartle at bartled@cardiff.ac.uk. You can also contact psychethics@cardiff.ac.uk should you wish.

What are the possible disadvantages and risks of taking part?

The research project may involve difficult or sensitive discussion points, however, this is dependable on your own experiences. You will be provided with a debrief form including contact details of myself and my supervisor, should you have any questions or concerns following the interview. The interview will be very flexible in format, which will allow for time and breaks if required.

What are the possible benefits of taking part?

This study hopes to offer insight into how school staff are experiencing implementation of a trauma-informed approach. The study hopes to bridge theory and practice about trauma informed approaches together and inform ways in which EPs might be best placed to support in implementation of trauma informed approaches moving forwards.

Who has reviewed the project?

This research is conducted within the requirements of the School of Psychology Research Ethics Committee at Cardiff University and in accordance with the British Psychological Society's Ethical Code of Conduct (BPS 2009). This project is being overseen by the researcher's supervisor Dale Bartle.

Thank you for taking the time to read this information

The information provided will be held in compliance with GDPR regulations. Cardiff University is the data controller and is committed to respecting and protecting your personal data in accordance with your expectations and Data Protection legislation. The University has a Data Protection Officer who can be contacted at inforequest@cardiff.ac.uk.

Further information about Data Protection, including your rights and details about how to contact the Information Commissioner's Office should you wish to complain, can be found at the following: https://www.cardiff.ac.uk/public-information/policies-and-procedures/data-protection.

The lawful basis for processing this information is public task. This information is being collected by Ellie Collinson. The information on the consent form will be held securely and separately from the research information. Only the researchers will have access to this form and it will be destroyed after 7 years. The research information you provide will be used for the purposes of research only and will be stored securely. Upon study completion, the data will be anonymised (any identifying elements removed) after 3 weeks and this anonymous information may be kept indefinitely, published or made publicly available in accordance with open science practices.

2. Consent form

Name of Student conducting this research: Ellie Collinson

1   I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet for this project. I have had the opportunity to ask questions.

2   I understand that my participation is voluntary, and I am free to withdraw my data until 3 weeks after the interview date, which will be the when the audio data will be transcribed and anonymised.

3   I understand that examples of my experiences will be noted, analysed and that all data will be stored securely.

4   I understand that my interview will remain anonymous and that only the researcher and the supervisor of this project will hear it. I understand that all personal data about me will be kept confidential.

5   I understand that the researcher must work in accordance to the Ethical Code of Conduct set by the School of Psychology Research Ethics Committee at Cardiff University and The British Psychological Society (2009).

6   I agree to take part in the above research project.

7   I agree to allow the researcher to use audio recordings to record my interview

_____   _____   _____

Name of Participant   Date   Signature

Ellie Collinson

_____   _____   _____

Researcher   Date   Signature

You may also wish to contact the ethics committee. Their email address is psychethics@cardiff.ac.uk

The information provided will be held in compliance with GDPR regulations. Cardiff University is the data controller and is committed to respecting and protecting your personal data in accordance with your expectations and Data Protection legislation. The University has a Data Protection Officer who can be contacted at inforequest@cardiff.ac.uk. Should you have any questions or concerns you

can contact myself at collinsone@cardiff.ac.uk or my supervisor Dale Bartle at bartled@cardiff.ac.uk. You can also contact psychethics@cardiff.ac.uk should you wish.

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3. Debrief information

To participants,

Thank you for volunteering to participate in this study. Your participation is greatly appreciated, and I hope that you enjoyed taking part.

The purpose of this study was to understand how you experience day to day implementation of a trauma informed approach in your school. It is hoped that this opportunity to answer questions about your experience has offered a space for reflection on your practice. If the experience has made you feel anxious or worried about anything at all, please do not hesitate to raise any concerns with myself or my project supervisor. Our contact details are at the bottom of this form.

You are reminded that your participatory data will be kept confidential and no names will be associated with any findings within the report. However, if having received more information about this study you no longer wish for your data to be used in this report then you are reminded that you are free to remove your data at any point up until such a time that the audio recordings will be transcribed and anonymised, which will be 3 weeks after the interview. After this date the data will have been analysed and incorporated into the report and will no longer be retrievable. If you wish to remove your data prior to transcription, please let me know using the contact details below. If, having participated in this research and reflected on the events discussed, you are in any way unhappy, you are encouraged to discuss this with the University's ethics committee. You can also contact myself or my supervisor, Dale Bartle, if you have any concerns relating to this research.

If you would like to withdraw your data or have any further questions, please contact myself or my supervisor:

Dale Bartle Professional Tutor,

Doctorate in Educational Psychology,

School of Psychology, Cardiff University, Tower Building, Park Place, Cardiff, CF10 3EU;

email: bartled@cardiff.ac.uk

OR

Researcher: Ellie Collinson

School of Psychology,

Cardiff University, Tower Building,

30 Park Place, Cardiff, CF10 3EU;

email: collinsone@cardiff.ac.uk

If you feel emotionally affected by any of the topics discussed in today's interview, you may also wish to contact the NHS Community Advice Listening Line on 0800 132 737 or text 'help' to 81066. You can also visit their website at www.callhelpline.org.uk

You may also contact the ethics committee if you have any questions or concerns about your participation. Their email address is psychethics@cardiff.ac.uk

The information provided will be held in compliance with GDPR regulations. Cardiff University is the data controller and is committed to respecting and protecting your personal data in accordance with your expectations and Data Protection legislation. The University has a Data Protection Officer who can be contacted at inforequest@cardiff.ac.uk.

Further information about Data Protection, including your rights and details about how to contact the Information Commissioner's Office should you wish to complain, can be found at the following: https://www.cardiff.ac.uk/public-information/policies-and-procedures/data-protection.

The lawful basis for processing this information is public task. This information is being collected by Ellie Collinson. The information on the consent form will be held securely and separately from the research information. Only the researchers will have access to this form and it will be destroyed after 7 years. The research information you provide will be used for the purposes of research only and will be stored securely. Upon study completion, the data will be anonymised (any identifying elements removed) after 3 weeks and this anonymous information may be kept indefinitely, published or made publicly available in accordance with open science practices.

4. Semi structured interview questions

1. *What does the term 'trauma' mean to you?*
2. *Tell me about your experiences implementing a trauma-informed approach? Prompt: why do you think that? Can you tell me more about that?*
3. *Can you tell me about your personal and professional feelings regarding a trauma-informed approach?*

5. Headteacher/ gatekeeper email

Dear [Gatekeeper Name]

My name is Ellie Collinson, and I am currently undertaking a piece of research for my Doctorate in Educational Psychology at the University of Cardiff. The research will involve carrying out interviews with 6-10 members of school staff who are in the process of embedding or have embedded a trauma informed approach, to explore their experiences and perceptions.

I am writing to ask your permission to be allowed access to your school to seek research participants to take part in the interviews. The interviews should take up to one hour and can be conducted at a convenient time and date to be arranged with the staff members.

If you agree I am wondering if it might be possible to speak to staff about the project and will ask if you can send out the participant recruitment information to all staff. All data gathered for the project will be anonymised and kept securely. The results will be reported in a research paper that will be made available to the senior leadership team and participants on completion.

If this is possible, please could you e-mail me at collinsone@cardiff.ac.uk to confirm that you are willing to allow access to the school's staff providing they agree and are happy to take part. Thank you for your time and I hope to hear from you soon.

Kind regards

Ellie Collinson

Trainee Educational Psychologist

Appendix B – Database Search Table

1. Search Results

I used this table to record my search results from a number of different databases.

I conducted the search twice. My first search yielded a lot of papers on Scopus so I revised my search to be more specific and in line with my revised literature review question. I enlisted the help of librarian Jonathon Jones to help me with this. I have included a screenshot of our conversation below. We conducted the search together which helped with the quality assurance process. I have provided a detailed rationale for my cut off date below.

Table 8: Search Results Table.

Search no. (SX)	Search string	Results found in Scopus	Results found in Proquest	Results found in Ovid via medline and APA Psychinfo
1 26.07.24	"Teacher experiences" AND "implementing" OR "appl*" OR "embed*" AND "trauma informed approach" OR "trauma informed practice"	153	120	46
2 04.12.24	"trauma informed" OR "trauma aware" OR "trauma responsive" OR "trauma sensitive AND "school staff" OR "teacher" OR "classroom assistant" OR "headteacher" OR "teaching assistant" AND "experience" OR "perception" OR "attitude" OR "opinion" OR "views" OR "perspective" AND "implementing" OR "appl*" OR "embed"	49	95	45

<mark>(final search)</mark>				
	Database search limits used			
	By date (2017 onwards)	46	92	41

Notes

- Additional exclusion criteria applied to narrow down papers to a reviewable number (see Prisma)
- Very few papers on trauma informed practice prior to 2017 found (10 mentioned trauma-informed practice in the abstract but none of these were explicitly relevant.

Library data base search enlisting the support of expert librarian Jonathon Jones:
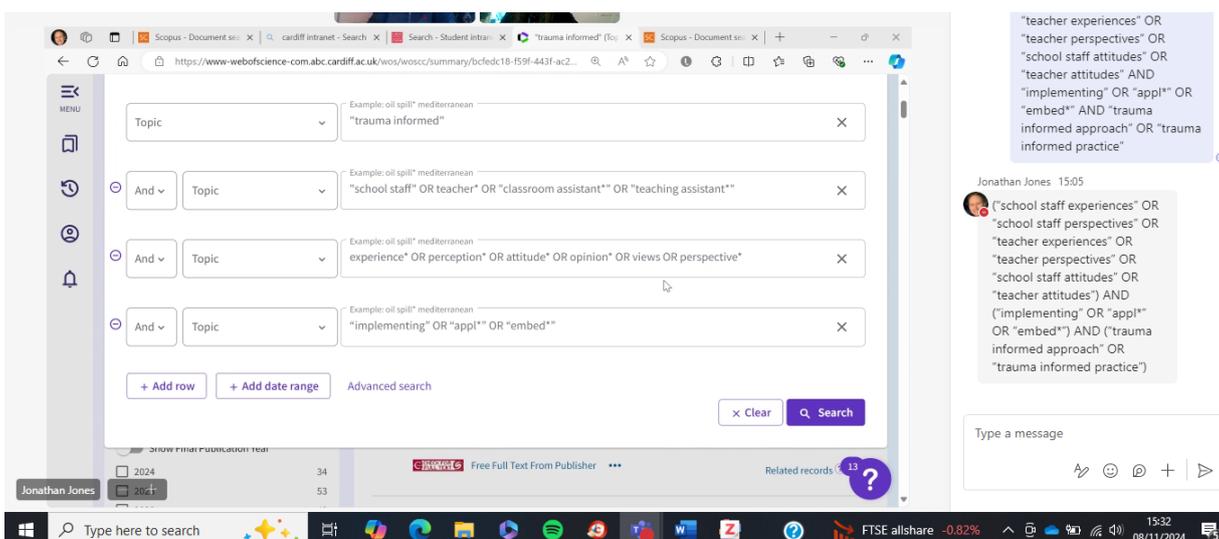
Figure 11: Librarian Support.

2. Rationale for publication cut-off date of 2017

The author has chosen the cut-off date of 2017 to ensure relevance to the contemporary educational and policy landscape in which trauma informed practice has gained traction in the UK. Although the term 'trauma-informed care' was introduced earlier in clinical contexts (Harris & Fallot, 2001), its widespread application to educational practice only began to accelerate in the mid 2010s (Maynard et al., 2019).

By 2017, the terminology of TIP had begun to formally enter educational discourse and training in the UK, particularly in response to growing recognition of the impact of adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) on learning and wellbeing (Department of Health & Department for Education., 2017; National Assembly for Wales Children, Young People and Education Committee., 2018). In England, the department for education and the department for health published the mental health and behaviour in schools guidance in 2017, which explicitly emphasised early intervention, the role of school culture and the role of mental health support within educational settings (Department of Health & Department for Education., 2017). Although not solely focused on trauma, this guidance provided a foundation for schools to adopt holistic, psychologically informed approaches from which trauma informed approaches could take hold.

At a similar time in Wales, the national assembly published the mind over matter report in 2018, following a comprehensive inquiry into the mental health of children and young people. The report called for a "step change" (National Assembly for Wales Children, Young People and Education Committee., 2018, p. 5) in how mental health and resilience were embedded into schools and proposed a whole school approach as a national priority. This positioned trauma informed practice as an essential part of school transformation in the interest of the creation of emotionally safe environments (National Assembly for Wales Children, Young People and Education Committee., 2018). Setting the cut-off to 2017 allows this review to focus on literature that reflects this policy shift within the English and Welsh context, thereby ensuring that included studies are relevant to the environments educators are currently working within.

Appendix C – CASP Critical Appraisal Summary Tables (Qualitative, Mixed Methods, Systematic Reviews)

1. Qualitative Studies (CASP Qualitative Tool)

Table 9: Qualitative Studies.

Study and country carried out in	Clear Aims	Methodology Appropriate	Design Appropriate	Recruitment Strategy	Data Collection	Researcher-Participant Relationship	Ethics Considered	Analysis Rigour	Clear Findings	Research Value
Berger & Samuel (2020) Australia	Yes – focused on school mental health staff needs	Yes – exploratory semi-structured interviews appropriate	Yes – interviews allowed flexibility and depth	Stratified random sampling – some gaps in demographic detail	Rich interviews	Some reflexivity noted	Yes	Partially – some rigour but limited coding detail	Yes	Strong practical implications for training design
Blitz & Mulcahy (2017) USA	Yes – CBPR to inform school climate reform	Yes – important for research to be participatory to initiate systemic change in school culture	Yes	Voluntary participation – engaged staff	Triangulated: surveys, focus groups, observations	Discussed – could deepen	Yes	Partially – analysis process less detailed	Yes	Valuable for CBPR-informed school change

Brunzell et al. (2021) Australia	Yes – teacher wellbeing after TIPE	Yes	Yes – IPA longitudinal appropriate for studying experiences over time	Purposeful sample across two schools with contextual detail ensured relevance but transferability limited.	Interviews, journals over time which aligned with idiographic focus.	Some positionality disclosure	Yes	Yes – clear coding and theme development	Yes	Advances TIPE and teacher wellbeing research
Brunzell et al. (2022) Australia	Yes – TIPE reflection over time	Yes	Yes	Purposeful	Group interviews, reflection logs	Mostly – could expand	Yes	Yes	Yes	Well-developed themes supporting new model
Brown & L'Estrange (2023) Australia	Yes – remote teacher trauma-informed readiness	Yes. A qualitative, reflexive thematic analysis approach was well-suited to explore nuanced perspectives	Yes. The use of online questionnaires and a focus group captured in-depth data aligned with the exploratory aim.	Purposeful and snowball	Online questionnaire + focus group	Acknowledged – limited exploration	Yes	Mostly – coding details brief	Yes	Strong in under-researched remote contexts

		and lived realities.								
Eubanks (2022) USA	Yes – urban trauma-informed middle school	Yes – hermeneutic phenomenology	Yes	Single school convenience sample	Surveys, interviews, artifacts	Partially	Yes	Mostly	Yes	Significant for racial equity and policy change
Ganigan (2021) USA	Yes	Yes – thematic analysis	Yes	Purposive sampling	Semi structured interviews	Reflexivity and positionality discussed	Yes	Clear procedure and thematic analysis explained	Yes – 5 themes	Findings highlighted potential of professional development to promote trauma-sensitive pedagogy but also highlighted the need for systemic support and school-wide alignment to embed these

										practices effectively.
Easterling (2022)

USA | Yes | Yes - IPA | Yes – well structured interviews and relevant document analysis. | Partially. Purposeful sampling was appropriate, but participant demographics could have been more transparently reported. | Yes | Limited. The study could have provided more detail on reflexivity or how the researcher's position may have influenced interpretation. | Yes | Thematic analysis was described, though more transparency about coding and theme development would enhance rigor. | Findings were supported with quotes and thematic organizatio n aligned with the research questions. | Strong. The study provides valuable insights into educator experience with trauma-informed practices, with actionable implications for policy and practice. |
| Hinton Pollard (2020)

USA (California) | The study had a clear and specific aim to explore teachers' perceptions of implementin g trauma- | Yes - IPA | Semi-structured interviews were suitable for capturing in-depth, experiential data. | Purposeful sampling was clearly used, though demographic details (e.g., race) were limited. | Yes | While researcher reflexivity was discussed, more detail on managing power dynamics would improve it. | Yes. IRB approval and informed consent were obtained; ethical safeguards were described. | NVivo-supported analysis and IPA steps were outlined, though further transparency in coding | Yes. Findings were clearly presented with illustrative quotes and | The study offers valuable insight into professional development and systemic barriers to trauma-informed |

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	informed practices after PD.							would enhance rigor.	aligned to themes.	implementation.
Gleaton (2023) USA	Yes. The study clearly aimed to explore the lived experiences of teachers of color implementing TIPs	Yes. A qualitative design is appropriate to explore complex, contextual, and underrepresented perspectives	Yes. A descriptive qualitative design aligned well with the exploratory nature of the study.	Mostly. Purposive sampling was justified, although further demographic transparency (e.g., intersectional identities) would strengthen it.	Yes. Data were gathered through questionnaires and in-depth interviews, with alignment to the COM-B model.	Limited. Reflexivity was addressed, but there was little detail on managing prior relationships	Yes. Ethical procedures including consent and IRB approval were described.	Mostly. Thematic analysis and coding procedures were described, but more detail on codebook development or peer-checking would enhance trustworthiness.	Yes. The findings were clearly presented and supported by participant quotes, organized around the COM-B model.	Strong. This study contributes original insights into the role of racialized identity in TIPs.
Frearson & Duncan (2024) UK	Yes. The study clearly aimed to explore teachers' lived	Yes. Qualitative phenomenology was suitable for exploring nuanced emotional and	Yes. The use of IPA with semi-structured interviews aligned well	yes. Purposive, heterogeneous sampling of six experienced teachers offered diverse	Yes. Interviews were in-depth, contextualised by Covid-related	Mostly. Reflexivity and positionality were discussed, but further exploration of researcher influence during	Yes. Ethical approval and participant protections (e.g., withdrawal	Mostly. IPA procedures and thematic coding were described, but deeper detail	Yes. Themes were clearly presented with	Strong. The study provides timely and highly relevant insights into the

	experiences of working with traumatised students using IPA.	relational dynamics in teaching trauma-affected children.	with the aim of capturing subjective experiences in depth.	perspectives on trauma-informed classroom practice.	challenges, and allowed rich insight into classroom realities.	interviews could improve transparency.	options, mental health signposting) were clearly outlined.	on analytic processes (e.g., memoing, audit trails) would enhance rigour.	supporting quotes, and the narrative built a strong case grounded in data.	professional and emotional demands of teaching trauma-affected pupils, especially post-Covid.
Ellison & Walton-Fisette (2022) USA (mid-west)	Yes. The study clearly aimed to explore PE teachers' knowledge and experiences of trauma and TIPs in school settings.	Yes. A qualitative, interpretivist design was well-suited to exploring individual perceptions and meaning-making.	Yes. Semi-structured interviews and thematic analysis aligned well with the goals of understanding lived experience.	Mostly. Convenience sampling from a university-affiliated PETE network enabled access, though representativeness may be limited.	Yes. Interviews were rich, reflective, and structured to explore all relevant dimensions of TIP implementation.	Partially. The authors acknowledged their relationship with participants (former mentors/supervisors) but could have explored the impact of this more fully.	Yes. IRB approval and consent processes were followed; confidentiality was assured through pseudonyms and secure data handling.	Mostly. Thematic analysis was robust and reflective, but more transparency on coding stages and inter-rater dialogue would improve rigour.	Yes. The findings were clearly structured using a conceptual framework and illustrated with powerful teacher quotes	Strong. This study highlights overlooked perspectives of PE teachers and provides concrete implications for training, policy, and inclusive practice.

Haynes et al (2023) USA	Yes. The study aimed to explore how PD influenced educator awareness and interactions with racially marginalized students.	Yes. A qualitative design was suitable for exploring educator perspectives in a reflective, relational context.	Yes. The use of interviews, case reflections, and journals was appropriate and aligned with the study's exploratory aims.	Mostly. Purposive sampling allowed for diverse participant demographics, but the small sample size limits generalisability.	Yes. Rich, multi-source data were collected through interviews, journal entries, and reflective activities across the PD series.	Mostly. Positionality statements were provided and reflexivity was discussed, enhancing transparency.	Yes. Ethical procedures, including consent and confidentiality, were clearly described.	Mostly. Thematic analysis was well-described, though additional detail and transparency on process might be needed	Yes. Themes were clearly articulated and supported by illustrative quotes.	Strong. The study offers original insight into culturally responsive, trauma-informed professional learning and has practical implications for equity and policy reform.
Southall et al., 2023 Australia (Victoria)	Yes. The study aimed to explore how structured reflection supports trauma-informed practice, clearly aligned to the	Yes. A qualitative design was appropriate for examining lived experiences and emotional meaning-making among teachers.	Yes. Critical reflection through RCEM allowed detailed exploration of beliefs, emotions, and practice transformation.	Mostly. Purposeful sampling allowed diverse experience, though transferability was limited by small sample size.	Yes. Data from multiple sources (journals, interviews, circles) offered rich triangulated evidence of teacher experience.	Mostly. Researcher positionality and facilitation roles were acknowledged, but more reflexive detail could enhance transparency.	Yes. Ethical approval, consent, and confidentiality were all clearly described and appropriately managed.	Yes. Thematic analysis was detailed, multi-staged, and collaborative across coders, enhancing analytic credibility.	Yes. Findings were clearly presented with extensive supporting data and participant voice.	Strong. The study fills a key gap by operationalising teacher support in trauma-informed practice and offers an adaptable

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	methodology.									reflective model.
Luthar & Mendes (2020)\n\nUSA	Yes. The article clearly aimed to understand what educators in trauma-informed schools need to sustain their own wellbeing and manage compassion fatigue	Yes. A qualitative approach was appropriate for capturing subjective experiences and professional reflections.	Mostly. The exploratory design was suitable, though data collection via open-ended social media prompts may have limited depth and consistency.	Limited. Participants self-selected via social media, raising concerns about sample representativeness and response bias.	Yes. The prompt effectively gathered reflective narratives related to teacher stress and support needs.	Partially. Researcher positionality was acknowledged, but little detail was given on reflexive engagement or interaction with participants.	Yes. Ethical considerations were addressed, including informed consent and data anonymisation.	Partially. Thematic interpretation was clear, but formal coding or methodological detail on how themes were developed was limited.	Yes. Themes were explicitly discussed and grounded in direct participant quotes.	Strong. The study highlights a neglected dimension of trauma-informed practice

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2. Mixed Methods Studies (CASP Mixed Methods Tool)

Table 10: Mixed Methods Studies.

Study	Clear Aims	Appropriate Methodology	Justified MM Design	Integration of Methods	Addressed Research Qs	Data Collection	Researcher-Participant Relationship	Ethical Issues	Data Analysis	Clear Findings	Research Value	Limitations Acknowledged
Kim et al. (2021) Canada	Yes – impact of trauma training and MindUP	Yes	Yes	Partially – separate then merged	Yes – attitudes and burnout explored	Strong – multiple tools across years	Limited detail	Yes	Mostly – coding described	Yes – quantitative and qualitative	High – teacher wellbeing focus	Yes – acknowledged bias
Mullin et al. (2023) USA	Yes – COVID-era TIP barriers and motivators	Yes	Yes – convergent	Yes – joint interpretation	Yes – barriers and supports identified	Strong – large N + rich quotes	Limited reflexivity	Yes	Quantitative and thematic clarity	Yes	High – directly policy-relevant	Yes – transparent on limits

3. Systematic Review Studies (CASP Systematic Reviews Tool)

Table 11: Systematic Review Studies.

Study	Clear Question	Right Type of Papers	Relevant Studies Included	Quality Assessed	Synthesis Appropriate	Overall Results	Precision	Local Applicability	Outcomes Considered	Practice Change?
Cohen & Barron (2021) USA	Yes – high schools TIP	Yes	Partially – US-only focus	Yes – EPPI applied	Narrative only due to heterogeneity	Mixed – staff gains, weak evidence	Low precision	Context-limited	Yes – staff/student	Limited – more trials needed
Oberg et al. (2023) Australia	Yes – burnout, TIP impact	Partially – grey lit heavy	No – limited empirical basis	No formal tool	Narrative summary	Suggestive – training protects	Low precision	Mainly Australian context	Yes – wellbeing focus	Tentative – further data needed

Appendix D – Depicting combined analysis of RTA and CTA

The analysis followed Braun and Clarke's (2022) six-phase model of thematic analysis, with adaptations to incorporate open and closed coding strategies drawn from critical thematic analysis (Lawless & Chen, 2019). The table below outlines each step of the process:

Table 12: Combined Procedure.

RTA Phase	How it was combined with CTA
1. Familiarisation with the data	Interviews were transcribed verbatim and read multiple times to support immersion. Memos were made to capture initial impressions.
2. Generating initial codes	Both open and closed coding were used during this stage. Open coding allowed data-driven codes to emerge freely; closed coding involved identifying discourse aligned with power, ideology, and policy.
3. Constructing themes	Codes were grouped into potential themes based on patterns of recurrence, repetition, and forcefulness. Attention was paid to how discourse reflected dominant or contested narratives.
4. Reviewing potential themes	Themes were checked against the full data set for coherence and distinctiveness. Extracts were revisited to ensure internal consistency.
5. Defining and naming themes	Themes were clearly defined and refined to capture their scope and relevance to the research questions. Subthemes were created where appropriate.
6. Producing the report	Narrative write-up included rich examples from the data. Analysis reflected both the semantic content and underlying sociopolitical context.

Example of Lawless & Chen's (2019) critical thematic analysis procedure:

Table 13: Critical Thematic Analysis Procedure

Coding tool	Example quotes	Researcher's interpretation

| Recurrence (meaning repeated) | Participant 2: "There is a time and a place for a firm, authoritative approach. For instance, if they're about to stick their finger in a socket, or if they're punching lumps out of each other, I'm not averse to raising a voice. Ya know?"

Participant 8: "For the older generation, a punitive system is what they know and have learned. And it can be quite authoritarian and it can be quite, I'm in control, you need to listen to me."

Participant 1: "I think particularly for teachers who have strong disciplinarian attitudes or really struggle with behaviour, that's really scary to be told that you deal with things in house. There is not a clear system of consequences. They default to, how do I deal with this? What's the procedure?"

Participant 9; 'I think the biggest challenge is bringing about a change of culture in school. Some still believe that behaviour must be addressed. Poor behaviour should not go unpunished. But that is quite punitive.' | Participant quotes are indicative of some resistance to change due to the entrenchment of punitive mindsets that value authoritarianism. This could come from deep seated epistemic needs for control and familiarity or could be the influence of neoliberal educational culture.

Also the recurring tendency, for those in a position of power, to talk about the punitive attitudes of others rather than themselves, may reflect a tendency to distance themselves from problematic beliefs or practices that contradict the values of trauma-informed care. Not taking responsibility for their own beliefs might be a way to maintain their superiority by 'othering' the staff below them. This can impact on trust within the system. |
| Forcefulness (Importance that participants assign to their own language e.g. | Participant 1: 'It is **dangerous** if we don't get the balance of relational and authoritative right.'

Participant 8: 'There has got to be a **balance**. If we went trauma-informed school **_all in_**, we | Participants emphasized the words in bold to communicate their deep seated views that pupils, especially in a secondary school context, need boundaries, consequence and consistency. Acknowledgement that trauma affected children need to feel a |

tone, volume, inflection).	would never positively handle. And there are times and places for that to still be needed.' Participant 2: "I think also if teachers don't have clear standards, so if teachers think a trauma-informed approach is just kind of giving the kids an easy ride, then you end up with children who just take the mick and actually it…. it's almost detrimental to whatever trauma they've had, because actually it's inconsistent and that inconsistency makes kids feel unsafe…. Which in a secondary school I think is a massive, massive issue because they might see they might see 6… yes 6 teachers a day. Yeah and you know, that's before they've seen break time, lunchtime and after school staff. **Consistency** is so important'	sense of safety and consistency is in line with psychological research (see analysis). However, these views could be seen to be indicative of a reluctance to adopt more progressive views that are more compatible with the ethos of trauma informed care. This contradiction in terms of punitive beliefs and trauma informed behaviour can be explained by psychological theory (see discussion) and the influence of conservative ideologies which are laden in education policy regarding how behaviour should be managed in secondary schools (DfE, 2021, 2024).
Repetition (specific reappearance of key words and phrases)	Participant 3: "*Relationships* are so important." Participant 4: 'The *relationship* is the core of everything.' Participant 9: "We use the phrase connection before correction when repairing *relationships*." Participant 5: "The best thing you can do is build *relationships* and repair them as well once they've broken using restorative conversations." Participant 6: "Doesn't matter how many letters you have after your name or how much	The word 'relationship' appeared 22 times across participant transcripts. This repetition signals a shared belief system that relational connection is foundational to trauma-informed work and that most professionals, regardless of level of training, deeply value authenticity and connection. The repetition of valuing 'relationships' could also be seen as a discursive challenge to neoliberal logics that emphasise performance and control. This might also suggest a redistribution of power from institutional authority to relational attunement.

	you know about your subject. They couldn't care less our kids, but what really does matter is the quality of the *relationships* and you've either got it, that ability to connect… or you don't."	

Appendix E – Process of data analysis using NVIVO software

The below depicts the process of establishing 132 codes reflexively and generating themes.

1. Codes

The coding process supported by NVIVO software. Please see table below depicting the number of occurrences across participant transcripts for all codes. The codes are ordered by number of occurrences, which helped me start to think about likely themes.

Code ID	Code Name	No. of Occurrences
1	Importance of balance of relational approach with boundaries	30
2	The importance of student teacher relationships	22
3	Teachers being retraumatised and triggered	19
4	Punitive way of thinking as entrenched in some members of staff is a challenge for leadership	16
5	Staff wellbeing	13
6	Subjective nature of trauma	13
7	Empathy is born from experience	12
8	Trauma informed approach with parents	12
9	A trauma informed approach can be mistaken for a soft approach	10
10	Importance that leadership trust staff intentions	10
11	Proactive vs reactive responses	9

12	Perception of main role of implementing TIA belongs to pastoral leads	8
13	TA challenge of encouraging students to open up	8
14	The power of a common language	8
15	Trauma informed practice should prepare pupils for the future	8
16	Engaging parents	7
17	Importance of reflecting on effectiveness of approaches being used	7
18	Predictable and structured lessons as a trauma informed approach	7
19	Recognising student triggers	7
20	Tensions in sharing information about student trauma whilst honouring confidentiality	7
21	Appreciating the nuance between right and wrong	6
22	Causes of behaviour situational and environmental rather than deficit focused	6
23	Importance of getting to know the whole child	6
24	Importance of getting to know the whole child authentically	6
25	Importance of trauma informed supervision	6
26	Normalising difficult emotions and developing resilience as part of a trauma informed approach	6
27	Perception of trauma informed practice that it should link in with curriculum for Wales	6

28	Recognising behaviour as communication	6
29	Rupture and repair	6
30	Staff burning out	6
31	Amount of transition and change in the structure of a secondary school day as a barrier to TIP	5
32	Appreciating longevity of trauma	5
33	Challenge of ensuring whole school culture shift	5
34	Challenge of reframing staff thinking when attitudes and values are entrenched	5
35	Importance of a joined up approach to achieve consistency with external agencies	5
36	Importance of authentic praise	5
37	Importance of leadership team endorsing trauma informed approaches	5
38	Open door policy	5
39	Restorative conversations as a trauma informed approach	5
40	The nuance in relationship building is hard to teach	5
41	Trauma informed practice can leave teachers vulnerable to judgement	5
42	Trauma informed training costs time and money	5
43	Giving students autonomy	4
44	Importance of knowing all the trauma information on a child	4

45	Need to break the cycle of generational trauma	4
46	PACE as a trauma informed approach	4
47	Positive experience of TIS training	4
48	Priorities of education changed since covid	4
49	Resilience building as part of a trauma informed approach	4
50	Restorative conversations effective	4
51	Sanctions and shouting causes fear	4
52	Time consuming nature of restorative conversations	4
53	Trauma informed approaches are not a short term fix like more reactive approaches	4
54	Trauma informed approaches create safe environments	4
55	Wellbeing as first priority in secondary schools	4
56	A trauma informed school as having no sense of hierarchy	3
57	Addressing behaviour privately	3
58	Different personalities and trauma informed approaches	3
59	Fear of the unknown during change	3
60	Higher need for trauma informed approaches since covid	3
61	Importance of a person centered approach in TIP	3

62	Importance of bespoke learning pathways as important for TIP	3
63	Importance of trauma informed approaches for helping students feel ready to learn	3
64	Leadership style of practicing what you preach	3
65	Newer staff being more on board with trauma informed approaches than older staff	3
66	Not taking things personally is important	3
67	Perception that behaviour has changed or got worse	3
68	Teacher desire for a system to follow when reacting to behaviour	3
69	The power of the adult apology	3
70	Trauma informed approach from leaderships to students AND staff in the form of support	3
71	Trauma informed approaches as in line with attitudes and values	3
72	Use of trauma informed approaches easier outside the class	3
73	Younger teachers buy in more to TIP than older teachers	3
74	Acknowledgement that school itself can be traumatic	2
75	Ambiguity of a trauma informed approach and staff unsure if they are getting it 'right'	2
76	Assumptions about what makes a good teacher	2

77	Emphasis on outdoor education and biophilia	2
78	Every interaction is an intervention	2
79	Flexible system constraints	2
80	Helping students regulate and understand their emotions	2
81	Huge amount of change in a secondary school which poses a challenge to consistency	2
82	Importance of offering children multiple ways to communicate and express their traumas	2
83	Importance of providing experiences	2
84	Lack of time to really get to know the children authentically	2
85	Leadership use data to improve trauma informed approaches	2
86	Perspective taking	2
87	Recognising lesson content can be triggering	2
88	Recognising marginalisation and racism as trauma	2
89	Recognising that some emotions are proportional and normal in reaction to an event	2
90	Rising number of additional needs in mainstream schools is a challenge for trauma informed	2
91	Tension around ambiguity of the limits of trauma informed practice and what is within the expectations of the role	2

92	Therapy dogs as a trauma informed approach	2
93	Trauma informed approach to staff	2
94	Trauma informed practice is a journey	2
95	Ambiguity of a trauma informed approach	1
96	Attitude that there is still a time and a place for authoritative stance within TIP	1
97	Challenge for leadership of simultaneously showing support for both teacher and student when mediating	1
98	Challenge of what behaviour is communicating	1
99	Challenging assumptions	1
100	Difficulty defining trauma	1
101	Empathy goes both ways in trauma informed practice	1
102	Encouraging forgiveness and redeemability	1
103	Ensuring labels not used as excuses	1
104	Ensuring there is an acknowledgement of what the child is bringing to the problem	1
105	Every day is a blank slate	1
106	Expecting a consequence or an apology as a sense of entitlement	1
107	Helping students embrace failure safely	1

108	Importance of being open minded and learning from the new generation	1
109	Importance of taking ownership and following up with students	1
110	Importance of the child feeling motivated in school	1
111	Individuals assign different meanings to principles underpinning trauma informed practice	1
112	Leadership view that every member of staff should be trained	1
113	Modelling empathy	1
114	More competing pressures as time goes on	1
115	Need for leadership staff and teaching staff to appreciate and respect competing priorities and pressures	1
116	Not holding children to the same standards as adults	1
117	Offering space to regulate	1
118	Power of reputation	1
119	Reduced timetable as a trauma informed approach	1
120	Staff and student wellbeing linked	1
121	Targeted trauma informed interventions for non-teaching staff	1
122	Teachers understand that trauma can impact students at any time	1
123	The power of silence over shouting	1

124	TIP has reduced exclusions	1
125	TIP to encourage attendance	1
126	Trauma as synonymous with ACES	1
127	Trauma as the impact of a traumatic event	1
128	Trauma informed approaches are not 'soft'	1
129	Trauma informed approaches feel overwhelming with high numbers of students	1
130	Trauma informed approaches increase workload	1
131	Trauma informed practice reduced positive handling	1
132	Undoing the problem of special schools pretending to be a comprehensive	1

2. Theme generation

In line with Braun & Clarke's Reflexive thematic analysis (2013, 2022, 2024) and Lawless & Chen's critical thematic analysis, a process of open coding and theme generation took place, of which a snapshot is provided below. Code ID has been provided so that codes can be cross checked with the number of occurrences in the table above. Codes were colour coded for similarity. Codes were grouped and different subthemes were considered for each core theme.

Subjective nature of trauma – Green

Entrenched punitive mindsets – Red

Ambiguity of relational practice – Blue

Echoes of trauma – Purple

Code ID	Code Name	Reflection	Theme Generation Notes
C74	Acknowledgement that school itself can be traumatic	Noticed feeling admiration for the high-quality skills and knowledge my participants had about TIP.	Everything is subjective.
C100	Difficulty defining trauma	Noticed participant difficulty in answering this question. This could mean different things including; 1. Not being sure how to define trauma, 2. Recognising that trauma can mean many different things, 3. Evidence of open mindedness that anything could be constructed as a trauma depending on the person's experience.	Recognition of subjective nature of trauma.
C9	A trauma-informed approach can be mistaken for a soft approach	Acknowledgement of attitudes toward relational practice. This will inform action. Noticing some relating to this from my own experience. I remember colleagues talking about this. Does this mean they have not yet had enough	Possibly related to punitive mindsets.

		training on trauma informed practice?	
C104	Ensuring there is an acknowledgement of what the child is bringing to the problem	Noticed this might be a deficit based attitude. May or may not reflect wider attitudes within the system. Is this indicative of an authoritative mindset?	Deficit based mindsets.
C75	Ambiguity of a trauma informed approach and staff unsure if they are getting it 'right'	The challenge of TIP Relating to this as a previous leader in role as a trauma informed teacher.	Need for assurance (possible subtheme?)
C16	Engaging parents	Thinking about relationships at the level of the microsystem.	Relationships with all members of the system.
C30	Staff burning out	Noticed my feelings of compassion for staff who were so well intentioned and relational in their values but felt overworked and underappreciated.	Staff feeling traumatised and triggered themselves.
C129	Trauma informed approaches feel overwhelming with high numbers of students	I related to this feeling that having high quality relationships with every student in a secondary school is difficult; the average teacher will teach 150 students per week in a secondary school. I	Staff feeling overwhelmed.

		thought about how difficult it would be to stay on top of interventions, and manage restorative conversations.	

3. Screenshots of the process

Screenshot one shows how the coding process started to come together. It was helpful to use visual charts to look at common codes and how they might come together to generate themes.
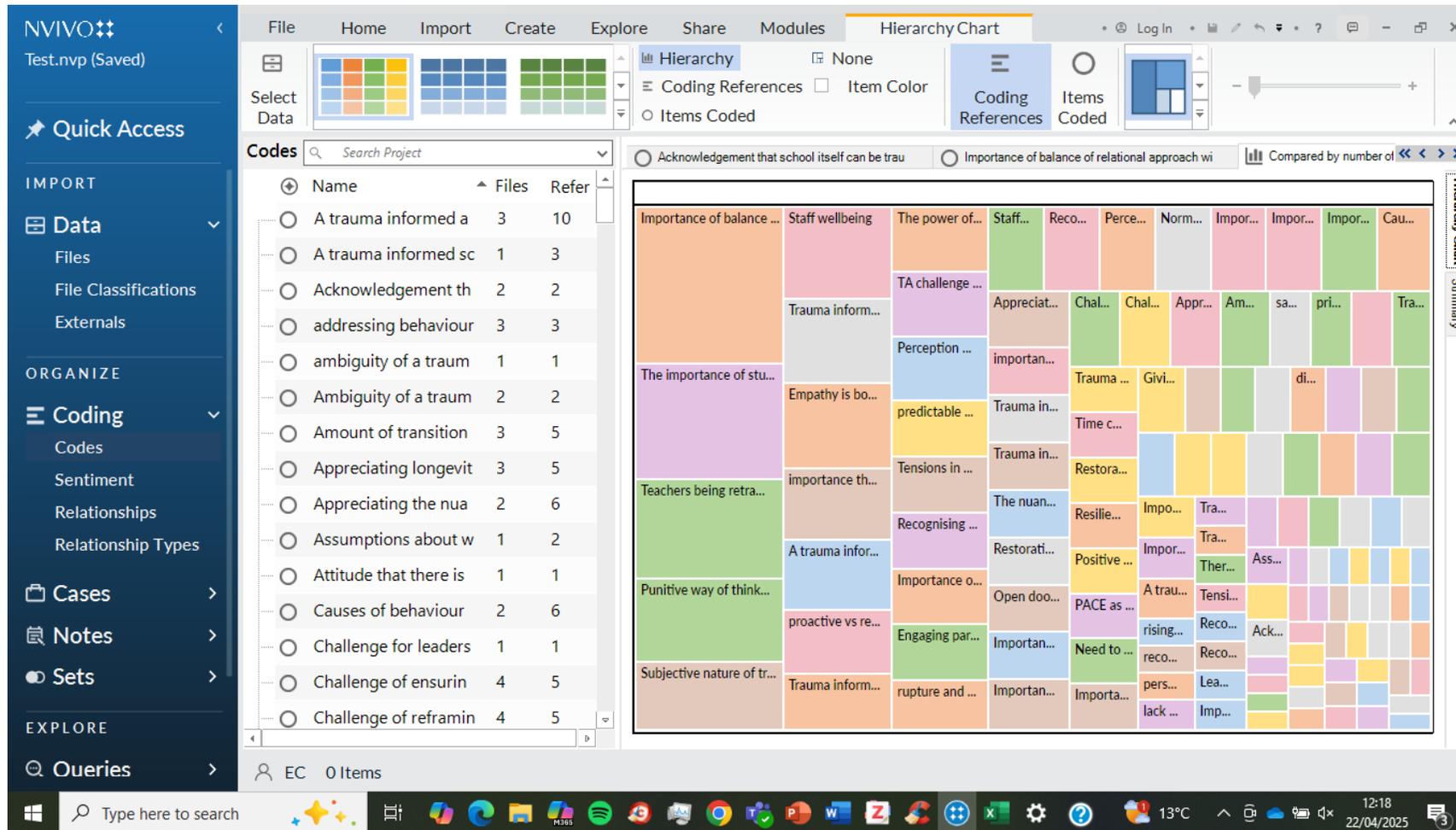

Figure 12: Screenshot one - Code Occurrences.

Screenshot two shows the process of highlighting text and generating latent codes from participant transcripts.
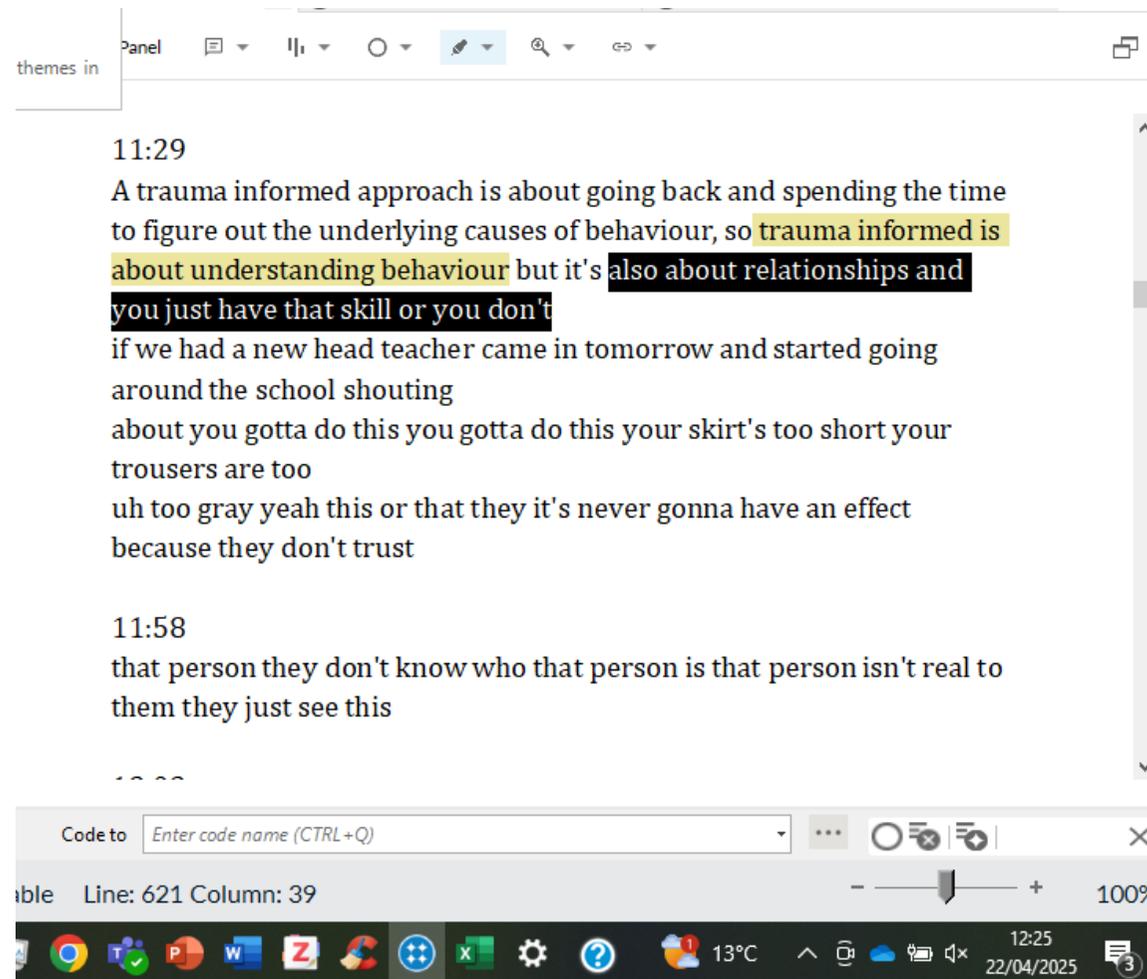

Figure 13: Screenshot two - Code Generation.

Appendix F – Illustrative quotes for themes (and subthemes)

Text ID	Theme/ subtheme	Participant	Text
1.1	1 - Recognising the subjective nature of trauma	P4	"Trauma can be generational, it could be an event that's happened, it could be… um something that happens when they were babies in the womb um so yeah, I do think it does present differently and yeah… it's a really broad term trauma."
1.2	1 - Recognising the subjective nature of trauma	P8	"Trauma can manifest itself in many different ways. For example, for some people, birth is a magical event. For me, witnessing birth was absolutely horrendous, horrific in fact."
1.3	1 - Recognising the subjective nature of trauma	P5	"It is possible that children can hold onto trauma that was linked to what happened when they were in the womb. There's a lot of research into adopted children and you don't know their backgrounds, but it is thought it could be linked to that, linked to stuff that happened in the womb."
2.1	2 - Entrenched punitive mindsets under subtheme 'the elusive balance'	P2	"There is a time and a place for a firm, authoritative approach. For instance, if they're about to stick their finger in our socket, or if they're punching lumps out of each other, I'm not averse to raising a voice. Ya know?"
2.2	2 - Entrenched punitive mindsets under subtheme 'authoritarian assurance'	P6	"A minority of teachers will go straight to... well what's the consequence? I just have to sort of challenge the perception still that a punitive approach will make them all into model citizens, whereas for our students who have been excluded... A punitive approach has been used and it has failed time and time again, so why would we do it the same? That school that school that school and that school has failed this

			particular boy so we need to think about education in a whole different way."
2.3	2 - Entrenched punitive mindsets under subtheme 'authoritarian assurance	P10	"A lot of my staff ask, well what do I do when things go wrong? Well that approach it's really reactive and that's what historically… teachers have always been used to so when you try to get them to be proactive with relationship building and having systems in place for restorative conversations they're like I don't have time for all that…. But that's the reality. You're going to have people that are new to the game. But I get it… They've got 10 different classes to get to know very quickly. They've got to get on with it and they want the back up of a system to follow when things go wrong."
2.4	2 - Entrenched punitive mindsets under subtheme 'authoritarian assurance'	P1	"I think particularly for teachers who have strong disciplinarian attitudes or really struggle with behaviour, that's really scary to be told that you deal with things in house. There is not a clear system of consequences. They default to, how do I deal with this? What's the procedure?"
2.5	2 - Entrenched punitive mindsets under subtheme 'authoritarian assurance'	P2	"Some teachers want to know things like… what happens if they come in a hoodie? Well… we do this, we do this, and this… right? These are the things that we do, this is what we follow."
2.6	2 - Entrenched punitive mindsets under subtheme 'authoritarian assurance'	P8	"For the older generation, a punitive system is what they know and have learned. And it can be quite authoritarian and it can be quite, I'm in control, you need to listen to me."
2.7	2 - Entrenched punitive mindsets under subtheme	P3	"Newer staff are buying into us straight away."

	'authoritarian assurance'		
2.8	2 - Entrenched punitive mindsets under subtheme 'authoritarian assurance'	P5	"I think it is particularly important that the older generation of teachers need to do the training."
2.9	2 - Entrenched punitive mindsets under subtheme 'Dissonant approaches'	P6	"What do the students need? Well they need to be able to be um sort of constructive people in society."
2.10	2 - Entrenched punitive mindsets under subtheme 'Dissonant approaches'	P10	"What are we trying to do in school? We're trying to prepare them for life. Unfortunately, the vast majority of jobs and life outside of school is not trauma-informed. it's also preparing those for a world where there's going to be inconsistency…. And they need to tow the line and they need to understand that I have to do this because I'm told to do this. But also to help them understand that not everybody's going to be treating them the same way…. Someone might have had a bad day… so won't be able to have the perfect reaction to their behaviour… They need to understand that the world doesn't revolve around me and that some people may respond differently to me."
3.1	3 - The ambiguity of relational practice, subtheme: The centrality of relationships	P2	"Not everybody sees the importance in good relationships."

3.2	3 - The ambiguity of relational practice, subtheme: The centrality of relationships	P10	"It helps the relationship with children when you really relate to their experiences on a personal level."
3.3	3 - The ambiguity of relational practice, subtheme: The centrality of relationships	P5	"The best thing you can do is build relationships and repair them as well once they've broken using restorative conversations."
3.4	3 - The ambiguity of relational practice, subtheme: The centrality of relationships	P9	"We use the phrase connection before correction when repairing relationships."
3.5	3 - The ambiguity of relational practice, subtheme: The centrality of relationships	P3	"Relationships are so important."
3.6	3 - The ambiguity of relational practice, subtheme: Navigating	P6	"Doesn't matter how many letters you have after your name or how much you know about your subject. They couldn't care less our kids, but what really does matter is the quality of the *relationships* and you've either got it, that ability to connect… or you don't."

	nuance and subtle dynamics		
3.7	3 - The ambiguity of relational practice, subtheme: Navigating nuance and subtle dynamics	P4	"Relationship building is a very difficult skill to teach."
3.71	3 - The ambiguity of relational practice, subtheme: Navigating nuance and subtle dynamics	P1	"an adult saying sorry to a young person is one of the most powerful things"
3.8	3 - The ambiguity of relational practice, subtheme: The pillars of trust	P5	"Staff work hard and it doesn't matter to me whether they take a day out and take the wife or the husband to the mumbles for lunch because I know that the classroom work is good."
3.9	3 - The ambiguity of relational practice, subtheme: The pillars of trust	P7	"So politicians are always holding me to account and you to account. And the health service to account. But, you know, I'm a parent, who holds parents to account? We need to be taking a trauma informed approach with parents too and teach them how to be trauma informed with their kids."
3.10	3 - The ambiguity of relational practice,	P2	"We are really well supported by SLT, really well supported, you know."

	subtheme: The pillars of trust		
4.1	4 - The Echoes of Trauma	P1	"Sometimes teachers just don't have it in their tank to give. It is important to take a step back sometimes."
4.2	4 - The Echoes of Trauma	P2	"It feels like trying to be emotionally available inside a pressure cooker about to explode. It is difficult for other's who don't teach to imagine. We need to show up for ourselves before we can show up for the children."
4.3	4 - The Echoes of Trauma	P6	"There's a lot of laughter amongst the staff here and you do find that in schools where the job is really hard, isn't it? Helps us to deal with the overwhelm."
4.4	4 - The Echoes of Trauma	P8	"To be emotionally available adults for the children we need to look after ourselves first. Um yeah and I think it's really important we look after ourselves."
4.5	4 - The Echoes of Trauma	P5	"We have 'well-being Wednesdays' here, like the school as a whole is very aware of trauma for staff and we're lucky we've got an on-site psychologist therapist and we have access to speaking to her at any time."
4.6	4 - The Echoes of Trauma	P9	"You wouldn't believe as well, the amount of staff who go through trauma and aces. They have triggers and so we have to be aware of how we help them to become aware of these triggers."
4.7	4 - The Echoes of Trauma	P3	"Reflecting on your own traumas is really important for you to fully understand the impact of trauma on your stress response."

4.8	4 - The Echoes of Trauma	P6	"Having a trauma informed school culture can be as therapeutic for the staff as it is for the kids."