

“It Ripples Down”: Exploring personal and professional experiences of primary school staff  
implementing a trauma informed approach

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## Summary

This doctoral thesis comprises three chapters: literature review, empirical chapter and reflective account. To begin, the literature review explores relevant themes, theory and conceptualisations in relation to behaviourist and relational approaches in schools, alluding to their theoretical underpinnings, and subsequent impact on childhood outcomes.

Furthermore, literature around relationships, and the impact of trauma on children and young people within the context of schools as well as enablers and barriers to implementation of whole school approaches relevant to this area will be explored.

Secondly, the empirical paper offers an exploratory qualitative study in which professional and personal experiences of a range of staff with different roles in primary schools, that have embedded a trauma informed approach, were gathered. The research employed semi-structured interviews with an aim of supporting schools to explore whole school change of a relational nature and considerations to support systemic implementation.

Following analysis, professional practice and future research directions are discussed.

Lastly, the reflective chapter offers a reflective account of the researcher's journey through the process of designing, carrying out, analysis and interpretation of the project. The researcher's experiences, personal and professional development along the journey will be shared, as well as reflections on the study's implications for professional practice and appropriate dissemination of findings.

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## Literature Review

### Introduction

An ongoing concern in education is disruptive behaviour in UK schools, which is suggested to be the reason for increasing levels of fixed term and permanent exclusions (DfE, 2023). Disruptive behaviour can trigger stress for teachers and effect pupil outcomes (Little & Maunder, 2021). However, the DfE, have continued to advocate for an approach that takes a harder stance, promoting an ethos of order and discipline prominently based on behaviourist principles. In contrast there are also calls for education to focus on supporting the emotional wellbeing of children in school (HM Government, 2021; Department of Health and Department of Education, 2018) and a rising awareness of the influence that quality relationships between staff and students has on social emotional wellbeing and attainment (Marzano, 2003). Relational approaches that draw on ideas from the humanistic movement, are gaining traction in education abroad and in the UK. When considering whole school relational approaches, a key area of interest is the recognition of the impact of trauma on the body, mind, brain and behaviour of children (Porges, 2011; Bomber, 2020; Treisman, 2017; Perry, 2009; Van De Kolk, 2014), which has driven a need for systems across health and education to become 'trauma informed' (Maynard et al., 2019). The purpose of implementing a trauma informed approach across a whole school is to support staff in understanding the effects of trauma, highlight the need for consistent safe trusting relationships and feel able to support all children and young people's wellbeing (Morgan et al., 2014; Berger & Martin, 2021).

The aim of this literature review is to offer an overview and critical analysis of literature in relation to behaviourist and relational approaches in schools, alluding to their theoretical underpinnings, and subsequent impact on childhood outcomes. Furthermore, to consider the literature around relationships, and the impact of trauma on children and



young people within the context of schools and finally, the enablers and barriers to implementation of whole school approaches relevant to this area.

A decision was made to undertake a narrative literature review rather than a systematic literature review, as the former was more appropriate for this research study. Systemic literature reviews (Gough et al., 2012) summarise research evidence specifically to address a clearly defined research question. This is done in a transparent way that can be replicated by other researchers and aims to offer practice recommendations and highlight gaps in knowledge. The purpose of the current literature review is to organise, discuss and analyse critically existing literature, research studies and relevant psychological theories, focusing on themes that are considered arguably relevant and important, to gain an understanding of some of the key debates within the topic area and explore a rationale for the proposed research study (Onwuegbuzie & Frels, 2016).

Electronic databases, powered by EBSOC Host, accessed through the University of East Anglia, and PsychInfo, Science Direct, ERIC, EPIP and Google Scholar were used as an initial point of access to the literature. Search terms included “behaviour management” or “behaviouris\*” or “discipline” AND “schools” or “whole school approaches” AND “trauma” or “trauma informed practice” or “adverse childhood experiences” AND “perceptions” or “experiences” or “attitudes” AND “staff” or “teachers” AND “Values” AND “schools”.

References of relevant literature were also carried out to find further relevant studies. Searches were from the year 2000 to ensure up to date information was used to give a reasonably current picture. Some underlying psychology and studies pre-dating this have been included based on relevance and importance in the field. These searches were carried out between November 2021 and January 2023. The literature was also expanded to include journal articles and books considered significant. Furthermore, current and

historical relevant legislation, guidance, policy, practice documents and government reports were added to the literature review.

## **Terminology**

Presently there are variations in terms used in the literature in relation to trauma informed care, programmes and interventions, such as (trauma informed practices, attachment sensitive schools, trauma-informed pedagogy, trauma sensitive schools) (Berger & Martin, 2020). Trauma specific interventions are different from trauma informed care, what is key to a trauma informed approach has not been clearly established (Maynard et al., 2019) and is also referred to in varying ways (trauma responsive, trauma sensitive, trauma informed systems) (Hanson & Lang, 2016 cited in Maynard et al., 2019). This has made it challenging to make comparisons and evaluate outcomes (Berger & Martin, 2020; Maynard et al., 2019). For the purposes of this research the term “trauma informed approach” will be adopted, encompassing a whole school approach that is applied at a system rather than an individual intervention or small group intervention level. Wilkinson (2018) claim a trauma informed approach offers a common set of values, knowledge and language applied across a whole school and written into their policies.

## **A Behaviourist Approach**

*“Our message to teachers is clear – don’t be afraid to get tough on bad behaviour and use these punishments.....These guidelines give teachers the confidence to be tougher on bad behaviour and ensure every child has the chance to learn in a controlled, orderly environment.”* (Michael Gove, Secretary of State for Education, quoted by Williams, 2018, p15)

In 2010, Michael Gove as the Minister for Education, instigated a focus on attendance and behaviour in schools and issued guidance to headteachers and staff which gave them increased powers to tackle ‘bad behaviour’. For example, he reduced the

threshold for absence; gave teachers 'reasonable force' and extended their powers to search and implement school-based community service. Poor pupil behaviour was to be addressed using tactics such as taking away pupil privileges and writing lines (Williams, 2018).

The UK Government continues to advocate for the principles of discipline to manage pupil behaviour. The Department of Education (DfE) guidance document for headteachers and school staff on developing school behaviour policies (DfE, 2020), refer to discipline, teachers' powers, punishing poor behaviour, and sanctions such as detentions, seclusion, and isolation rooms as ways to promote good behaviour, self-discipline and respect. The DfE has also recently funded a 'Behaviour Hubs programme' (DfE, 2021). This is a 'schools mentoring initiative' pairing up multi-academy trusts (MATs) that have 'exemplary behaviour practices' with schools or MATs who need and wish to improve behaviour. It has a strong focus on discipline. Tom Bennett carried out an independent review on behaviour in schools in the UK. As part of the evidence for the Bennett Review (2017) the DfE commissioned ASK Research (Government social research specialists) to undertake qualitative research into behaviour practices in schools (DfE, 2017). They carried out semi-structured telephone interviews with SLT members from across 20 mixed rural and urban schools rated as 'outstanding'. A commonality found was that the overall approach used involved a balance between positive reinforcement with approaches for poor behaviour that were definitively communicated. The findings are to be viewed with caution though, due to the focus being only on schools rated as 'outstanding' and that a top-down view was collected not one gathered across whole schools (DfE, 2017). The Bennett Review postulated the value of consistent, clear rules to offer a productive learning environment in schools, specifically in relation to headteachers creating an ethos of order and discipline. It was suggested that leaders in schools have a responsibility to expect positive behaviour from students and that 'outward' presenting

behaviours are more obvious to address than internal mental states (Bennett, 2017). This advocates an approach that seeks to focus predominantly with the behaviour in isolation and not what may be underlying it or how relationships can impact upon it.

Within UK schools, behaviour management, for many years, has widely followed a system of sanctions and rewards to improve attainment and encourage pro-social behaviour (Parker et al., 2016; Payne, 2015). This system is identifiable as behaviourist. The focus of behavioural psychology is on how we learn to behave in particular ways, how this learning takes place and how behavioural principles can be applied to change individual behaviour. There is an aspect of behaviourism known as operant conditioning. Skinner (1974) postulated that operant behaviour is learnt and performed spontaneously rather than an involuntary response to a situation. He suggested most human behaviour to be operant. Skinner's operant conditioning theory claimed that the rewarding of desirable behaviour and punishing of less desirable behaviour will lead to greater incidences of the production of desired behaviours and the eradication of the less desirable ones. These concepts are still encouraged in relation to classroom behaviour management in schools today.

There is some debate in the literature regarding the use of authoritarian practices in schools built on a behaviourist approach. Clough et al. (2005) cited in Harold and Corcoran (2013) argue that Britain as well as the USA has seen an increase in social policies, including those in schools, characterised by zero tolerance. This involves the assertion of power and control by adults versus the use of more humanistic approaches, such as those that use a more nurturing child-centred style of pedagogy. Williams (2018) who carried out research for Policy Exchange, a centre-right think tank, argues for a more authoritarian approach, where '*Submission to the authority of the teacher,.....can allow children access to an education that is truly liberating*' (Williams, 2018, p9). Williams

suggests that taking an egalitarian rhetoric of child-centred pedagogy does not recognise that teachers and pupils are not equals, and that this lack of recognition can leave children to their own perceptions and experiences of the world which can reinforce what disadvantages they may be experiencing outside of school.

There are questions around whether staff in schools should nurture or discipline children and young people and how these viewpoints can be seen as conflicting. It has been suggested by Williams (2018) that this could be compounded by wider societal systems and the demise of a collective understanding about the values that need to be instilled in our children and young people. William's (2018) research, explored parents, teachers and pupils' experiences of and attitudes towards low level disruptive behaviour in secondary schools. Both quantitative and qualitative data were gathered through the use of surveys, focus groups with parents, triad interviews with teachers and paired interviews with pupils. They found, from their interview data, that there is a drive from both teachers and parents towards more rigid approaches such as 'zero tolerance'. This is not an empirical research paper, however demonstrates that advice from research institutes can still be unchallenged and can guide national policy. However, there is empirical evidence that zero tolerance is not effective in improving school safety or changing behaviour (American Psychological Association, 2008; Skiba et al., 2014; Skiba & Losen, 2015).

Nash et al., (2016) carried out a study to explore teacher's perceptions of disruptive behaviour, its means of communicating emotional distress, awareness of attachment theory and the implications of this on effective behaviour management. They also looked at the extent to which teachers believed that disruptive pupils can control their behaviour. A questionnaire was used to gather data and sent to primary and secondary schools across different geographical areas. They found there to be a wide disparity in perceptions

of disruptive behaviour. The majority of staff believed that pupils can mostly control or have total control over their behaviour. The study concluded that this belief from staff that pupils choose to be disruptive leads to a further belief that they need to be disciplined to learn the consequences of their actions. They postulate that the behaviourist approach does give clear consistent boundaries which can be beneficial for some children. However, their findings importantly support concerns behind reasons the needs of some vulnerable pupils are being missed and not addressed, through the use of a behaviourist management approach. They claim the issues for these pupils are far more complex than the behaviourist approach advocates due to the approach operating at a mostly cognitive level and pupils needing to have the capacity to distinguish between cause and effect. It is therefore built on expectations that may not be reachable for all pupils. Nash et al. (2016) advocate for a proactive compassionate response from school staff rather than a punitive approach. Awareness raising and training in what psychologically drives disruptive behaviour and the willingness to engage on an emotional as well as cognitive level with children and young people in schools. They also found that there was less agreement regarding the impact of factors that are psychological and could influence disruptive behaviour, such factors that Nash et al. (2016) suggest underpin attachment difficulties and related trauma.

Harold & Corcoran (2013) used focus groups with school staff in a secondary school in Northern England and analysed the school's behaviour policy with the aim of exploring what the dominant discourses of behaviour were amongst staff and what space is available for alternative discourses regarding behaviour and relational action. Their findings confirmed the dominance of discourses of behaviourist and zero tolerance and reliance on within child explanations in relation to behaviour. However, they also found evidence of different discursive resources suggesting viability of an alternative discourse which supports the notion of an alternative to behaviourist approaches. These were,

having an understanding of how interactions and discourses are socially constructed and finding some common ground in order for a change in discourse to occur. They concluded there is a need for collective responsibility and a sense of community when addressing difficult behaviour.

Further, The House of Commons Education Committee (2018) found that behaviour policies with a rigid structure, such as those taking a zero-tolerance approach, therefore resulting in an ineffective system for all those children who do not fit the same mould. Flexibility and reasonable adjustments are required particularly as more is being understood about the impact of adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) and poor mental health and how these can impact on behaviour and the ability to cope in school (The House of Commons Education and Health and Social Care Committee, 2018). Concerns have been highlighted about the impact of zero tolerance policies on minority groups (Clough et al., 2005, cited in Harold and Corcoran, 2013). Further how this aligns with the fact that schools need to make reasonable adjustments to accommodate pupil's needs under the Equality Act (DfE, 2010) and Childrens and Families Act (DfE, 2014). The National Education Union's Anti-Racism Charter (2020), states there are large racial inequalities in exclusions and zero tolerance policies that disproportionately harm and segregate black pupils, those from socially deprived backgrounds and children with SEND. This raises questions around the suitability of a behaviourist approach for all children, particularly those children with different needs who are most likely to receive the sanctions and punishments. Therefore, it has been suggested that a behaviourist system in school can work for most children but not for all (Parker et al., 2016; Nash et al., 2016).

This highlights the intricacies involved in each situation and for every individual child. It appears that the behaviourist principles of rewards, sanctions and punishments neglects these complexities, particularly when considering emotional and behavioural

issues. A study investigating pupil's perceptions of the use of behaviour strategies such as these was carried out by Payne (2015) using a case study design and the use of surveys to gather secondary pupils' perceptions in year 7 and year 11. The findings demonstrated a complexity and range in pupil responses to rewards and sanctions, punishments, relationships, and maturation. Additionally, it was recognised that a deeper understanding is required in relation to distinguishing between rewards and punishments that focus on pupils' social behaviour and those that focus on their learning. It is noted for both studies (Payne, 2015; Harold & Corcoran, 2013) that the sample sizes were relatively small due to them being conducted in one school which would mean the results are not generalizable and limits cross cultural and socio-economic representation.

More recently, a consultation into the Behaviour in schools Guidance and Suspension and Permanent Exclusion Guidance (DfE, 2022) has been carried out, which highlighted many aspects, such as, a request for more emphasis in school behaviour policies on relationships, avoiding punitive approaches and to refer to children with SEND and behaviour challenges. The Government's response to this was that school's should have flexibility in designing and implementing behaviour policies dependent on their context and that there is recognition "*that relationships between staff and pupils have an important role to play in maintaining high behaviour standards.*" (DfE, 2022, p.6).

### **A Relational Approach**

*"Relationships matter: the currency for systemic change is trust, and trust comes through forming healthy, working relationships. People, not programs, change people"* (Perry & Szalavitz, 2017, p.85).

The emotional aspect of development can at times be seen within schools and educational contexts as something that is unrelated to learning and something to be coped with. However, knowledge of child development postulates that this view is erroneous and



potentially damaging (Whitebread, 2012). Schools continue to misunderstand that emotions and behaviours that children and young people present with can be misinterpreted as behavioural issues and as ‘within child problems’, rather than considering what could be underlying and what unmet need may be driving it (YoungMinds Trust, 2018). Viewing the whole child, recognising and supporting emotional development should be an essential part of a child’s education, development of life skills and a key part of this is through supporting the development of positive relationships. John Bowlby’s (1969) attachment theory was particularly influential when considering the significance for development of children’s relationships and emotional experiences. He highlighted the importance of secure attachments between primary caregivers and child and the impact of this on development. Further research showed multi-attachments are beneficial (Schaffer, 1996) and can be formed later not as Bowlby initially suggested within the first two years of life. What is important is the quality and consistency of various relationships with key adults including sensitivity, warmth and responsiveness (Whitebread, 2012).

Recent developments in understanding the significance of relationships when considering children’s wellbeing have shown children are shaped through a continuous process of interactions and relationships with important people in their lives, such as their parents, siblings and staff in school (Armstrong, 2018); and schools are a key part of children’s social, emotional and behavioural development (Oldfield et al., 2015; Frederickson & Cline, 2009). Relational approaches that draw on ideas from the humanistic movement, are gaining traction in education abroad and in the UK. Even though the UK government is still advocating for a behaviourist approach, there is recognition of the need to support the emotional wellbeing of children in school and the influences this has on their learning, physical and social health. Attachment, trauma, and post-traumatic stress are identified as key areas where schools require guidance (HM Government, 2021; Department of Health and Department of Education, 2018).

Furthermore, there is growing evidence that good quality relationships in schools between adults, children and young people glean positive impacts on many factors for all children irrespective of their experiences and situations (Martin & Dowson, 2009; Murray-Harvey, 2010; Roffey, 2012). Murray-Harvey (2010) found the quality of relationships between teachers and students have an influence on social emotional wellbeing and academic achievement and concluded that less emphasis needs to be on control and more on making meaningful connections with students. These meaningful connections with students have also been found to have a positive impact on teachers and that those who had good quality relationships with their students had less discipline related issues than colleagues (Marzano, 2003). The quality of relationships is suggested to either sustain toxicity in the working environment or develop a sense of wellbeing. Roffey (2012) carried out a qualitative research study across six schools in Australia who were developing emotional literacy. Semi-structured interviews were used to explore teachers, students, school counsellors and principals' experiences and the processes involved in developing in their current culture. Roffey's paper explored the commonalities of factors that support the relational wellbeing of all staff and students. The findings confirmed that relational quality and social capital are major factors in resilience and wellbeing throughout a school.

## **Trauma**

A key area of interest in this study, in view of relational approaches, is the acknowledgement of the impact of trauma which has driven a need for health and education systems to become 'trauma informed' (Maynard et al., 2019). Many years of work in the field of psychological trauma has produced many definitions of trauma. In the USA, the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration [A], (2014) went through these many definitions and found that the differences were subtle and nuanced. Using an expert panel, they created a working definition of trauma.

*“Individual trauma results from 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, p6)

In the literature there is some debate in relation to the concept of trauma in childhood. Kliethermes et al. (2014) claim that the concept of complex trauma has changed in the last few decades. There is some debate in relation to the concept being used to refer to the event of the trauma itself and the symptoms associated with it or a combination of both. Further, the number and types of events, at which point in development they occur and what is experienced by an individual (Kliethermes, 2014; Weathers & Keane, 2007). In their report SAMHSA (2014) highlight both the experience of the traumatic event(s) and the effect. Stating that the event can include the actual or extreme threat of physical and/or psychological harm or severe neglect of a child that impacts on healthy development. They recognise the adverse effects as a crucial element of trauma and can be delayed after the event or occur immediately, as well as being short or long term. Studies in neurobiology and a further understanding of the interaction between neurobiological and environmental factors have highlighted the effects of traumatic events, such as hyperarousal (where an individual is in a constant state of alert) and hypoarousal (where they are numb and disconnected from themselves and the world around them) (Felitti et al., 1998; Perry, 2004). The experience is very much dependent on the individual and it is their experience of an event or circumstance that helps to determine whether it is traumatic or not. How an event or circumstances are experienced can be linked to many factors including what social support they have access to, cultural beliefs of the individual, and their developmental stage (Felitti et al., 1998).

During the last two decades there have been discussions in the literature regarding the prevalence of childhood trauma and adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) in adults.

Felitti et al. (1998) found that ACEs can interrupt both development and capacity to experience connection and safety, which can lead to experiences of fear and toxic stress. A similar study in the UK supports Felitti et al. (1998) findings, postulating those experiences of a high number of ACEs increases likelihood of issues in adult life including incarceration, drinking and poor mental health (Bellis et al., 2015).

There are some challenges to the use of ACEs within the literature. In their article White et al. (2019) argue that ACEs are limited to intra-familial circumstances, meaning difficulties outside of parental control are not explored such as contextual factors, wider family, school, friendships, community and wider socio-political aspects. In relation to using ACEs to inform policy and practice, findings from studies using ACEs found limitations in relation to methods used (Hartas, 2019; White et al., 2019). Still the evidence is promoted as scientifically definitive by policy makers and advocates of the ACE movement (White et al., 2019). Being aware of ACEs has become a key component of trauma informed policy and practice and the use of screening tools for them is more widespread than it was a decade ago across 'human service providers' (Burke Harris et al., 2017). Hambrick et al (2019) suggest that misunderstandings can occur as correlation and causation become conflated when ACE awareness spreads to a non-academic arena. They argue that awareness of the potential impact of adversity and trauma on development is important however, going beyond the ACE score is vital to inform policy and practice to address physical, emotional and social ill health related to developmental adversity. Therefore, ACE studies suggest a narrower view of adversity is taken that does not extend to relationship and wider contextual factors around a child, i.e. Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems model (1979) (White et al., 2019; Quinn, et al., 2020). There needs to be further acknowledgement of the complexity of systems surrounding a child, including schools. Educational Psychologists work with these systems.

Perfect et al., (2016) conducted a systematic review of literature between 1990 and 2015 to identify whether there is an association between trauma and school related outcomes in young people of school age. The review consisted of 44 studies investigating cognitive functioning, 34 focusing on academic functioning and 24 on social-emotional-behavioural functioning. They found that young people who have experienced trauma have a higher risk for impairments across various cognitive functions (memory, language, attention, IQ; poorer school related behaviours i.e. discipline, academic performance, attendance, increased rate of internalising symptoms and behavioural issues). Perfect et al., (2016) findings parallel those of Felitti et al., (1998) in relation to the prevalence rates. Highlighting the importance of school staff needing to be more aware that approximately 2 out of 3 children may have encountered at least one or more traumatic events by age 17 and that there are multiple ways that children respond to these events.

When considering the impact of childhood trauma and ACES in schools, further research found that trauma in childhood can have a detrimental impact on a child or young person's, comprehension, memory and organisation, as well as their capacity to self-regulate (Wolpow et al., 2009; Shore, 2001). Further, that trauma impedes social, emotional, cognitive and brain development and an association is found between impediments in performance at school and childhood trauma (Perfect et al., 2016). Furthermore, Oehlberg (2008) referred to a correlation between trauma and low academic achievement.

### **Impact of trauma on relationships**

When considering childhood trauma, Triesman (2017) views it through a lens of 'relational' and 'developmental' to describe those who have experienced it in the context of their own relationships. Children that have experienced relational and developmental trauma have often had a lived experience involving many, co-occurring stressors, traumas

and losses. A wider relational and developmental framework aims to view the whole child and context as opposed to just their diagnosis.

*“...with the hope that a broader systemic and context informed trauma/attachment-sensitive approaches can reach a wider remit and strengthen preventative, early intervention, and proactive approaches” (Treisman, 2017, p 9)*

Trauma can affect the ability individuals have to build and be within relationships with others and can impede the experiencing of secure and safe relationships. Children can find it hard to form healthy relationships if they have experienced emotional neglect (Perry, 2009; Schore, 2001). Unprocessed loss and fear can be communicated through behaviour such as being disruptive and experiencing emotional outbursts at school. These such behaviours can be interpreted by adults as defiance and disrespect (Oehlberg, 2008). There are consequences to not having experienced relationships that are attuned, consistent and affectionate in early life and those are a loss of self-regulation and possible disassociation. Trauma that happens within relationships is harder to recover from. It is those individuals that you turn to for support and protection but that offer rejection. This can lead an individual to shut down what they feel and find other ways to cope with the pain, to survive (Van de Kolk, 2014).

A large body of research and theoretical literature has concluded that trauma impacts on the body, mind, brain and behaviour of children (Porges, 2011; Bomber, 2020; Treisman, 2017; Perry, 2009; Van De Kolk, 2014). Porges (2011) offers a theory that assists in the understanding of the behaviours seen in the context of trauma. His polyvagal theory describes the ways visceral experiences impact the bodies nervous system, how this influences behaviour and how social interactions negotiate in supporting minds and bodies to seek safety. The literature demonstrates that when exposed to trauma, individuals experience dysregulation and can become hyper alert to any dangers or

perceived threats which impacts on their capacity to regulate their emotional responses, relationships and behaviours (Porges, 2011; Bomber, 2020; Treisman, 2017; Perry, 2009; Van De Kolk, 2014). It is suggested that those exposed to trauma can be more hypervigilant to those school staff who start to lose control, picking up on changes in expression, tone of voice or their breathing. This can lead to a strong sense of vulnerability for the child or young person with their responses being generated through their limbic system and appearing as anger when they are driven by fear. Others may experience dissociation as a coping strategy which can present in the classroom as daydreaming, disengaged, and passive. Both mean there is limited engagement in cognitive learning (Oehlberg, 2008). Perry (2004) claims that academic achievement will be impacted negatively as only half of what is spoken in the classroom is picked up. During these times the offer of emotional security will restore a classroom environment conducive to learning than action that results in shame or threats (Forbes & Post, 2006, cited in Oehlberg, 2008). This provides insight into some patterns of behaviour presented by children and young people in schools and how these can be best responded to.

Treisman (2017) suggests that when the trauma is experienced within an individual's relationship, it is relationships that need to become the focus of intervention and support for change. Using psychoeducation and having people consistently available to build new relationships with and creating a new blueprint from the existing one the child or young person has formed. As discussed, research has shown good quality relationships in schools are key for positive impacts on children and young people (Martin and Dowson, 2009; Murray-Harvey, 2010; Roffey, 2012). All children benefit from quality relationships in schools; however, it becomes particularly important for the population of children and young people who may have experienced challenges linked to attachment and trauma. Building rapport and relationships with school staff will help to support them during times of dysregulation and when their behaviour is creating disruption. In their interdisciplinary

review of research of trauma-informed approaches in schools (Thomas et al., 2019) found the literature emphasised the importance of developing a school environment that promoted understanding and compassion and purposefully building and maintaining relationships between staff and students, staff and staff and students and students that were meaningful. Further, a report by the Education Endowment Foundation (EEF, 2019) into improving behaviour in schools was carried out in the UK and recommended that teachers have awareness and understanding of their students and what impacts their behaviours, as it can help them to respond in a way that is best in supporting the student. The importance of teacher-student relationships that are supportive was also highlighted

There can be an increased risk for some children and young people in school systems that focus on presenting behaviours rather than what is underlying them and take punitive approaches with zero tolerance (Bombèr, 2011). Zero-tolerance policies have proven to be ineffective in addressing behaviour. It is posited that they can damage relationships, trust and goodwill (Reynolds, 2008 cited in Ruttledge, 2022). It is suggested this approach is not working for all children, particularly those that have experienced trauma and ACEs (Skiba et al., 2014). It has also been posited that further consideration needs to be given to ways in which school policies and practices around discipline and punishment can lead to re-traumatisation and that changes to those policies and practices should be made by those informed by evidence of trauma and recovery (Thomas et. al, 2019). Furthermore, it is fundamental that school behaviour policies should promote quality relationships (Roffey, 2012).

### **Trauma-informed approaches in schools**

There is growing acknowledgement of the advantages of trauma-informed approaches (Chafouleas et al., 2016) and a rise in the promotion of them across educational settings, due to the link between ACEs, childhood trauma and poorer outcomes for children (Bellis et al, 2015; Felitti et al., 1998). In the UK, Trauma Informed



Schools UK (TISUK), which is a UK registered community interest company, working in association with the Centre for Child Mental Health, claim to have delivered various training, some of which is whole school, to 3,500 schools, colleges, early years and community settings (<https://traumainformedschools.co.uk/about-tiskuk>). They are also an organisation named in the Department of Health and Department of Education (2018) Green Paper as supporting and promoting positive mental health. It is also anticipated that taking a trauma-informed approach is valuable to all students, not just those that have experienced trauma, by directly assisting with ways to manage stress and emotionally regulate and indirectly by improving the climate in the classroom (Wassink-de Stiger, et al., 2022).

Trauma informed approaches in schools aim to offer an understanding of the impact of trauma on the capacity to learn, highlight the significance of prioritising the building of safe, trusting relationships (that support emotional and social aspects for cognitive learning) and that each child's needs are understood and are responded to (Morgan et al., 2014; Berger & Martin, 2021). This approach offers a common set of values, knowledge and language that would be applied across the whole school and written into their policies (Wilkinson, 2018). Thomas et al. (2019) found in their review that more research is required in relation to the usefulness of trauma informed practice and school behaviour practices and policies. Trauma informed practice models emphasise the need to decrease activation of students' nervous systems (Porges, 2011). This reduces physiological arousal and psychological distress, through increasing a child's sense of safety and by teaching students about emotional and behavioural regulation skills. Building relationships and engagement at school is likely to provide some autonomy over their educational goals (Berger & Martin, 2021).

Trauma informed models that are used in schools here and abroad, include but are not limited to, the Attachment Regulation and Competency model (ARC) (Blaustein & Kinniburgh, 2018). The Regulate, Relate, Reason and Repair model (4 Rs) (Bombèr, 2020) and Protect, Relate, Regulate and Reflect (PRRR) (TISUK) (<https://traumainformedschools.co.uk>). Furthermore, restorative practices in schools can create an environment that is trauma informed and healing for children and young people. There is no universal definition of restorative practices in schools, however it is grounded in indigenous traditions with an aim of promoting the wellbeing of community members with a focus on interconnectedness and relationality (Amstutz & Mullet, 2014; Lockhart & Zammit, 2005; Morrison, 2007; Zehr, 2005 cited in González et al., 2019).

The ARC model comes from the USA, it is evidence based and has been used in creating trauma-informed schools (Weed Phifer & Hull, 2016; Rishel, et al., 2019). Core components of the framework assist those who have experienced trauma in the community, home and large systems of care including schools. There are three core areas, attachment (building of safe relationships), self-regulation and competency (supporting the functions that facilitate resilient youth development). It is a flexible framework with concepts that apply across settings; focus and setup will be different dependent on context.

Bombèr (2020) 4 R's model is based on Dr Bruce Perry's neurosequential model of Regulate, Relate and Reason (Perry, 2020), in addition Bombèr has added Repair to take into account times in schools when behaviour needs to be taught and there is a need for restorative opportunities. Similar aspects are the focus in this model. The process of providing students with regular relational experiences that are regulating; building safe relationships for all but particularly for those that may have experienced relational trauma

and insecure attachment relationships; however rather than focusing on resilience the 4Rs and the neurosequential model focus on the reflective and restorative aspect. Restorative practices enable broken connections to be repaired, feelings to be voiced and relationships to be rebuilt resulting in support being offered in a positive way. Skiba and Losen (2016) suggest that school communities should adopt restorative approaches, with a focus on wrongdoing by healing harm, specifically to relationships. Conflict that occurs within the learning environment and how it is dealt with either through punitive or restorative discipline can be what decides the continuation or ceasing of cycles of trauma. Restorative practices enable children and young people to feel empowered using problem-solving through a trusted adult and working collaboratively to repair any ruptures caused by their behaviour (González et al., 2019; Velez et al., 2020).

TISUK's mission is to,

*“provide appropriate training for schools, communities and organisations so that they become trauma informed and mentally healthy places for all.”*

<https://www.traumainformedschools.co.uk/ourmission>

Similarly, their model of Protect, Relate, Regulate and Reflect (PRRR) with protect focusing on providing safety, relate focusing on building relationships that again are regulating and being offered a supported reflective space. The model is based predominantly on research and literature into toxic childhood stress (Porges, 2011; Hughes, 2009; Burke Harris, 2020) and the physiological and psychological impacts of that and how this presents and can be supported within a school setting. It also focuses on Hughes (2009), PACE model (Playfulness, Acceptance, Curiosity and Empathy) which is a way of thinking communicating and behaving that enables children and young people to

feel safe and enables a child to reflect on their behaviour and responses without judgement. They refer to research which shows that the approach is evidence based <https://traumainformedschools.co.uk>. However, it is noted that there appears to be no identifiable empirical evidence in relation to the effectiveness of the training or application at a whole school level.

Trauma informed practice models have in the main 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). There has been some criticism in the literature of trauma informed programmes in schools regarding there being not enough focus on regular staff supervision and limited integration of the principles of trauma informed practice within whole school mental health frameworks (Chafouleas et al., 2016; Berger & Martin, 2021). It has also been found that training alone is not sufficient to ensure effective and efficient implementation of trauma-informed skills and strategies (Dorado et al., 2015; Fixsen et al., 2009). Furthermore, Maynard et al. (2019) carried out a systematic review of literature to identify and synthesise evidence of the impact of trauma informed approaches being used in schools to offer guidance for policy makers, those in education, and to find where the gaps may be in the evidence base. Their findings showed there is no evidence that demonstrates whether a trauma informed approach in schools is effective. It is claimed that it cannot be known if the approach could have consequences for those who have experienced trauma or adverse experiences. Also, whether the costs (financial and academic) outweigh the benefits and are worth implementing and maintaining in a school environment. Evidence postulates there is little known about this and how trauma-informed approaches are being defined and evaluated (Berliner & Kolko, 2016; Thomas et al., 2019).

It is suggested that school leaders and policy makers proceed in a cautious way when adopting a trauma-informed approach as a framework and to begin evaluating such an approach across all areas i.e. workforce, organisational, practice change (Maynard et al., 2019). Having said that Maynard et al. (2019) do not suggest schools should not continue to use evidence informed programmes they encourage,

*“healthy scepticism and evaluation by the schools who are adopting a trauma-informed approach and clear descriptions of what schools are doing.” (Maynard et al., 2019, p3).*

They suggest further research is needed not only on the effects but also qualitative research on what is being implemented. Maynard et al. (2019) recognise there are guidance documents and suggested frameworks (Chafouleas et al., 2016). However, there needs to be more clarity on what schools are doing when they say they are using a trauma informed approach.

### **Whole School Approaches/Change**

For schools interested in implementing a more relational approach with an emphasis on social and emotional wellbeing of its students and staff the literature suggests whole school change would be required. Models such as those highlighted above, are whole-school models.

A whole school approach has been defined in the literature as an integrated framework that has multi-components across a whole school and not just a small part of it. It involves all within a school community, such as parents, staff, other professionals and agencies supporting children and young people, as well as consideration of the environment, relationships and ethos across the school community (Weare, 2015; Berger

& Martin, 2021; Ruttledge, 2022; Demkowicz & Humphrey, 2019). Implementation of trauma informed approaches require whole school change. Chafouleas et al. (2016) discuss a blueprint for schools and refer to implementation domains that are relevant to organisational change across a whole school such as, leadership; policy; physical environment; engagement & involvement; cross sector collaboration; training and workforce development; progress monitoring and quality assurance; finance; and evaluation. Similar and further enablers of whole school change are suggested, such as effective leadership, staff training, guidelines, evaluation and monitoring, student voice, targeted support (Weare, 2015; Adleman & Taylor, 2007; Demkowicz & Humphrey, 2019). However, these can be challenging for schools due to limited time and resources. Whole school approaches are intended to support through agreed, consistent procedures and policies (Doig, 2000; Chafouleas et al., 2016) and can involve a tiered approach targeting school wide, group/classroom and individual levels (Scott, 2005; Weare, 2015). Schools use policies to direct change and these are most effective when underpinned by an agreed set of principles and promoted throughout the school community.

Radford (2000) developed a framework to support schools to develop behaviour policies collaboratively and in line with their agreed values. Values can be defined as an enduring belief upon which a person acts by preference (Limthanakom et al., (2008). They are relevant to organisations and cultures as well as individuals.

Radford's framework was used and evaluated in primary, infant and junior schools and resulted in increased consistency in approach and positive responses to pupils. It is required that a behaviour policy needs to reflect a whole school approach which stipulates promotion of positive behaviour in line with values of the school. There are challenges to this in relation to individual staff priorities and past experiences; also, the difficulties some

staff may have in actively reflecting on their beliefs, attitudes and emotions in relation to behaviour (Radford, 2000). It is also postulated that a commitment to change from SLT, staff and pupils is needed, that staff buy-in is deemed essential and that challenges to core beliefs, attributions, values and attitudes need to be given careful consideration (Doig, 2000; Gaffney et al., 2004; Adelman & Taylor, 2007; Meiksin et al., 2020; Ruttledge, 2022).

If we consider some of the underpinning psychology around values and attitudes, Shalom Schwartz (2012) a social psychologist and cross-cultural researcher identified six key features of values; they are linked inextricably to affect; they refer to desirable goals which motivate action; transcend actions/situations; guide choice of actions, people, event, policies; are ordered in relation to importance to one another and influence action when relevant in particular contexts and significance to an individual. Schwartz created the theory of Basic Human values (Schwartz, 1992; Schwartz et al., 2012). His theory identified initially ten broad personal values distinguished by their underlying motivation or goal (Schwartz, 1992), following refinement, nineteen values were identified (Schwartz et al., 2012). It is postulated that the values identified are universal and connections between them are dynamic. Pursuing a value can result in conflicts or congruence with other values which were also found to be near-universal. Schwartz claimed personal values guide actions and behaviour and that our value systems are created from our personal experiences, learnt through observation and influenced by our environments. Values can influence attitudes and the Theory of Planned Behaviour (Ajzen, 1991) suggests that attitudes are one of the core components that shape behaviour. Floyd and Widaman (1995) also found a significant correlation between what values mean to us and how much we act according to them. Leon Festinger (1957) a social psychologist developed the theory of cognitive dissonance which posits that humans pursue consistency between

many cognitions such as, thoughts, values, attitudes, behaviours or beliefs. He found values to be vitally important to establish our inner peace and give us balance and going against them can be overwhelming and bring experiences of tension and conflict (Festinger, 1957).

Whole school systemic change requires a mindset that accepts change as permanent and not fleeting and leadership that motivates and supports staff to take on change that is challenging, complex and anxiety provoking (Fullan, 2005 cited in Adelman & Taylor, 2007). In their article Adelman and Taylor (2007) discuss how sustaining systemic change requires the stakeholders involved to experience initiatives in ways that enable them to feel valued and as adding to a collective identity and vision for change. When considering this in relation to behaviour management, findings of a review of literature on what makes whole-school approaches to behaviour management effective suggest that belonging, relationships and engagement are key principles connected to behaviour management approaches and successful whole school behaviour approaches (Doig, 2000; Gaffney et al., 2004; Parsons, 2002, cited in Scott, 2005). Gaffney et al. (2004) found that relationships between staff that are collaborative, supportive and positive were an instigator for developing positive relationships between staff and pupils and pupils and pupils. This in turn can influence the culture of a school. Gaffney et al. (2004) found the focus on relationships throughout three participant schools was the basis for effective change. An approach, such as a behaviourist one, can offer a clear, simplified set of rules, sanctions and rewards which can be viewed as emotionally safe for some. However, applying such an approach without exploring the underpinning values can result in implementation without explanation and understanding to pupils and result in inconsistency across a school. Radford's framework aimed to address how to motivate



young people to behave in ways that create supportive communities both in school and wider (Radford, 2000).

Wear (2015) suggested that for schools interested in implementing a more relational approach, with an emphasis on social and emotional wellbeing of its pupils and staff, a whole school approach to change would be required. When considering those that have a focus on social emotional mental health a whole school approach shifts the emphasis to the school community and those that support all children rather than just focusing on individuals (Ruttledge, 2022). Collective efficacy encourages teachers to utilise proactive rather than reactive methods to support as part of a wider system and ecology (Gulliford & Miller, 2015). Possibilities for staff to explore and agree on values held as a school is an important part of effective whole school change (Scott, 2005). School ethos is part of the framework that supports whole school change and is something Roffey (2011) describes as "*the beliefs, aspirations, vision and values that underpin the way we do things round here*" (p. 193).

It has been suggested that the classroom can offer a stable setting for children and can be an opportunity to meet their therapeutic needs. Gaining the understanding required for this takes the role of staff in schools to a level beyond curriculum attainment (Perry, 2020). However, it can be difficult for schools to put emotional wellbeing ahead of academic achievement as they are judged on assessment and examination results. There is a need for whole school approaches acknowledging that schools go further than attainment and integrate social and emotional wellbeing for all children (Conkbayir, 2017; Shooter, 2012; Quinn et al., 2020; Chafouleas et al., 2016; Adelman & Taylor, 2007).

Relational whole school approaches such as schools becoming attachment aware are being encouraged (Little & Maunder, 2021). Little & Maunder's paper discussed the

link between childhood trauma and disruptive behaviour, so teachers are able to respond effectively to support children and young people. They found that there is potential for schools to be part of a systemic approach in building positive interpersonal relationships following evidence of what helps children and young people to adopt healthier coping patterns. However, it was recognised that there can be challenges to aligning relational based approaches within education that is driven by a performative culture and concluded that now is the time to make relationships a priority in education. Further research highlights the need for evidence-based practice which supports social behaviour in classrooms as well as that which relates to academic attainment (Clunies-Ross et al., 2008). Applying relational approaches within schools therefore takes interactions between staff and students further than the convention of teaching and learning and moves the emphasis onto staff being emotionally available to students. There is limited research on how relational approaches are maintained within the many different relationships students encounter in school, particularly when supporting children who are presenting with unpredictable behaviours (Quinn et al., 2020).

Involvement of all within a school community is key to whole school approaches (Weare, 2015; Berger & Martin, 2021; Rutledge, 2022). Considering research on the different levels of staff involvement in whole school change, Radford's (2000) framework highlights the importance of involving all members of staff within the school community in the development of school behaviour policies. This is based on the understanding that collaboration and agreement of a shared philosophy for a school will lead to an increased likelihood of consistency in how expectations of behaviour of pupils will be promoted and communicated. Further, research involving the views of all staff including principals; teaching and non-teaching staff, on the nature of their contribution to health education, was carried out across five French schools using semi-structure interviews and content analysis. A key finding was that an enabler of implementation of health education was that

schools require support in creating a health education policy and ways to develop an inclusive common culture among staff which is not limited just to teaching staff but also involves non-teaching staff (Jourdan et al., 2010).

Schools are made up of adults undertaking many different roles; they all interact with children and young people and are vital to the culture of a school. This can include and is not limited to lunchtime staff, teaching assistants, bus drivers, caretakers, and office staff. In their interdisciplinary review of research of trauma-informed practices in schools Thomas et al. (2019) found that experiences and perspectives of those in the roles stated above were significantly lacking with only two studies identified that included the views of staff who were non-teaching. Anderson et al. (2015) carried out a study that focused on the professional development of classroom support staff and Alvarez (2017) conducted a case study with an educator who was also “a program director of an in-school mentoring program” (p. 58) with a focus on trauma and effective educator practices. Therefore, there is a gap in the literature in relation to gathering the views and experiences across all staff in schools that are using a trauma informed approach.

Systematic reviews and commentaries carried out in the United States found there were many publications that advocate the need for trauma informed practice in schools and suggested frameworks for implementation (Chafouleas et al., 2016) but there is little on the evaluation of its effectiveness or empirical evidence to support the impact of those recommendations (Maynard et al., 2019; Chafouleas et al., 2016; Thomas et al., 2019; Berger & Martin, 2021; Wassink-de Stigter et al., 2022). A Scoping Review carried out by Wassink-de Stigter et al., (2022) examined the facilitators and barriers in implementing a whole school trauma-informed approach. They found only 28% of the empirical studies reviewed focused on implementation (which was stated as a small part).

This notion that more evidence is needed in relation to establishing the conditions which make relational approaches effective, is supported by a recent study, that was

carried out evaluating the implementation of a whole school compassionate relational approach (Quinn et al., 2020). This was based on attuned relationships, the potential effect of stress and trauma and taking a positive psychology approach to building psychological resources and embracing strengths. It was developed by Educational Psychologists (EPs), for school leaders in the UK (Quinn et al., 2020). The compassionate school's framework is made up of some key areas that have been explored above, for example, relationships based on acceptance, empathy and repair; the environment promotes safety, belonging and trust; mindful, regulating approaches are integrated into the day; as well as values being shared and visible within the school community which reflect compassion and connection. Forty-four school leaders participated in rolling out the programme across two groups from 32 different schools. After attending a training day, school leaders were invited to reflect on the degree to which the areas within the framework were established in their schools using a likert scale. Following a period of 12 weeks and the creation of development plans with a focus on key priorities and actions, they came back together to attend a reflection workshop to share insights and any progress on planning. The study highlighted some organisational complexities of building these types of approaches into a school system particularly large schools and tensions between current behaviour management systems and staff values and beliefs. They also identified some factors that could support implementation of it within a UK school context, one being the importance of ensuring an integrated approach was implemented across policy and practice.

It is recognised that there is limited literature, particularly within a UK school context, exploring implementation factors for this type of approach and this study did identify various areas for future research (Quinn et al., 2020). They recognised that there can be tensions between ensuring an integrated approach is implemented across policy and practice and staff values. That this could relate to how adults respond to and interpret

children and young people's behaviour, recognising approaches that are relational are more than a set of strategies and may require a shift in mindset and values. Radford's framework (2000) highlighted the importance of collaboratively identifying and agreeing a school's values with those in the school community and Roffey (2008) suggested that there is a need to further understand how relational approaches relate to the shared relational values and relational quality within schools.

### **The role of Educational Psychologists**

In recent years there has been an increase in the promotion of approaches that take a more relational approach as well as trauma informed approaches in UK schools (Quinn et al., 2020). Little and Maunder (2021) concluded that now is the time to make relationships a priority in education. EPs are well situated to support schools at both individual and systemic levels (Beaver, 2011). From an individual child perspective EPs can take a whole child approach that considers the wider contexts and systems around them and seeks to provide targeted support for children and young people who may have experienced relational and developmental trauma and/or have encountered lived experiences involving many, co-occurring stressors, traumas and losses - through to organisational school wide support (Beaver, 2011). Including supporting staff working systemically with schools using whole school training or policy development to effect whole school change. Also, through the promotion of inclusive approaches and using psychological perspectives when considering difficulties (Cameron, 2006). Supporting staff to understand what may be underlying and contributing to behaviour and responses, and how this and relationships can impact upon the wellbeing of all children and young people with the aim of better outcomes for them. EPs have opportunities to provide support to schools going through whole school change in practical ways which sit within their everyday practice (Cameron, 2006).

## **Future Research Directions**

This literature review highlighted there is research and guidance for the implementation of whole school approaches (Weare, 2015; Adleman & Taylor, 2007; Demkowicz & Humphrey, 2019) and implementation frameworks and guidance for trauma informed approaches at whole school levels (Chafouleas et al, 2016; Wassink-de Stigter et al., 2022), however there is a dearth of research literature on the effectiveness of trauma informed approaches in schools, as well as in the evaluation of implementation guidelines (Maynard et al., 2019; Chafouleas et al., 2016; Thomas, et al., 2019; Berger & Martin, 2021; Wassink-de Stigter et al., 2022). Further consideration needs to be given to this; therefore, this is a potential area for future researchers to explore.

In connection with this the review also found that there is a need for further qualitative research in this area on what is currently being implemented (Maynard et al., 2019) and more clarity on what schools are doing when they say they are implementing a trauma informed approach (Chafouleas et al., 2016). Therefore, this is an avenue that future researchers could take.

Further Quinn et al. (2020) study highlighted some complexities of building relational approaches into school systems and highlighted tensions between staff values/beliefs and behaviour management systems, they encouraged further research around this. This links to Roffey's (2008) suggestion of a need to understand further the relationship between relational approaches and shared relational values and relational quality within schools. Furthermore, when considering this in the context of trauma informed approaches, as far as the researcher is aware, there are limited qualitative studies that have explored the cognitive and emotional impact (including value systems) on staff in UK schools implementing the approach.

It was also found that there is limited evidence around how school staff maintain relational approaches with the many relationships that children and young people encounter in school, particularly when supporting children who are presenting with unpredictable behaviour (Quinn et al., 2020). Furthermore, in relation to trauma informed approaches, there were only limited studies that focused on perspectives of school staff, the focus was predominantly on teachers (Thomas et al., 2019). Therefore, school staff views across a whole school are under explored. These are also potential areas for researchers to explore.

Finally, an observation from the review of the literature was that there is a need for more research around trauma informed approaches in UK schools with the majority of studies found to be in the USA and Australia. This adds more complexity when considering the findings as they are confounded by different education systems and overarching legislation.

## Empirical Chapter

### Abstract

Schools in the UK are currently caught in a tug of war between the demands for staff to adopt a more behaviouralist approach to address discipline, while at the same time responding to a growing understanding of the importance of developing positive relationships to address issues around emotional wellbeing and behavioural regulation. Trauma informed approaches in schools take a relational stance by prioritising building safe relationships, taking a holistic view of children and young people and making their needs central. The aim of this exploratory, qualitative study was to explore professional and personal experiences of a range of staff with different roles in primary schools who are involved in implementing a trauma informed approach. Semi-structured interviews were used to explore both teaching and non-teaching staff (n=8) experiences, and Reflexive Thematic Analysis (Braun & Clark, 2022) was used to analyse the transcripts. The findings highlighted key of six overarching themes related to staff experiences: **R**elationships and connection, **I**nsight gained, **P**romoting staff cohesion and support, **P**sychological and emotional impact, **L**ining up of values and **E**ncountering friction with expectations and norms (RIPPLE). Further analysis of these experiences highlighted important aspects linked to alignment and friction in staff values when implementing the approach, as well as suggesting some systemic considerations when embedding trauma informed approaches in schools. These include individual (supervision), group (peer support; messages to parents) and organisational level (culture). Recommendations for future research are discussed and the potential role of the EP at the individual and systemic level is considered.



## Introduction

Over recent decades there has been an increase in empirical evidence in relation to the impact of trauma and adverse childhood experiences on the mind, brain, body and behavioural responses in children (Porges, 2011; Bomber, 2020; Treisman, 2017; Perry, 2009; Van De Kolk, 2014). They also explore the effect of trauma and adverse childhood experiences on the impact on future life outcomes of children and young people (Felitti et al., 1998). This has prompted a movement towards systems across health and education to become more trauma informed (Maynard et al., 2019) and a surge in the promotion of this approach in schools (Quinn et al., 2020; Chafouleas et al., 2016). In relation to schools, the aim of trauma informed approaches is to offer understanding of the impacts of trauma on the ability to learn; to prioritise the building of safe, trusting relationships; take a holistic view that encompasses social and emotional aspects linking to cognition; and to make the needs of the child central (Morgan et al., 2014; Berger & Martin, 2021). This, it is suggested, should take the form of a whole school approach that applies a consistent set of common values, language, and knowledge across a school and written into their policies (Wilkinson, 2018).

Due to the increase of application in practice and policy across health and education the DfE recently issued guidance on a working definition of trauma informed practice (DfE, 2022). Within that guidance a definition of ‘trauma’ is provided that reflects the internationally recognised definition of the United States Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA),

*“Trauma results from an event, series of events, or set of circumstances that is experienced by an individual as harmful or life threatening. While unique to the individual, generally the experience of trauma can cause lasting adverse effects, limiting the ability to function and achieve mental, physical, social, emotional, or spiritual well-being” (DfE, 2022).*

The literature in this area highlighted the variations in terms used. Berger and Martin (2020) highlighted some of the disparities in relation to trauma informed care, programmes and interventions, such as (trauma informed practices, attachment sensitive schools, trauma-informed pedagogy, trauma sensitive schools). Trauma specific interventions are different from trauma informed care and also referred to in variable ways (trauma sensitive, trauma informed systems, trauma responsive) (Hanson & Lang, 2016 cited in Maynard et al., 2019).

### ***Context of the research***

When considering the wider political context/systems and policies in relation to behaviour management in schools, the DfE, have continued to advocate for an approach that takes a tougher stance and focuses on an ethos of discipline to manage pupil behaviour built on behaviourist principles. In recent years there has been a spotlight and ongoing concern around disruptive behaviour, suggesting this to be the reason for increasing levels of fixed term and permanent exclusions (DfE, 2019). Further, the DfE guidance document for headteachers and school staff on developing school behaviour policies (DfE, 2020) discusses ways to promote positive behaviour, respect and self-discipline by placing discipline at the centre, referring to teachers' powers and sanctions, such as detentions, punishing poor behaviour, isolation rooms and seclusion. In addition, a 'Behaviour Hubs programme has also been funded by the DfE (DfE, 2021). It is reported that there are approximately 700 schools actively involved in this programme (Morgan, 2023) which is a 'schools mentoring initiative' pairing multi-academy trusts (MATs) with 'exemplary behaviour practices' with MATs or schools who want and need to improve pupil behaviour with a strong focus on discipline. Co-occurring across time, and in contrast to this, there have also been calls for education to focus on supporting the emotional wellbeing of children in school (Department of Health and Department of Education, 2018; HM Government, 2021).

In the current context, discussions are opening up (i.e., The Times Educational Supplement, TES) recently wrote an article around the evidence for the different approaches (Morgan, 2023). Consideration of approaches that are relational is particularly relevant in light of the Covid-19 pandemic which is reported to have had an impact on children's social and emotional mental health (Unicef, 2021) and is believed schools are experiencing an increase in emotionally based school non-attendance (EBSNA) (Children's Commissioner, 2022). Therefore, the topic of whole school relational approaches inclusive of trauma informed approaches in schools in the UK is a current key area of interest to explore.

### ***Relational/Trauma informed approaches***

Perfect et al. (2016) found that there is a higher risk of impairment in cognitive functions in young people who have experienced trauma and a rising awareness of the influence that quality relationships between staff and students have on social emotional wellbeing and attainment (Marzano, 2003). Schools are a key part of children's social, emotional and behavioural development (Oldfield et al., 2015; Frederickson & Cline, 2009) and children are shaped through a process of interactions and relationships with important people in their lives, such as their parents, siblings and staff in school (Armstrong, 2018). Further, research has shown good quality relationships in schools are essential for positive impacts on children and young people (Martin & Dowson, 2009; Murray-Harvey, 2010; Roffey, 2012) and are particularly important for those that may have experienced challenges with attachment (Bowlby, 1969) or trauma.

There is growing acknowledgement of the advantages of trauma-informed approaches and it is anticipated they are valuable to **all** children, not only those that have experienced trauma by improving the classroom environment, and supporting emotional regulation and stress (Chafouleas et al., 2016; Wassink-de Stiger et al., 2022).

Furthermore, research shows whole school change to be necessary in the implementation of trauma informed approaches and Chafouleas et al. (2016) discuss a blueprint for schools and refer to implementation domains relevant to organisational change. Further enablers of whole school change are suggested, such as effective leadership, staff training, guidelines, evaluation and monitoring, student voice, targeted support (Weare, 2015; Adleman & Taylor, 2007; Demkowicz & Humphrey, 2019). There is understanding that whole school approaches are embedded through consistent procedures that are agreed and policies (Doig, 2000; Chafouleas et al., 2016). Furthermore, they can involve approaches that are tiered and targeted at school wide, group/classroom and individual levels (Scott, 2005; Weare, 2015).

On the whole, trauma informed models for practice in schools have been based on the body of literature in relation to the need to address psychological and physiological impacts of stress on development of children as opposed to evaluation of the approach (Berger & Martin, 2021). Further, there is limited evidence on their effectiveness or how they are being evaluated (Maynard et al., 2019; Chafouleas et al, 2016; Thomas, et al., 2019; Berger & Martin, 2021; Wassink-de Stigter et al., 2022). While the framework and guidance on implementation, Chafouleas et al. (2016) is recognised, it is suggested more qualitative research is needed on what is being implemented, to add some clarity on what schools are doing when they state they are using a trauma informed approach, in addition to its effects (Maynard et al., 2019).

Radford (2000) found that when considering whole school change and behaviour policies they need to reflect an approach that makes clear and promotes positive behaviour that is in line with values of a school. However, there can be challenges to this, relating to

individual staff experiences and priorities; also, that some staff may experience difficulties actively reflecting on their emotions, beliefs and attitudes.

Furthermore, Quinn et al. (2020) identified areas for future research from their study of applying a compassionate schools' framework across 32 schools in the UK and evaluating it with 44 school leaders. They recognised that there can be tensions between ensuring an integrated approach is implemented across policy, practice and staff values, as this could influence responses to behaviour. They identified that relational approaches are more than a set of strategies and may require a shift in mindset and values. Further research in this area was encouraged by Quinn et al. (2020). Roffey (2008) also suggested that there is a need to further understand how relational approaches relate to the shared relational values and relational quality within schools. When considering this in the context of trauma informed approaches, limited qualitative studies were found that had explored the cognitive and emotional impact (including value systems) on staff in schools implementing this.

Furthermore, children and young people encounter many personal interactions in schools and it was highlighted there needs to be further evidence on how school staff sustain relational approaches within these many interactions, particularly for those children presenting with unpredictable behaviour that require support (Quinn et al., 2020). In addition, in relation to trauma informed approaches, there were only limited studies that focused on perspectives of school staff, the focus was predominantly on teachers (Thomas et al., 2019). Therefore, a range of views from school staff in different roles and experiences of using trauma informed approaches across a whole school are underexplored.

### ***Aims and Rationale of present study***

This study aims to gather experiences of staff in primary schools that have embedded a trauma informed approach, in relation to its effects on them at both a personal and professional level. Furthermore, to consider what insights can be gained from these experiences that may build on current literature around implementation of whole school and trauma informed approaches (Chafouleas et al., 2016; Scott, 2005; Weare, 2015; Adleman & Taylor, 2007; Demkowicz & Humphrey, 2019) from those who are applying it and have it embedded in their everyday practice. It also aims to explore the impact that staff values have on the effective and consistent implementation of a trauma informed approach. This research hopes to gather the views and experiences of a range of school staff involved in implementing a trauma informed approach (Thomas et al., 2019), as whatever their role they all interact with children and young people and are vital components of sustaining the espoused relational culture of the school. It is also hoped that the findings will support schools considering whole school change to one that is relational and trauma informed, in relation to what they might want to consider to support the process of systemic implementation. As Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems theory suggests system change requires consideration at different levels of the system (i.e. environment, parents, staff).

For this to be achieved the following central question and subsidiary questions will guide this research study:

- How do staff experience the effects of working in a school that has embedded a trauma informed approach at a personal and professional level? (RQ1)
  - How are staff values impacted when implementing a trauma informed approach? (RQ1a)
  - What systemic considerations can be learned from school staffs' experience of implementing a trauma informed approach? (RQ1b)

## **Methodology**

Set out below is the methodology used for the current research including the data collection process and analysis implemented to explore the research questions. In addition, a critical discussion regarding the ontological and epistemological position assumed by the researcher and how this influenced the study's design, data collection and analysis.

### ***Epistemological Position***

This research aligns with the ontological and epistemological position of critical realism (Bhaskar, 1986), which perceives reality as multiple, complex and objective (Robson, 2002). It acknowledges the world is real, that knowledge is fallible and theory dependent rather than theory determined and takes the view that reality can be observed. It acknowledges that reality is shaped by various underlying structures, processes, mechanisms, events and possibilities within the world, that are mainly independent of us and not dependent on our perceptions or knowledge of them (Bhaskar, 2013). Critical realism acknowledges the value of positivism however, hermeneutically methods that are based on interpretation are where critical realist researchers begin, and they postulate that language provides an 'inside' or 'interior' to social life (Bhaskar, 2016, p57) which is not shared by the positivists and natural scientists (Price & Martin, 2018). Further, critical realists view structure and individual agency as features of the world operating at different levels, existing relationally (Archer et al., 2016). They argue that knowledge and perception of reality is reliant on ways we make meaning linked to individual experiences, expectations and personal beliefs, in addition to how the wider social context impacts those meanings (Willig, 1999; 2013).

In the context of this research, a critical realist stance is appropriate as there is an 'observable' or 'objective' reality i.e., the schools' policies, processes and values. However, a critical realist position would posit that these are influenced by the social

context, interpreted in light of the beliefs, experiences and meaning ascribed by the individual. This study is best suited to a qualitative research design. Qualitative methods support the exploration of causal processes as causal mechanisms are examined within social contexts where they interact in dependent, unpredictable and complex ways. Critical realists are justified in the use of qualitative methods as the rejection of prediction and measurement leads to a requirement for qualitative methods in making sense of social situations and events (Ackroyd & Fleetwood in Hu, cited in Price & Martin, 2018). The methodology for the study will have the participant's views at the centre, using an inductive approach to inform the researcher's understanding and aims to explore meaning and experience in the language used (Potter & Wetherell, 1987; Widdicombe & Wooffitt, 1995). A benefit of using this approach is that understanding the subjective reality of the participants implementing a trauma informed approach would enable exploration of contributing and challenging factors to elicit positive change. The research can therefore potentially enable the starting point of a framework for promoting a positive future in this area.

### ***Sample and Participants***

In line with the position outlined above, this study employed semi-structured interviews to provide in-depth qualitative data with the purpose of pursuing the views of staff in two schools that have embedded a trauma informed approach. Three schools were initially approached in total (two primary and one secondary). The schools were within the Local Authority (in eastern region of England) where the researcher was on placement. The criteria for approaching these schools were that they needed to have either embedded or were embedding a trauma informed approach. The Headteachers of the schools were sent an email by the researcher and invited to take part in the study as well as providing information and requesting their consent if they agreed for their school to take part (Appendix 1).



All three schools agreed to take part, however only two primary schools had participants volunteer, therefore the secondary school was not involved in the study. A purposive sampling approach was taken with identifying schools to participate, with the aim of generating 'insight and in-depth' understanding of those perspectives (Patton, 2002).

Of the two schools that participated, school A cater for children age 4-11 and school B for children age 3-11. One school is larger than the other. School A has approximately 500 pupils and school B approximately 250 pupils. They are based in different areas of the county, however are both situated in socially deprived areas of the county. Based on national rankings school A is within the most deprived 20% in the county and school B within the next most deprived 20%. The proportion of pupil premium pupils is slightly above the national average in both schools. Due to being in different areas of the county, school A can be described as being more highly served by community initiatives than school B. A further difference is that school B is situated closer to the boarder of other neighbouring counties which could mean they are likely to attract staff from other countries bringing other experiences and expertise.

Both schools have had similar journeys to becoming trauma informed schools. School A underwent the transition approximately 5 years ago and school B approximately 4 years ago. Both schools began their transition to taking a more relational approach using the Paul Dix (2017) relational behaviour practice approach as a foundation. Both schools have relationship policies which promote interactions that are kind and compassionate and include no shouting, criticisms, put-downs, and shaming. They extend to promote good listening, understanding and the use of words to convey empathy.

Alongside this both schools have undertaken training with Trauma Informed Schools UK (TISUK). Therefore, staff that have had the training have been provided with

key skills in understanding and responding to challenging and/or trauma triggered behaviour. Through gaining an understanding of neuroscience and psychology around child mental health, ACES and protective factors and how to apply key relational skills that support better outcomes for children. TISUK's model of Protect, Relate, Regulate and Reflect (PRRR) informs policy, procedures and school culture. It focuses on providing safety, building relationships, supporting regulation and offering a supported space for reflection. Further, the practice in both schools also focuses on Dan Hughes (2009) PACE model (Playfulness, Acceptance, Curiosity and Empathy) which is a way of thinking communicating and behaving that enables children and young people to feel safe and enables a child to reflect on their behaviour and responses without judgement (<https://traumainformedschools.co.uk>).

Within both schools the approach is delivered as a whole school approach. Some staff had initial training with TISUK, dependent on what point they joined the school and some have done further training to become practitioners (which is a more in-depth level of training and enables them to work one to one with children doing emotionally supportive work). These staff are available to support when needed and are part of what school A call their nurture team. The approach in both schools is led by the headteachers who have completed senior leads training. Updates and return to the approach are carried out during CPD time for all staff and new members of staff are informed of the schools' trauma informed and relational approach as part of their induction.

The Headteacher in school A referred to the Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator (SENCo) to support with recruitment for the study. The Headteacher for school B took this role, therefore they were the gatekeepers and disseminated the information and consent forms out by email to all staff. Conversations were had with the researcher and the gatekeepers in relation to staff possibly experiencing a sense of obligation to take part. The researcher made clear on the information given that participation was voluntary in an

attempt to alleviate this. The gatekeeping role would have impacted the participant sample as there was a reliance on the gatekeepers as part of the recruitment process.

There are limited studies involving those in non-teaching roles in schools within this area of study (Thomas et al., 2019) and it is recognised that specific kinds of people may hold different relevant views about the concepts (Campbell et al., 2020). Further, all staff that interact with students have a role in promoting policies, hence only interviewing staff doing one role may not reflect views across a whole school. Therefore, all staff were invited to participate in the study as opposed to a random sampling method being deployed. Participants were invited across the two schools and included members of SLT and those with both teaching and non-teaching roles such as, teaching assistants, office staff, midday supervisors, family support workers, SENCOs, inclusion facilitators and intervention workers. 8 staff volunteered to participate, 6 from school A and 2 from school B. Information and written consent were obtained from participants who wanted to take part in the study and interviews. In order to limit the possibility of being identified and to maintain confidentiality, a generic term of “non-teaching staff” is used to cover those participants.

**Table 1**

*Participants Details*

<b><i>Participant (P)</i></b>	<b><i>School (S)</i></b>	<b><i>SLT/teaching/non-teaching</i></b>
1	A	SLT/non-teaching
2	A	Non-teaching
3	A	SLT/non-teaching
4	A	Teaching
5	A	Non-teaching
6	A	Non-teaching
7	B	Non-teaching
8	B	SLT/teaching

To ensure anonymity further demographic information of the participants was not collected.

### ***Data collection***

Questions included in the semi-structured interviews were used to explore the experiences of participant school staff in relation to the introduction of a trauma informed approach and to gain their perspectives of the possible challenges and supports to implementation of this approach. An interview schedule was developed as a flexible guide to the conversation (Appendix 2), dependent on the participant and their responses. Probes and unplanned questions were used when appropriate in response to what was being shared by the participants. This enabled the discussion to flow and aided rapport building as well as helping the participant feel at ease, a key factor in interactive data collection (Reinharz, 1993 cited in Braun & Clark, 2013). The questions developed in the schedule mirrored the research aims and questions, in particular in relation to the topic of trauma informed practice, views and experiences and the impact on staff working in schools with it embedded. The researcher identified a list of questions relating to the relevant areas of interest (Smith, 2015). The questions were piloted with a school professional prior to undertaking any of the interviews in order to highlight any need for adaptation or clarification. A person-centred approach was taken to opening and closing the interviews. The initial question was posed to gain some insight into the participants understanding of the approach, before specifically exploring their views and experiences of implementing a trauma informed approach in their school. The final question gave participants an opportunity to bring or add anything further that they wanted to share that was not specifically asked by the researcher. It was hoped this would alleviate researcher-driven interview questions and may initiate unanticipated data. However, none of the participants added anything further at the end of the interviews.

Interviews were carried out both face to face in school and on Microsoft teams. Participants were given the choice following an initial lack of staff coming forward and the need to increase access for potential participants. Six interviews were face to face and recorded using a digital audio recorder and two were carried out and recorded on Microsoft teams. The recordings were deleted following transcription and data analysis. It was anticipated that the interviews would take up to an hour, however they varied in length and were between 23 and 63 minutes. The interviews were transcribed verbatim once they had all been carried out to aid immersion in the data (Braun & Clarke, 2022), prior to conducting analysis. Participants were given the option to review their transcripts. One participant did take up this offer and consented to its use.

### ***Analysis***

The interview transcripts were analysed using Braun and Clarke's Six Stage Thematic Analysis (2006; 2015). This is a method of analysis that offers a systematic, accessible and rigorous approach involving coding of data, the development of themes and identifies patterns of meaning and experience across a whole dataset. The approach used in this research study is the 'Big Q approach', as the research is qualitative and fits the critical realistic ontology and epistemology stance the researcher has taken. Critical realism does not seek general laws as they believe common patterns of behaviour and experiences are not demonstrated in unchanging or expected ways (Willig, 2013), they look for tendencies which can be seen in rough trends within data. The researcher used an inductive approach where the analysis is primarily grounded in the data rather than existing concepts and theories. Both semantic and latent coding were carried out. Codes were informed by the data content and refined using Braun and Clarke's reflexive approach (Braun & Clarke, 2022). This resulted in a process of critical reflection throughout the analysis acknowledging the researcher's interpretation and subjectivity within the data. This analytic approach supports putting participants' perspectives and

experiences at the centre, to offer insight to the researcher of the relationship between staff's thoughts, feelings and behaviour in relation to an implementation of a trauma informed approach.

Braun and Clarke (2022) outlined the six phases as guidance, placing the researcher as active within the process and highlight that this is a non-linear process that is there to support the process of reflexive analysis. Table 2 sets out the phases with reference to how the researcher applied them.

**Table 2**

*Application of the Six phases of Thematic Analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006; 2015; 2022)*

Phase	Process and Action
1. Familiarisation of the data	Transcribing the dataset by first listening to the recordings; listening again by checking transcripts against recordings; immersion in the data by reading and re-reading the transcripts and making brief notes on analytic ideas related to each data item and the whole data set (sample at Appendix 3). Electronic copies of the transcripts were read and notes were made on paper and handwritten as this supported the researcher's reflections and insights.
2. Coding	Systemic and inductive coding based on a what/how structure (Watts, 2014) involving going through the dataset identifying segments of data that are meaningful for the research questions and applying analytically-meaningful descriptors (code labels) that capture single meanings or concepts. This process was carried out twice across the dataset. Both semantic and latent codes were produced which reflect both overt and implicit meaning of the data. The process was carried out electronically using the

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	<p>comment function in word to note down codes in relation to the relevant pieces of text (see sample at Appendix 3).</p>
3. Generating initial themes	<p>Codes were coloured coded in relation to each data item to assist the researcher in identifying if more than one participant had expressed a code (see Appendix 3). Codes were then organised into clusters. Shared pattern meaning of the dataset is identified through the clustering of codes that appear to share a core concept. This stage captures specific or particular meaning that are broader and shared. When potential candidate themes were identified all coded data relevant to each theme was collated. During this process it came to light that some codes had to be let go, particularly those where only one participant had shared the concept.</p>
4. Developing and reviewing themes	<p>An assessment of the initial fit of the candidate themes were made to the data. The themes were sense checked in relation to the coded extracts and the full dataset. A thematic map of the analysis was then generated (Figure 1).</p>
5. Refining, defining and naming themes	<p>Each theme was clearly defined and built on a strong concept. A brief synopsis of each theme written to support the creation of an informative name for each.</p>
6. Writing up	<p>A selection was made of compelling extract examples for each theme (Appendix 3). The data was returned to and extracts were collated and selected relevant to the codes, to assist in the development and reviewing of themes and to check that the extracts fit with the themes being proposed. Throughout relating back to the research questions and the literature to present</p>

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the narrative and interpretation of the data. The researcher ensuring all participants were represented. Further reflections were made and further adjustments made to themes and sub-themes throughout the writing process.

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### ***Ensuring Rigour***

Throughout analysis and interpretation consideration was given to ensuring rigour, which is described by Lincoln and Guba (1985) as the ‘quality’ or ‘trustworthiness’ of qualitative research, in place of reliability and validity. The researcher’s subjectivity is a key element of Reflexive Thematic Analysis, and requires them to be part of the research process not separate from it. It is therefore shaped by what the researcher brings, including their education, values and other contextual elements. Braun & Clarke (2022) claim that subjectivity drives this process. Denzin and Lincoln (2005) consider all research to be interpretative and guided by the researcher’s set of beliefs and how they view the world from a qualitative place, what we bring, who we are, are seen as vital to the analysis. These are not seen as contamination but a part of the knowledge production process (Braun & Clarke, 2022). It is therefore acknowledged that these elements may have influenced interpretation of the data impacting on the credibility and transferability of the interpretation. To buffer this Braun and Clarke’s (2022) guidance on carrying out ‘good thematic analysis’ were considered and followed and Lincoln and Guba’s (1985) evaluative criteria was used in relation to trustworthiness in the present study. See Table 3 below.

### **Table 3**

*Lincoln and Guba’s (1985) Evaluative Criteria to establish trustworthiness*

<b>Lincoln and Guba’s (1985) Criteria</b>	<b>How the researcher addressed this</b>
Credibility: confidence in the ‘truth’ of the findings; the fit between	The researcher ensured there was prolonged engagement and deep immersion in the data,



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respondents' views and the researcher's representation of them	comprehensively following guidance from Braun and Clarke (2022). The use of member checking with participants to share themes could have further strengthened the credibility of the research. However, due to time constraints this was not possible.
Transferability: showing that the findings have applicability in other contexts, i.e. the 'case-to-case' transfer of findings.	The researcher ensured there was a detailed description of the process of recruitment, data collection and steps of data analysis. This transparency is hoped to assist with transferability judgements for the reader. The researcher also provided context of the schools included in the study and the trauma-informed approach. This is felt to further support transferability judgements and the potential for findings to be applicable in other schools/contexts, which may be a future area of exploration.
Dependability: showing that the findings are consistent and could be repeated	It is acknowledged that the researcher's skills, knowledge, experiences, values and other contextual factors may have influenced the research and subsequent direction of the analysis. However, the subjectivity and skill of the researcher is considered a key component of Reflexive Thematic Analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2022) with the researcher being transparent about this process.
Confirmability: a degree of neutrality or the extent to which the findings of a study are shaped by researcher bias, motivation or interest.	The researcher engaged in a reflexive process throughout the project, reflecting on their own experiences, interpretations and potential biases (and how these might impact on the research). This is further explored in the reflective chapter, with such considerations held in mind throughout the research. It is also felt the researcher's thorough and detailed engagement in transcripts and back-

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and-forth between the transcript and codes/themes ensured a clear and transparent process.

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### ***Ethics***

This research study was conducted following full ethical approval from the University of East Anglia EDU S-REC (School of Education and Lifelong Learning Research Ethics Subcommittee) (Appendix 4) and in accordance with the principles of the Code of Human Research Ethics (BPS, 2021). In relation to the school A, the researcher attended a staff meeting to introduce themselves and the project and to answer any questions. Following this they an email was sent out to all staff attaching participant information sheets and consent forms (PIS) (Appendix 5). The PIS set out the study's aims; what the study would involve and what time the participants would be asked to give; participation was voluntary and there was no obligation by staff to participate; they had a right to anonymity and a right to withdraw up to the point the data had been analysed and how the results from the study would be disseminated. A second ethics application notified the committee that due to a lack of participants up to three schools would be involved and a further option to participate through Microsoft teams was requested to improve access. This was approved by the ethics committee. School B, due to time constraints and practicalities did not have the researcher attend a staff meeting, however an updated PIS, including the option to participate through Microsoft teams, was emailed to all staff. Before beginning any interviews, the right to anonymity, the right to not answer any questions, to withdraw at any point prior to the data being analysed and verbal consent to go ahead and take part was discussed and gained.

Data and any personal information were handled and stored on a laptop that is password protected and in line with the Data Protection Act 2018 (DPA, 2018) and UK General Data Protection Regulation (UK GDPR), and the University of East Anglia's

Research Data Management Policy. All mentions of the schools and any identifying aspects (i.e. LA or area) as well as names of individuals brought up in the interviews.

A further ethical consideration was that the adult participants would be invited to explore what may be a sensitive issue for them in relation to supporting children that may have experienced trauma. Therefore, the projects aim was made explicit in the PIS so participants were aware of the area that would be discussed and the researcher checked in and clarified support available to them if need. This included other colleagues, line managers or occupational health should it be required. As far as the researcher is aware this was not needed.

## **Findings**

*“...it would be amazing if we were all trauma informed, but you don't need to have us all as practitioners because it rolls on, it ripples down....” (P6)*

After the analysis of transcripts (Appendix 3), themes and sub-themes were developed which allowed for the development of a framework (forming the acronym RIPPLE) which highlighted the experiences of staff and pointed to relevant considerations when implementing a trauma-informed approach in schools. A summary of the themes and subthemes are shown in the thematic map below:

**Figure 1**

*Thematic Map of Themes and Subthemes derived from analysis*



Extracts from transcripts are used to illustrate the themes and subthemes.

### **Theme 1: (R) Relationships and Connections**

The theme 'Relationships and connections' reflected views expressed across the dataset of various ways relationships are built when working in a nurturing, relational and trauma informed way, having knowledge of the significance of positive relationships and how personal connections have been improved.

#### ***Subtheme 1a: Building relationships and connections with CYP and parents***

Some participants indicated that there is a real emphasis on relationships when working this way:

**P1:** *"...what I do know is the relationship is absolutely key...."*

**P2:** *"...being mindful of our approach to sort of behaviour is different to other schools that I've worked in and knowing that we are, we do focus more on building those relationships...."*

Further to this, participants shared that working in this way promotes the building of relationships and connections and offers children the opportunity to have an alternative relational experience to those they may have had before.

**P1:** *"...what we know is that if we increase the levels of control around our interactions with that child, is that they never learn trust and they never build that kind of you know, and the rupture and repair as well, because often they're in a home that may still be quite traumatic and often those relationships aren't repaired, they rupture and they stay unrepaired..."*

This participant also alludes to the importance of repairing ruptures and building trust, as both will promote the building of those relationships through offering a sense of safety for the child. This aspect was also referred to by another participant:

**P7:** “...to know that that child then has got some faith in you and that you're gonna follow through on what you're saying. That's not necessarily their experience....”

The significance of relationships came through from some participants not just in relation to working with the child but also the parents, and how this is important to offering continuing support:

**P8:** “.... I think we had previous families that would just drag their children out of school because they didn't like the process. Once again, we took a, come in, come and talk, what aren't we getting right? OK, what can we do differently? You know, once you've got them a bit more malleable and on board and maybe have the concept of what we're trying to do...”

This suggesting the building of both relationships with the families and also children, because they are both being offered opportunities by staff to feel understood and heard.

Participants across the data expressed their experiences of different ways they had attempted to make connections and build relationships. Those who had not had the same level of training as the trauma practitioners, spoke about ways they attempted to make connections that enabled the child to be free of expectations. This was illustrated in the following extracts:

**P5:** “...me personally, I just try and find common ground with them, just to try and, not be the teacher, not be the [pause], but just be....”

**P2:** “...I would try and get down to their level and try and see if they want to come to a separate area with me, or yeah, somewhere quieter....”

Both quotes imply experiences that encourage meeting the child where they are and not imposing any sense of authority, which can also facilitate the building of trust and safety.

### **Subtheme 1b: Acknowledgement of emotions**

Some participants highlighted the use of validating an individual's emotions to support connections and meet the individual where they are, which can facilitate the building of relationships. One participant, expressed an element of their practice picked up by observing colleagues that illustrates this:

**P3:** *"...getting down to their level and sort of acknowledging, not saying everything will be alright but saying 'I can see that you are feeling', so naming it and saying things like 'I can understand how hard that is for you' and 'we're here for you' but not pretending it's not there or its okay but acknowledging it all...."*

Another shared an experience of supporting a colleague to work with a child who found it difficult to verbally express her worries and concerns. A key aspect of building the relationship between the child and TA was the acknowledgement of their emotions and meeting the child where they were. The participant expressed,

**P6:** *"... you can't fix things, can you? You can't fix it. So sometimes you just need to acknowledge it and that worry book kept going forwards and back and eventually now she now speaks, so it worked didn't it, and you just, then you can have, that TA has now got that relationship because she acknowledged that. She gave her acknowledgement that that emotion, that feeling was okay..."*

This was also expressed by a participant in relation to making connections with parents,

**P1:** *"...often they will laugh at my little sentence stem, 'I can hear what you're saying, I don't agree, I don't disagree, I'm just hearing what you are saying', and I'll often say 'I can really hear what you're saying', 'I can hear how angry you are about*

*that, I can hear how frustrated you are', you're not agreeing with them you are just bringing it down...."*

### **Sub-theme 1c: Application of humanistic/child centred principles**

The sub-theme 'application of humanistic/child centred principles' reflects views expressed across the dataset in relation to staff applying more nurturing, relational aspects through becoming trauma informed schools, which are underpinned by humanistic/child centred principles and also contribute to the building of connections and relationships.

Some participants expressed the importance of giving children a voice and allowing them to be heard, which is central to child centred practices and the view of not doing to them but doing with them. One participant explicitly shared they saw value in children having a voice:

**P1:** *"...I think children's voice is a major value thing for me and hearing them, even, even if it feels really unreasonable, even to you, not from their point of view [...] receiving that message they need to give...."*

This participant implied they were almost trying to get into the child's shoes and enter their world, to gain that full understanding of what their experience may be, irrespective of how it is seen through an adult lens. Attempting this level of understanding serves to build connections and ultimately trust particularly with children that may struggle with this, if they have had negative life experiences and trust is an issue. Some participants also reflected on how allowing children to be heard build's trust which is essential to building relationships:

**P6:** *"...there's one child at the moment who 100% understood her feelings but didn't feel her feelings were being listened to, so she was using a worry, err a book, I think it was at home, and I said but does anyone read it? No, so I have a timer on my*



*watch and at five to three I just pull her out, we pay a quick game and we talk it through....”*

Further, some participants reflected on how children giving their views and using their voices is encouraged and that the transition to a trauma informed approach has enabled this:

**P4:** *“...there’s time for them to talk and I don’t think we had as much time for them to talk before so it’s more, we’re allowing children to be more open....”*

**P8:** *“...I had a conversation with a pupil who struggled off and on for a couple of years and I was meeting with him regularly with mum and I said to him. What else can we do? You know what else can we do? Because you know, we’ve tried this, we’ve tried that, but and he just said I need more help. And I said, well, would you like me to fill in a form to see if you can go to a different school where they can give you more help? And he said yes, please....”*

This participant demonstrated the importance of how even those bigger decisions about a child’s future should encompass their voice, as this can support the child to feel included and can help the members of staff feel they are doing the best for the child; it becomes a more collaborative process.

Some participants also expressed the importance of working with the child’s interests and taking the time to get to know their likes and dislikes, which also helps connections and builds relationships. Participants spoke about how being aware of this can support them to make that connection with a child particularly during times when they are finding things difficult and maybe experiencing dysregulation. One participant expressed,

**P6:** *“.....it is just as simple as sparking that conversation up and it’s also knowing with children, we have one girl that loves cats, I hate cats, but when I’m with her, I make sure that I pretend I love cats, because I know that will, that’s a subject that you can talk about that will distract her...”*

A further example of trying to enter the child’s world and connect with them, irrespective of the staff’s own interests and how they view things. This participant was also explicit in her view of how easy they felt it can be to make that connection if the child is known well. Another participant demonstrated the importance of knowing the child’s interests as a way to support connection,

**P5:** *“.... I know that someone likes a certain football team or someone likes certain toys and things and for my interaction with them, just try and get some common ground with them really so that I can just take, hopefully take their mind off what is upsetting them at that particular time....”*

Following on from this a further concept that some participants expressed when talking about their experiences was the importance of acknowledging each child as an individual:

**P3:** *“.... we greet everyone every morning with a hello, every single child, I mean I’m on the gate every morning with year 1 and we say hello in person to every child and say you know notice a new coat, or notice umm the birthday badge and we make a point of making each child feel very welcome into their school environment....”*

Indicating that every child is shown that they are seen, that they are not just one of many and links to the concept of the importance of welcome. Another participant expressed that staff can offer the child an alternative experience through making even a small connection with them:

**P6:** “... actually maybe, nobody actually acknowledges them at home so to have that through the corridor that’s enough just, it doesn’t need to be anything more than that...”

In addition, participants across the whole dataset reflected on different ways that individual needs are responded to through working in this way, indicating how important it is to really know the child as an individual:

**P1:** “.... it’s knowing them, it’s knowing them as a little person.... high expectations which sometimes we do have to change, having a high expectation for that child might be different to having a high expectation for that child...”

Demonstrating that flexibility and an individual approach is required, that takes into account a child’s complexity and individual experiences was reflected in the quote:

**P3:** “...the way we treat that child would be probably different umm or just ex, you’d give them extra leeway if you saw behaviours that perhaps you might challenge in another situation...”

## **Theme 2: (I) Insight gained**

The theme ‘Insight gained’ explores a core concept highlighted in various ways across the dataset, which is that working in a trauma informed school has contributed to staff development both within themselves, as well as within their school roles.

### ***Sub-theme 2a: Intrapersonal insight***

Some participants, reflected experiencing further self-awareness of what is going on for them as a result of the school implementation:

**P4:** “...I think it’s made me more understanding and more aware”.

They made this comment in relation to their own needs, what they find uncomfortable and difficult, and when they are feeling a sense of vulnerability working with those that maybe

also experiencing this. This had resulted in heightened awareness of their experience of themselves and in turn their responses which was noted by a number of participants:

**P7:** *“...also recognising when you’re in that zone as well. So, actually catching yourself if you’re about to maybe react in a way that wouldn’t be trauma informed....”*

**P6:** *“...I think we need to remain curious as to why that person triggers you, what is that? What are they doing? What is that making us feel and why are we feeling like that? Because actually, if you can address that it might be that you can shift that and work that out...”*

Suggesting that having that awareness of what we bring to each interaction and situation (which will be linked to individual histories, past experiences and knowledge) can be a support in making choices about how an individual responds in a number of situations and interactions. Therefore, working in this way can be supportive in facilitating the growth of our understanding of our own process. Which essentially raises the concept that it also enables reflective thinking (introspection).

Some participants shared some experiences that indicated they were being reflective, more considerate and questioning things further as well as checking in with themselves and with colleagues.

**P7:** *“....I don't know that I would have, I don't know, when it comes down to a safeguarding perspective and you're looking at things from a different perspective I think the trauma informed approach, I think it does make me look at things because I am constantly going, oh God, I'm wondering if maybe happens, something's not sitting quite right, you know, I'm thinking, could this be...” .*

**P1:** *"...I don't know if we managed that right today, do you think if we'd have done this differently and then someone will go, nope, or someone will go I wonder if we did that or we'd have pulled back a bit earlier and we'd gone in a bit earlier, or if we'd have thought about saying it in a slightly different way..."*

These quotes also indicate a sense of curiosity around what their thoughts and feelings maybe telling them.

It was evident from the findings that demonstrating this approach supports looking deeper and really unpicking and reflecting on what is underlying an interaction or situation rather than just dealing with what is seen in the moment. It also highlights the consideration of both parties within an interaction, their role in that, and what they bring as being reflected on, that is, how the development of the intrapersonal can support the interpersonal. These findings show that interactions do not happen in isolation. By raising their awareness of self and their own process and having the ability to reflect, staff are acknowledging their role and taking some responsibility for it, through reflecting on what changes can be made for future interactions. This also links to the collaborative and support element of working with colleagues in the 'Promoting staff support and cohesion' theme outlined later.

Some participants talked about how their perspectives had shifted and spoke quite explicitly about this:

**P4:** *"...I think that this whole approach has changed our way of thinking, and thinking beyond the behaviour..."*

**P7:** *"...there's that pragmatic part that I don't necessarily think was always there, or I had an understanding of, you know, that rational part of me going this is in your control, this is out of your control."*

Further to this, another participant inferred a shift within how they saw things and linked it to their personal lives and experiences:

**P6:** *"... I did have emotionally available adults at the time when I was younger, I think in my head, I was emotionally available for like my children and people, but I think that's just maybe how you are brought up as well isn't it, like, so for me that part, wasn't anything, I feel like that's just normal to be that. However, I now do see that it's not normal for everybody and I think that that's one of my changes."*

Other participants commented on developing further insight into the influence of their past. One participant when talking about their individual experiences of who was emotionally available for them shared:

**P7:** *"...when you can bring those examples back and reflect and kind of go crikey, you know, as a kid that, you know, that was very much kind of on my radar. And, you know, this is maybe why I trust my gut instinct a little bit more and things now, whereas again, I don't know that I would have..."*

All these quotes link to being more introspective and infers becoming more attuned and connected to themselves. In relation to this, there was mention of a reconnection with their inner child and that part of themselves that is playful which is often lost when we become adults. These quotes indicate further awareness of self and working in a more relational nurturing way, but also reconnecting with the playful child part.

**P5:** *".... I had an incidence earlier this week where I played dinosaurs with a little boy just trying to distract them from, [laughter] I made a complete prat of myself [laughter]..."*

**P7:** *"... try to do the voices and actually just letting yourself go, all the things that you would not have, I would never imagine myself to be, like, orrrr with a dinosaur,*

*you know, you know, all of those silly, silly things. They're just, they're really lovely. They're really characterful with those children as well and with me, you know...."*

Working in this way also indicated a growth and insight in and a validation of staff's abilities and this was expressed by some participants:

**P7:** *"... actually what being a trauma informed practitioner and, you know, being part of a trauma informed school is, it's given me confidence to have conversations that I might not have been able to have before and you know my job is I have to have difficult conversations..."*

Giving a further example that insight from working in this way has initiated growth within the self, consequently aiding the participant, in a professional capacity also.

Half of the participants across both schools indicated applying elements of working in a trauma informed way not only within the school environment but across wider contexts within their lives.

**P1:** *"...having that trauma informed lens not just on the children and the complex children but on all things is really, really helpful..."*

**P4:** *"I think a lot of the things that we've put in place over the last five years have changed my understanding of being a [role] and just of life, yeah I genuinely do..."*

This suggests a change in perspective, increase in awareness and understanding has both an influence on the participant, impacts their role and is taken into the wider systems around them, such as the home:

**P6** *"....at home your using the same approach and its quite, I find it, I find it's really helped my homelife actually if you know what I mean...."*

This process of 'rippling' into the wider community and within society was noted:

**P7:** *"...I think sometimes you would, in an environment outside, you might kind of go ah ok, I totally understand that things aren't quite working for them, understanding that somethings are not in your control and you can't help everybody. And you know, I think as a balance or, you know it personally and professionally, I feel like it's helped me an awful lot."*

Therefore, taking that new understanding and view of things, considering how it impacts on the self, which enables noticing and reflection and then leads to a change in response which could ultimately be less reactive and more considered.

### ***Sub-theme 2b: Professional insight***

The sub-theme 'professional insight' explores the concepts that growth and insight have been developed through working in a school that has embedded a trauma informed approach and this is expressed in various ways across the dataset. This was particularly evident in relation to participant's roles in school, through their practice such as, developing further understanding and being nurturing and consistent in their approach to facilitate safety for the children they are working with.

The data indicated a key insight that comes from working in a way that takes a trauma informed approach, is that staff have gained and are demonstrating through their practice, further awareness and understanding of there being various underlying reasons for behaviour. Some participants described it as *"...getting to the route of what's going on..."* (P5) and *"...understanding the child's needs at a deeper level..."* (P4). This was inferred by participants across the dataset and came across as an essential aspect in supporting all children and young people, with a need to recognise the child's lived experience:

**P1:** *"...if I've got a child who is really dysregulated one of the first things is I'm wondering why that is happening and then obviously it's about being really curious*



*about that, unpicking their background, unpicking maybe what even happened that morning.”*

This alludes to the need to really know children, so that ultimately staff can be responsive and support in a way that is best for the child.

Linked to this, there was expression around different elements of transitioning to working in a trauma informed way with children:

**P6:** *“...I think the biggest change is to think they are not doing it just for attention, they might be doing it for attention but why are they wanting that attention? It isn't just they're an attention seeker, they're the class clown, it will be, there will be a reason behind it and to try and break that....”*

This infers that staff need to recognise that every child has their own story and there will be a complexity to each of their situations. What was also taken from this was that there is more awareness of the value of taking a holistic view of a child and that having this understanding can help to support staff to support the child. To offer them an alternative to their historical experiences and to attempt to meet some of their unmet needs.

Following on from developing further insight into what underlies behaviour is that some participants, expressed the importance of accepting the child and supporting them irrespective of behaviour. This is linked to having that understanding of what might trigger a child or young person's responses and how the approach supports them:

**P1:** *“...sometimes you know the children do hurt us, you know, and it's about allowing that rupture to happen and then repairing that, not just pushing them out of our school even further....”*

**P8:** *“...we're going to keep you safe and, not, ohh, look what you're doing, now we're gonna get rid of you....”*

A further indication of working in collaboration that was indicated across the data was sharing information across teams in relation to children's needs, thereby helping to inform staff responses and support of the children. One participant indicated that having this information is supportive in raising staff awareness:

**P3:** *"...often in the briefing notes it will have a message that will say please can all adults that come across this person give them extra love, so we all then know okay something horrible has happened and we know that we have to be particularly mindful..."*

This also gives staff that mutual understanding of a child's needs and helps to inform a consistency of approach. Sharing of information as being supportive in relation to good practice was also raised by another participant:

**P7:** *"...we are seeking out things that have been on TV and we'd share that on an email between staff. It'd be like ohh did anybody catch this two-part documentary this is very similar to what we're dealing with this child."*

Another indication that staff have developed insight into their professional role of supporting children, was in relation to them recognising that taking a more nurturing and enquiring approach 'ripples down' to raise awareness and inquisitiveness within the children.

**P4:** *"...I think we are trying to encourage the children to be more open with us, not just with us but in general ..."*

**P6:** *"...I do think going forward it will make everyone coming out of this school more open minded and curious as well, I think the children are, I think our children are curious, and will ask other children well why are you feeling sad?..."*

This suggests that working in this way has demonstrated to this participant how elements of the approach can be applied by children and used potentially by their future selves.

Some participants also indicated that working in this way supported them in recognising the impact it can have on future outcomes for children, “...as much as its to help them now, it is, it’s a life thing for those children...” (P6). Participants inferred that taking a more relational nurturing approach can make a wider difference to the lives of children and young people. One participant when talking about the transition to a trauma informed approach, expressed,

**P7:** “...I think the more we kinda done it and then realized why we’re doing it and what we’re trying to elicit from that experience and what we’re not looking at, just the here and now, we’re looking at beyond this. We want them to have the best chance that they can go off and thrive in secondary and adulthood and whatever...”

This participant indicating that working in this way supported the recognition that this is wider than the ‘now’ it’s more than helping them to reach their potential in an academic sense and it’s about supporting them holistically and helping them flourish along whichever path they chose. Another participant indicated that children’s future role could be supportive of others within the systems close to them which could then permeate into society:

**P6:** “...so we’re teaching them when their eighteen and doing whatever they’re doing and somebody gets really annoyed at the pub, that hopefully they’ll remember what we’ve done and they can help each other as well. I think that that’s important that you might not be the child with the high ACE score that needs us but you might be the child that learns something that could help somebody else or help someone with in your family unit...”

This participant is again reflecting 'a ripple'. That this can be taken wider and support future generations. That something else is being offered that is different to what children may have experienced before and how that something different, even if small could impact on the journey they take as they move forward in life.

Another professional insight shared by some participants was recognising the value in how language is used and how the consistency in this is important when supporting children but also for staff. One participant expressed,

**P1:** *"...I wonder I notice, I imagine, all doing that with empathy and really attuning to those children really helps. So, and you only, you don't need to do that like loads but I think just that language really helps and just using those sentence stems really helps..."*

This participant suggests that the language demonstrates curiosity from the adult about what the child maybe experiencing, which will support interactions and relationships. The consistent use of language again becomes a way of being which can be used within interactions with a range of individuals. Another participant shared,

**P7:** *"...you know, kids saying I did have a blip, but I, you know, I pulled it, pulled myself out of it ohh, what was your blip about? You know, all of those things that we wouldn't have called it that before, we probably would have said they were negative or they were naughty ...."*

This participant suggesting that not only have staff changed the way they speak to children, so to be more nurturing and understanding, but implies that the children are picking up the language and using it themselves, which links to the point made above in relation to the 'ripple' and how it can impact on future outcomes.

In addition, and linked to the concept of consistency in language, some participants also raised how they could also see that consistency as a whole, in the approach, when it is implemented, is significant in facilitating a sense of safety. Which as evidence shows, is essential when supporting those who are encountering negative and difficult life experiences:

**P3:** *“.... the children know that there’s a consistency among all adults, that you’re not gonna, you’re not gonna get like a shouty person and a not shouty person, your just gonna have this calmness...”*

**P2:** *“...I suppose it offers the feeling of safety, of knowing what’s coming [...] I think it’s just allowing children the time to almost process it, if there are any changes going and yeah just that feeling of safety that they are going to know what to expect....”*

A nuanced concept in relation to this, that was shared by some participants when talking about aspects of the approach that they felt work well, was how consistent boundaries can help to also facilitate safety,

**P7:** *“.... they've had such inconsistency; they've had people set up to fail them. And when you all see it and you're all going, it's OK, I get it. It's not OK to hurt me. It's not OK to, you know, damage property, but it's OK to feel. Yeah, it's OK to, you know, not know why you feel that way....”*

These quotes suggest the importance of setting boundaries to facilitate physical and psychological safety and permission to experience whatever they are experiencing; however, it also offers an acceptance of the individual, irrespective of their behaviour.

Further aspects that came through across the data from many participants was the concept of working in a way that does not shame children or label them disruptive and

naughty; gaining professional insight into the importance of working in this way. Working in a way that avoids shaming children was illustrated by participants expressing,

**P4:** *"...it's about us being more nurturing, umm cause obviously we don't want to be reprimanding in public, we're trying to umm do it in private..."*

**P7:** *"...it's very important to make sure that those children are taken away and those individual conversations are had because actually we're not trying to embarrass.*

*We're not trying to provoke a negative reaction..."*

This suggests that working in this way is beneficial to the child and how they may respond to the need for intervention. In relation to not labelling them, participants illustrated this through sharing:

**P1:** *"...the behaviour is separate from the child [...] I don't think any child is naughty on purpose...."*

Further one participant expressed,

**P4:** *"...there's a child in my class at the moment, and he struggles to concentrate, somebody else could look and, I'm going to use that word again, naughty, and say oh that child's naughty, but they're not and I think that this whole approach has changed our way of thinking...."*

A further example of gaining insight and changing perspectives but also highlighting that not everyone will see it the same way, within or outside of the school context.

Finally, participants expressed, that they felt the approach was *"a bit revolutionary"* (**P7**) in the professional sense of working with children and young people, implying having had a beneficial impact. This was also explicitly expressed by another participant:

**P3:** *"...the behaviour in the, in the junior school was awful and very inconsistent and a lot of shouting, so it's been completely revolutionised absolutely definitely..."*

### **Theme 3: (P) Promoting staff cohesion and support**

The theme 'promoting staff cohesion and support' reflected views expressed in various ways across the dataset of a culture within the schools implementing a trauma informed approach that promotes support, cohesion and collaboration amongst their staff.

#### ***Subtheme 3a: Support from within***

Participants expressed what felt like a strong collaborative aspect to working together and being able to share in what at times can be difficult when supporting children with a high level of need. Participants expressed how in their view the trauma informed approach could not be delivered individually and that they value having their colleagues alongside them:

**P1:** *".... I think being in a team and being able to say actually I think today was really tough and I don't know if we got that right...."*

**P2:** *"...it's quite useful to be able to talk about an incident afterwards with someone else who has experienced the same sort of thing...."*

These quotes give an indication that they are sharing in experiences, which is supportive, as it promotes reflection, which can enhance wellbeing. A further participant also expressed the collaborative nature of working as a team,

**P8:** *"...and there's occasion where it takes all of us to sit around a table and think about what's happening and what the triggers are [...] and what we need to do to do things differently, and we'll do that, but it feels much more like it's a team effort in that and it's not, you know, just the SLT..."*

This also indicated a sense of collective responsibility when working in this way, "we all swoop in and we all deal with it" (**P3**) reducing the emphasis of a top-down approach and

bringing staff together (that know the children and young people best) to share views and inform decisions.

This was expressed further by some participants when talking about supporting children alongside colleagues,

**P3:** *"...I would never walk past a child that was, you know I wouldn't just assume that was someone else's responsibility, I'd always either support another colleague [...] yeah it's just everyone's responsibility to support those children"*

**P8:** *"...you need to be all people having responsibility. And I think that's what trauma informed does. It is not looking to the SLT to make decisions and what needs to be done..."*

These quotes highlight how supporting the children and each other leads to acknowledging a cohesive approach that brings staff together in what feels like a shared endeavour.

A further concept that came through from some participants and is supportive for staff in facilitating cohesion and togetherness, is staff modelling of a trauma informed approach for other staff members across the schools:

**P2:** *"...it's just picking up bits and observing the people that are trained and sort of picking up the bits that they are doing and how you can relate it to yourself in your practice going forward really."*

Learning from each other and feeling supported in doing so. Another participant described aspects of the approach as *"....it ripples down..."* Implying a sense of collectiveness that comes from staff modelling, and observation of practice, this participant expressed,



**P6:** *"...its everybody isn't it, it's us all and I think when you start saying like phrases back to people, if that phrase has meant something to like, if something like oh that made me feel really good or that, you then pass it on don't you, so you don't need to have everybody, I mean it would be amazing if we were all trauma informed, but you don't need to have us all as practitioners because it rolls on, it ripples down...."*

This participant implied a sense of the approach being embedded and almost contagious throughout the practices of a staff that are supportive and connected - it becomes a part of all those working within it. A culture of cohesion across staff in applying a trauma informed approach was also described as being ".... it's *in the air*...." (P1) and "...it's sort of *within our bricks and mortar now*..." (P8).

### **Subtheme 3b: Recognition of own and others support needs**

There were indications of an enhanced experience of attunement between staff in recognising each other's needs. One participant who had completed the TISUK training with a colleague indicated they were more attuned to the other's needs,

**P6:** *"...we were quite open with each other, so I probably now understand her more, so therefore can think oh she needs to not be with that person right now because that's gonna, that's not a good combo right now."*

This participant implies that knowing this colleague well helps them to experience empathy for what they may be experiencing, which facilitates the necessity to check in with them and/or offer support.

There were also indications from some participants that they recognise when they need support and feel able to reach out for it. One participant indicated the importance of needing support when identifying being triggered by a situation and having an awareness that it is best to remove themselves:

**P6:** *"...it's important for us to go we need to swap because they're pushing my buttons right now, and that's okay cause we are human...."* This participant also indicates a sense of feeling safe enough to express their vulnerabilities and the need to step back and to ask for someone else to step in. Another participant shared,

**P3:** *"...we know when we step away, not that we'd leave a child on their own but we'd always call for back up if we knew that we couldn't remain calm and emotionally available for them and that's a really important side to it...."*

This also indicates experiencing safety to reach out when needed, with an awareness that someone will be there. This could come from feeling a sense of belonging that is offered through the development of a supportive team, which in turn can alleviate pressures and enhance staff wellbeing. In a further example in relation to talking about reaching out for support from colleagues, one participant expressed:

**P7:** *"....me having those conversations with myself, but also verbalizing them with people and not pushing people away from that allows me to not be stressed in a way that I possibly was in the past."*

There is therefore an indication of a shift in how this participant copes with the challenges they encounter, due to now experiencing a working environment that is facilitating openness and honesty about their experiences and that they feel held and supported by those around them.

Some participants also indicated that they do not feel alone in working this way. One participant expressed when talking about establishing rapport with a child and finding it difficult,

**P2:** *"...knowing that there are others around in the team who will be able to connect is obviously, so just sort of passing it up and going to someone else about it."*

Further, some participants indicated that they feel listened to and included, "*I feel very respected and heard....*" (P3) while another participant shared,

**P7:** "*... I've never found a time where I feel like I've not been heard, you know again that's a real support of our team...*" this participant also shared, "*.... I don't know that I would have had the same conversation with [SLT]. Would I have even spoken to her. Would I have had let it stew me up? Would I have continued to let it [pause] would I have felt confident enough to say actually, I'm not sure that we go this quite right.*"

These comments demonstrate a recognition of change in how this participant thinks, feels and would approach a situation due to experiencing a more cohesive, collaborative and open way of working. Therefore, a key concept within this theme that came through across the data was of support being experienced as mutual across colleagues, irrespective of their roles within school. This can all add to experiencing a sense of being valued for their contributions in the role that they do and enhance staff cohesion.

### ***Subtheme 3c: Support from above and around***

Furthermore, there were participants expressing their sense of feeling fully supported by SLT and them being very much part of implementing the trauma informed approach and indicated experiencing them as being alongside staff and doing it with them:

**P1:** "*...our headteacher is absolutely on board, she did the training, she really gets it, our heads of school, they get it....*" Further when talking about needing to go to SLT for support one participant shared:

**P4:** "*...I think just having the process really explained to me, when I do go and say right ohh this person's upset, when they are really open, I think that's really helpful...*"

The honesty and exposure of what they find difficult and need support with, was recognised further by another participant who expressed,

**P6:** *"...I think our head is quite open [...] she makes herself human which I don't think always happens with the boss does it? So, I think we're very lucky that we are led by example, she is completely honest about her umm not even weaknesses are they [...] her vulnerabilities as well, so I think therefore it's okay, so if she can do then we can all do it can't we...."*

This participant indicates that honesty and sharing of what members of SLT find challenging and difficult within themselves, gives staff permission to also experience and be open with colleagues about it. This can increase the likelihood of a culture of mutual support, as they are demonstrating a similarity in experiences irrespective of role and this promotes whole staff cohesion.

Another concept that came through the data from some participants was that having a separate nurture team was really valuable in supporting staff, particularly as it was recognised that for teachers managing many children's needs when teaching a class, meant it was difficult for them to fully support those who, for example are experiencing emotional dysregulation:

**P3:** *"... we've got inclusion facilitators now in each phase that are sort of floating TAs that are picking up these children that are exiting or just not coping, umm which is great, that's made an impact this year, definitely..."*

Another participant when talking about the nurture team expressed, *"... it does affect us positively; it might not be us dealing with it directly but it all has an impact."* (P4).

#### **Theme 4: (P) Psychological and emotional Impact**

The theme 'Psychological and emotional impact' reflected views expressed across the dataset, of the psychological and emotional impact that can be experienced working in a school that has embedded a trauma informed approach. Some participants indicated experiencing it as emotionally demanding and difficult particularly when feeling vulnerable themselves, however some also indicated that it can support vulnerabilities and increase emotional availability.

Participants indicated that working in this way is emotionally demanding and difficult and at times psychologically and emotionally exhausting. One participant when talking about the transition to working in a trauma informed way, alluded to needing to give so much more of yourself to work at a deeper level to meet children where they are and be able to support them.

**P1:** *"... it's much harder, a lot more emotional energy is needed and resilience and because you know you are absolutely, because you are empathising with these young people so much in order to understand where their behaviour is coming from, you feel shattered sometimes by it..."*

Another participant expressed,

**P2** *"...I feel I suppose, when you are not being able to connect and not, you don't know how, what is the best way to move forward with this child, it does feel a bit sort of, I don't know how to describe it, just umm knowing that you are not enough for what they need I suppose, that can be quite a negative experience..."*

This infers a possible psychological and emotional impact can be experienced when attempting to meet the child and being unsuccessful in doing so. Something such as this could also link into staff's personal experiences and be more impactful for some more than others. It could also be perceived as going against what staff are trying to achieve if they

are wanting to make a difference. This impact was further illustrated by one participant sharing,

**P8:** *"...it's harder and emotionally draining for staff and sometimes can be really, when we've got a really challenging pupil struggling, it's a good few, it can take months for that child to be OK. It's not 5 minutes, it's not a week, so it can be really challenging for staff when it's sort of day after day...."*

The need for staff to continually show up in this way suggests that persistence, resilience and endurance may be necessary when working with some children that have had negative life experiences and acceptance that this will take its toll on staff at times. This also links into the theme of 'Promoting staff cohesion and support' as it found staff support to be invaluable particularly when staff recognise, they may have reached their psychological and emotional limits or are close to it.

Some participants also expressed how this psychological and emotional impact can be felt further when they are experiencing a sense of vulnerability. When talking about a relationship with a parent they had been working with, one participant expressed,

**P1:** *"...but this was a big rupture, there had been lots of little ruptures where she had, I don't know told me to f\*\*k off or you know those kinds of things, but that was okay, but this was physical aggression and that was on a different level..."*

Another participant shared,

**P7:** *"...sometimes it's really, really tricky to be really playful, accepting when you've been getting a bit of a bashing and [...] there's a few of us who've took a real pounding, and for you to then be able to continue that...."*

Both indicating participants shared examples of an experience that alluded to a threat to their sense of safety, both from working with children and parents. This would likely have

an impact on their capacity to psychologically and emotionally show up and continue to support in a nurturing, relational, accepting and playful way.

However, the experience of the emotional challenges was sometimes highlighted as having an ultimate positive psychological impact. Participants indicated that working in this way can be supportive for staff when they feel vulnerable:

**P6:** *"...I worked in adult care beforehand and I feel like there was you know you had to be tough and now that's not how I feel now, you don't have to be tough, you can you know you can just be what you are and that's okay..."*

Another participant alluded to their emotional capacity to support those at a deeper level as being increased by working in this way, *"...I think it, makes you a bit softer, makes you, well me, because I wasn't, I'm not that sort of person naturally so to have that brought out of me more..."* (P4)

### **Theme 5: (L) Lining up of values**

The theme 'Lining up of values' reflected views expressed across the dataset, of various links between a trauma informed way of working and participants own personal values. Some participants from both schools indicated that the approach had confirmed their beliefs and validated some of their perspectives.

Some participants indicated that working in a trauma informed way fits well with some of their own personal values, and explicitly shared some values, which are illustrated in the data with participants expressing, *"...compassion for each of the children..."* (P2) and *"...being curious about why, and not judging..."* (P3). Some participants also expressed explicitly that it was *"morally right"* to work in this way, which was quite a powerful message that demonstrates a strong connection for some of this approach to their personal values. This is illustrated in the data by participants when talking about the transition to becoming a trauma informed school:

**P8:** *“...I think morally we're doing the right thing by children now [...] the right thing is actually really difficult. But, you know, it's the right thing to do. And that's why I don't, I don't underestimate how challenging it is to implement a trauma informed approach ....”*

**P1:** *“...I suppose my big thing is I feel trauma informed practice is a moral imperative umm because it's the right thing to do for children and why wouldn't you do that...”*

Other participants expressed ways that the approach and working in this way confirmed some of their beliefs and validated their existing perspectives, one participant expressed when talking about what the training and working in this way offered them *“...I think my values and beliefs have always been a child rights, but I didn't have the language to wrap around that...”* (P1). This participant went on to share,

**P1:** *“.... it's kind of interesting because when I did my training to me it was like ooh my goodness thank goodness for that, because I then felt I'd got all this scientific base for how I've always been ....”*

This suggests that what underpins the approach was experienced by this participant as authenticating who they are and how they see the world. This presents as a positive thing for this participant and expressed as offering them a sense of relief in it helping to make more sense of things. Another participant when talking about the approach shared,

**P3** *“...oh it's weird because I didn't know about it and now I do I'm like yeah that does, that does align with what I've always thought but I didn't have that as part of my work life...”*

This alludes to the approach initiating a 'light bulb moment' for this participant in recognising how close it fits with their beliefs and values and also infers a type of



evolution, in terms of applying those aspects that resonate with beliefs and values across different contexts within their life.

One participant explicitly talked about empathy and how working in this way helped them recognise their capacity for applying this with others, they expressed,

**P7:** *"...I don't think I'd realised just how empathetic I was until really exploring PACE and, you know, actually quite often there's parents, so you just like, they grab you and just give you a hug. We've got such a brilliant relationship, that for me, I am, you know. It's really important to be able to support people regardless of who they are, granddads, mums, nans grandads... Are you ok? Can I help you with anything? That definitely is something from my personal values..."*

This participant is alluding to how rewarding it is for them to be able to support others in an inclusive way, which implies that working in a way that enables you to enact your values and do what is important to you can be positive for wellbeing.

Another participant talked about how they saw their role in supporting children as having an impact on life outcomes and recognised the impact on breaking a cycle within society and implying this could be done through using the approach which sits in line with their own values:

**P3:** *"...I think about places like prisons and pretty much everyone in prisons there because their traumatised and no one has helped them and it's really sad, so yeah I think it, in that way it aligns to what I just feel like we should be doing to support people...."*

The participant when sharing this gave a strong sense of this feeling really important to them, that helping others was important to them which demonstrates again that this is part of their personal value system.

Other participants across both schools also indicated experiencing a sense of satisfaction in working in this way and in tapping into their value of supporting others:

**P2:** “... I mean for me it feels quite lovely in the fact that you can sort of connect with a child and be able to just support them to regulate themselves enough to re-engage...”

**P8:** “... you end your day just feeling a lot better about that, don't you? Like you come away thinking I've actually helped people today. Now surely that is like a better, a better way than thinking, well, I've punished 15 children today.”

These quotes illustrate the concept further, that working in a way that enables you to enact your values and do what is important to you is rewarding and supportive of wellbeing.

### **Theme 6: (E) Encountering friction with expectations and norms**

The theme ‘Encountering friction with expectations and norms’ reflected views expressed in various ways of the concept that it is difficult to go against years of a system that advocates for a punitive approach. Experiences of both staff and parents are likely to be based on these types of experiences which can make full acceptance of a paradigm shift particularly challenging particularly if it is not fully understood.

#### ***Subtheme 6a: Friction with parents’ beliefs***

Some participants reflected that some parents within the school communities lacked an understanding of a trauma informed approach and how the schools were now managing behaviour. When talking about what they find tricky about working with parents and following an incident where a child had become “*big dysregulated*”, one participant expressed,

**P1:** *".... parents want that child to be punished, and they use the word punished they don't use the word consequence or restorative practice or any of that, because it is and if they were you need to get the police involved, that needs to be identified as a hate crime, I mean they really can escalate it."*

This participant indicating that some parents are seeking punishment to an extreme. This could possibly come from their own experiences of school and a system that takes a punitive zero tolerance approach to behaviour. The approach that both schools are now taking are extremely different to those that parents have an understanding of and highlights that consideration of an alternative to what they are familiar with could be a difficult concept for them, particularly if what underpins it is not explained and understood.

One participant also implied this, as well as recognising how it can be difficult for staff to help parents understand the reasons for taking a trauma informed approach.

**P7:** *"When I try and explain that actually there's lots of stuff that happens behind closed doors and whilst it feels like sometimes these children are getting away with stuff, actually we work tirelessly with these families but obviously we can't tell you that, you know we can't tell you the ins and outs. I know that it feels like on the surface that we're not doing the right thing, but actually we're trying to make sure that these have got the best opportunity in life. It's hard, isn't it? it's hard to explain that."*

This participant also highlighted how it is difficult to support parents in understanding when consideration also needs to be given regarding confidentiality and passing on personal information. However, another participant acknowledged this and expressed how they could see it from a parent's perspective when talking about how a parent may view children's behaviour,

**P8:** “... I get it from an outside view. They can see those two, particularly when the two were together, could be, appear to parents to be very disrespectful and, you know, swearing that sort of stuff and don't see the inside stories, do they?”

### **Subtheme 6b: Friction from other staff**

Further, some participants expressed similar concepts in relation to staff. That it can be difficult to completely let go of the punitive aspect to behaviour and sometimes there are difficulties in reconciling some of the outcomes in relation to some incidences. Some participants implied that some staff felt the punitive aspect was now missing:

**P8:** “... we've got a, you know, some of these members of staff 50/60 years of one way of thinking and then you're going and here's a new way of thinking....

Completely new way, thinking we're not gonna punish them when they call you a \*\*\*\*\*. Whatever. And I'm not and that can be really challenging for them.”

**P3:** “I think sometimes we have staff that pay lip service to it and don't, I hear them say things like but 'I just don't understand why there isn't a consequence...’

Further, a couple of participants reflected on how staff buy in can be variable. One participant expressed, “...some people are also onboard in a much stronger way than others and believe in it a lot more strongly than others, it's a bit like any kind of spectrum, isn't it?” (P1). Also, that staff who were ultimately 'not on board' with the new approach and its concepts have gradually moved on. This suggests that encountering those societal norms using an approach that does not run alongside them maybe too challenging for some.

### **Subtheme 6c: Friction from within**

Some participants, implied experiencing a level of inner conflict in relation to the level of consequences given, at times, when working this way with children that have high

levels of need, particularly when someone gets hurt. This links to the theme of 'Lining up of values' and highlights some of the challenges this presents. This is illustrated in the following extracts; one participant reflected,

**P4:** *"...there's definitely deeper things that sometimes you have a fight with yourself because you believe that we want to be nurturing and supportive but there's a line that shouldn't be crossed in terms of behaviours [...] if someone's being hurt [...] if an adult's being hurt by a child or a child is being hurt by child there's a line [...] I think so..."*

This participant infers it can be a battle between nurture and discipline. Another participant shared,

**P7:** *"...I totally get why we keep people; I totally get why we go through all of the actions that we do in the restorative. But there's sometimes a bit of a breaking point and when it's gone on and on and on and it's just the same vicious cycle, there's part of you, that kind of, is almost wishful. Ah. You know, 'back in the old days', we know it's not the right way, but there's that part, you know? [...] Because, you know, you're doing the right thing. But at the same time, you yourself and colleagues, you don't want anyone getting hurt."*

This participant expresses and highlights that they feel they are doing the 'right thing' by working in a way that prioritises a nurturing approach, however they also imply that before the transition it may have been easier at times to use an approach that prioritises discipline. Working in a trauma informed way means predominantly staff are not looking to punish and exclude children when they do something that completely pushes boundaries, however these findings suggest that it can be really challenging for some of them, particularly when they have predominantly been raised in a school system that has been essentially about managing behaviour through punishment. This to them could be an

innate part of how they view things and even though some of the values that underpin the trauma informed approach such as being relational, nurturing and empathic resonate with them, there are still some values that may be challenged. Participants imply that this conflict can be an uncomfortable place to be.

A few of participants inferred that implementing the approach at times can be difficult, due to it not feeling in line with their value of fairness. One participant described their experiences of how they see the division of support, due to the school having many children with a high level of need that require priority. They expressed, *“so it’s a balance of yes, we are very inclusive, yes, we are very supportive but it takes other adults away from their own jobs and I think sometimes [...] yeah there’s a detriment to other children...”* (P3). Further another participant was discussing levels of consequences and implied that challenges are experienced, they shared *“...I’m quite a passionate person, and I’ve got quite strong beliefs, I’ve got an idea of what right and wrong is....”* when asked, they confirmed that fairness is important to them and during this time they implied it is challenged. This participant went on to further express,

**P4:** *“we have our behaviour policy in place but I think when you have got those children with the more challenging needs, they don’t necessarily always fit into that, so you have to be more flexible and have a different approach, even with the policy [laughter] ..... yeah because I think sometimes it fights against your morals”.*

For this participant it can go against some of their values. The participant made the point that this is only a small part, but acknowledged its presence.

On the other side of this was a couple of participants indicating that a trauma informed approach supports relationships between a child and an adult as being more equitable, which again is a concept that does not necessarily sit in line with societal norms

as often within society an adult is still viewed as in authority to a child. One participant expressed,

**P1:** *“...if you use a child’s rights perspective and a child agency approach that helps you navigate that a little bit more easily that they’ve got a right to those feelings and they’ve experienced that as a little person and so rather than an adult being in authority and the child being the subservient part of that relationship it’s an equal relationship [.....] I think coming from a child’s rights perspective really helps with a trauma informed approach.”*

## **Discussion**

This section explores the implications of the findings and how they address the research questions as well as how they link to existing literature. In addition, limitations of the study, implications for Educational Psychology practice and future research in this area of study will also be considered.

The literature around trauma informed approaches and practices from the perspectives of school staff undertaking a range of roles is limited, particularly in UK schools. The aim of this study therefore involved exploring how primary school staff experience the effects of working in a school that has embedded a trauma informed approach at a personal and professional level (RQ1). Further to this, it aimed to consider how staff values may be impacted when implementing a trauma informed approach (RQ1a) and what systemic considerations can be learnt from school staff’s experiences of implementing a trauma informed approach (RQ1b).

Reflexive Thematic Analysis was used to analyse the data from eight participants across two primary schools. Six themes were identified ‘**R**elationships and connections’, ‘**I**nsight gained’, ‘**P**romoting staff cohesion and support’, ‘**P**sychological and emotional

impact', 'Lining up of values' and 'Encountering friction with expectations and norms societal norms'.

In terms of the structure of the discussion, the above findings will be discussed in relation to the central research question and highlight the personal and professional staff experiences in relation to implementation in the context of existing research. While the themes: 'Lining up of Values and 'Encountering friction with expectation and norms' will be primarily discussed in light of research question 1a, it is acknowledged that there may be aspects within other key themes which also provide insight around the area of values. Finally, staff experiences linked to the research findings will be discussed in the context of what they indicate could be considered at a more systemic level when planning and supporting implementation of this approach (they are also summarised in Appendix 6).

Within this discussion, each theme will be taken in turn and how they answer the research questions will be examined, the relevant research questions will be treated separately, however it should be noted that they are not distinct and unrelated, since aspects of staff values and implementation considerations have been reflected explicitly (values) and implicitly (systemic implementation considerations) through the experiences and effects on the participants applying the approach.

### ***Relationships and connections***

Relationships are the underpinning of relational approaches. Whole school approaches that focus on aspects beyond just academic achievement need to be informed by an essential understanding of the role of relationships in creating hopeful futures for all children (Quinn et al., 2020). The findings from the current study identified the theme 'Relationships and connections' which highlighted that an effect of participants working this way was the forming of strong supportive relationships with their colleagues (which also links to the 'Promoting staff cohesion and support' theme). Gaffney et al. (2004) found in



their study that collaborative and supportive relationships between staff are instigators for developing positive relationships between staff and pupils and pupils and pupils. Further, participants reflected on the purposeful ways they built relationships and connections across their professional practice, both with children, parents and also with colleagues. This aligns with Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems model (1979) which highlights the interactions between the child and some of the systems around them.

Participants reflected experiencing the practice of validating emotions when working with both children and parents, which contributes to the development of relationships by showing the individual they are heard and valued. Individuals develop relationships through communication and Burleson (2009), posited that communication that is emotionally supportive involves messages with a purpose to encourage desirable outcomes, such as emotional health and relationships that support when someone is experiencing upset and distress. Emotional validation which is defined as, referring to the emotion or the emotional perspective in a non-judgemental way (Fruzzetti & Iverson, 2004), can support children to feel heard, understood and accepted irrespective of behaviour. Further, an individual's emotional experience is accepted, not necessarily their behaviour (Faber & Mazlish, 2002).

Through ensuring staff know the children well, participants reflected on the importance of knowing their interests and having an understanding of needs and how to support children. This aligns with literature from the Education Endowment Foundation (EEF, 2019) recommending teachers have an awareness and understanding of their students' behaviours so they can respond in ways that best support. However, the findings from this study highlighted that non-teaching staff were also practicing this, therefore taking it further across the school.

Through using child centred and humanistic principles within their practice. Some of a child's ordinary needs (Mount & O'Brien, 2002), which are the needs that all children have irrespective of their lived experiences, can be met through giving the child a voice and enabling them to be heard as it allows them to contribute and to have a sense of choice and control. Further staff were demonstrating that they were offering respect through listening, trying to understand children's experiences and getting to know them so they can respond in a way that supports them as individuals. This can give the child some responsibility within an interaction, through inviting them to share their thoughts and feelings or to make choices, all of which are principles that underpin humanistic and more child-centred approaches. The aim of humanistic principles is to support individuals to make choices about their own wants and needs and to support them to reach their potential (Jarvis, 2000). This all supports the development of trust which builds connections and relationships as well as offers the child a sense of belonging.

Therefore, the findings showed that participants had gained experience in working relationally and in practicing purposeful ways of building relationships and connections and this knowledge and understanding will have had an effect on them both personally and professionally. Impacting their way of being in interactions with others in different areas of their lives (this links to the insight gained theme).

When considering systemic implementation considerations, the findings from participants reflections indicate that these schools have created environments through implementing and embedding a trauma informed approach, with a focus on relationships and understanding. These views were consistent with the literature that creating a culture in schools that purposefully aims to build and maintain safe, trusting relationships between staff and students, staff and staff and students and students, is significant and supports all children (Morgan et al., 2014; Thomas et al., 2019; Berger & Martin, 2021). Implementation is not just about policies and processes, and the importance of ensuring

culture change at the heart of the school approach is an essential consideration for future implementation. Roffey (2008) carried out a qualitative research study in Australian schools exploring their practices and processes. The findings suggested that changes in school culture that are positive are sustained by shared relational expectations which are highly developed; a focus on valuing members of the school community; a belief in inclusive practices and collective ownership by the school community. The findings of the present study support the findings of Roffey's study.

Furthermore, as highlighted, participants have developed and practiced many purposeful ways to build and maintain professional safe, trusting relationships and connections and there are ways this could support schools with implementation. It demonstrates the importance of all staff having a good understanding of the power and importance of relationships, which may be taken for granted if not a focus, for example, when working in an environment that takes a more behaviourist stance. Schools could further support implementation through regular staff meetings. During the interview, a participant mentioned regular staff meeting were held in relation to exploring how best to support particular children. These meetings could provide an opportunity to share positive experiences, exploring what works well and offering the sharing of good practice in relation to ways to enhance and develop relationships with pupils, staff and parents. Also, to support and maintain the relationships that staff have, as well as encourage collaborative and cohesive working.

### ***Insight gained***

The findings within this theme showed participants' reflecting in various ways on using a trauma informed approach and how this has contributed to staff development both within themselves and within their school roles. In relation to the subtheme 'intrapersonal insight', participants indicated processes such as introspection, self-awareness of thought (reflective thinking), feelings and of their behaviour in relation to others. This is also linked

to the theme 'Promoting staff cohesion and support', in that participants recognised when they would not be the best person to support a child and being able to reflect and learn in relation to future interactions. It is acknowledged that these findings are predominantly from those participants who have had trauma informed practitioner levels of training, meaning they have access to supervision (Shohet & Shohet, 2020). This could contribute to them being more open to and experienced in introspection. However, the findings also showed there were participants that had not had the same level of training but did also express an increase in awareness and a shift in perspective. This could be supported by working with colleagues who are open to discussing and having reflective conversations. Bainbridge, et al. (2022) identified some positive impacts of support and supervision for school leaders which they argued, in turn, supports those in school leaders care (other members of staff). Further, recent research in relation to social work found that the introduction of trauma informed and restorative practice in environments that offer safety and equality, where space is given for reflection, enabled professionals to experience increased self-awareness and compassion, trauma understanding and personal growth (Lauridsen & Munkejord, 2022). The findings of the current study suggest that an effect of working in a school that has embedded a trauma informed approach, which includes working in a supportive team that are open to reflective conversations, could facilitate and support the development of self-awareness and personal growth.

Further, the findings suggest that this increase in self-awareness, understanding, noticing, reflection and changes in ways of responding (which are more considered) was indicated by many participants to being experienced and applied across wider contexts within their lives. Highlighting the 'ripple' further and suggesting that trauma informed ways of working can become a way of being rather than just a way of doing. It is suggested that this growth and development within staff could also have an impact on the wider community and society.

When considering the subtheme 'Professional insight' participants reflected ways they have gained and are demonstrating through their practice, further awareness and understanding of the various underlying reasons for behaviour. When referring to understanding underlying behaviour, participants used words such as, "*at a deeper level*", and "*getting to the root*". It was indicated that this then feeds into how they can best respond to the child's needs. Perry (2020), posited that the classroom can offer a stable setting for children and can be an opportunity to meet their therapeutic needs. This is quite in contrast to what Tom Bennett (who is the lead on the Behaviour Hubs) is advocating, when he talks about 'outward' presenting behaviours being more obvious to address than internal mental states (Bennett, 2017). This seeks to focus predominantly with the behaviour in isolation and not what may be underlying it or how relationships can impact upon it. However, gaining insight into the importance of understanding the whole child, aligns with previous research that raised concerns about zero tolerance on minority groups (Clough et al., 2005 cited in Harold and Corcoran, 2013). This suggested there were questions around the suitability of a behaviourist approach for all children, as it focuses on behaviour in isolation and could neglect the needs of those children who are more likely to receive sanctions and punishments.

Further, the subtheme 'Professional insight' highlighted recognition by participants that some aspects of the approach were 'rippling down' to the children, such as in the language used. Also, that their roles can impact more than just on the present moment, they can impact future outcomes for children. It's about supporting children holistically and helping them flourish along whichever path they chose. These views align with the literature in relation to there being a need for whole school approaches that acknowledge the role of school to be one that goes beyond attainment and integrates social and emotional wellbeing for all children (Conkbayir, 2017; Shooter, 2012; Quinn et al., 2020; Chafouleas et al., 2016; Adelman & Taylor, 2007). Children are learning through

modelling, observation and experiencing safe relationships, life skills that may influence and affect their future trajectories and outcomes. However, as the literature shows, it can be difficult for schools to put emotional wellbeing ahead of academic achievement as they are judged on assessment and examination results (Quinn et al., 2020). A further effect on professional practice, was staff recognising that offering consistency in approach, including through language used and responses given is significant in facilitating a sense of safety.

When considering how the findings can support future implementation, Morgan et al. (2014) found in their study of a specialist educational provision in Australia, that there needs to be high levels of self-awareness and emotional intelligence from educators when prioritising relationships and working in a trauma informed way. The current research finding suggested growth in self-awareness and understanding and Lauridsen and Munkejord (2022) (as discussed above) found that space given for reflection, enables increased self-awareness and personal growth. Therefore, it is suggested that a key consideration for implementation is providing that space for introspection and reflection. Furthermore, when considering systemic aspects, the findings also suggest schools should consider taking a holistic approach, with a focus on individualised support to meet needs (Morgan et al., 2014; Berger & Martin, 2021) with a focus on social emotional aspects, that will support children to achieve better outcomes; ensure consistency as a whole in approach, when implementing including in language and responses to facilitate an environment that offers a sense of safety.

Schools could support with these aspects of implementation, again by providing opportunities for a regular space to share insights and engage in reflective practice, to support intrapersonal and professional growth and support work with children, parents and other staff using a trauma informed approach. This could be done through staff group meetings/reflective practice groups within school to support all staff, even more so those that may not have access to any supervision. The findings suggest that staff working in

schools that have embedded a trauma informed approach are going to be required to be open to introspection and increased self-awareness. There is some criticism in the literature regarding there not being enough focus on supervision in schools that are implementing 'trauma informed programmes' (Chafouleas et al., 2016; Berger & Martin, 2021). Further there is literature that supports the value of this support. Ellis and Wolfe (2020) discuss the importance of staff being valued in schools and giving them time and space for reflection on everything they are holding and Cooper and Wieckowski (2017) found positive outcomes from structured reflective practice in relation to professional growth and lifelong learning.

### ***Promoting staff support and cohesion***

The findings from this theme reflected participants views of working in a culture within the schools that promotes support, cohesion and collaboration amongst staff, which suggests applying a trauma informed approach can have a positive effect on team cohesion across roles.

Within sub-themes 'Support from within' and 'Recognition of own and others support needs' participants described experiencing being 'heard', 'respected' and indicated they felt 'supported' when talking about their involvement with colleagues. Feeling supported can enhance individual wellbeing. This aligns with findings that a multi-direction relationship is likely between team cohesion and individual wellbeing (Vanhove & Herian, 2015). Participants also indicated recognising and feeling safe enough to reach out for support when needed which could come from experiencing a sense of belonging from being part of a cohesive team. Baumeister & Leary (1995) posit that belongingness is a basic human need. Having basic needs met contributes further to a sense of wellbeing.

The models relating to team cohesion that are accepted most widely discuss a difference between social and task cohesion, however, Vanhove and Herian (2015)

suggest they are best considered as related. Social cohesion, predominantly described as being about attraction to the team, developing good interpersonal relationships between members and experiencing positive feelings in relation to the team (Casey-Campbell & Martens, 2009). And task cohesion, focusing on attraction to the aims/goals of the team and there being a collective commitment to those aims (Casey-Campbell & Martens, 2009; Zacarro, 1991). The findings of the current research demonstrate some aspects of social and task cohesion, as well as highlighting some effects on staff personally and professionally. With some participants indicating development of interpersonal relationships, such as, through experiencing attunement and empathy towards each other, and being open and honest with colleagues; also experiencing positive feelings about the team, and feeling 'heard and respected'; and experiencing a collective commitment, which links to the findings around some participants indicating a sense of collective responsibility in supporting children by applying trauma informed approach as well as supporting each other this way also in their professional capacities.

Further, in relation to the sub-theme 'Support from above and around', a sense of support and cohesion was also indicated by some participants expressing feeling supported by SLT and experiencing togetherness in working in this way, the effect being support was experienced as mutual irrespective of role. This can add to experiencing professional efficacy in relation to participant contributions, which can also contribute to personal wellbeing.

Social capital refers to a set of shared resources and values that enable individuals to work together in a group to effectively achieve a common purpose. Roffey (2012) found social capital and relational quality to be key factors in supporting resilience and wellbeing across a school (including staff and students). The current findings from this theme demonstrate that participants experienced working closely together, and a sense of collective responsibility, with a common purpose of supporting children in a more relational



and nurturing way, which links with the concept of social capital and Roffey's findings that this can support wellbeing.

It has been posited that leadership which supports and motivates staff is needed when undergoing whole school change (Adelman & Taylor, 2007). The findings, from the current research, indicated participants reflected on feeling fully supported by SLT and experienced them as being very much alongside and a part of the approach with them. As SLT are the ones that initiate any sort of transition or whole school change, the findings suggest a key aspect of implementation needs to be school leaders' being fully committed to any whole school change to that of a relational and trauma informed approach. This links with recent literature in TES that suggested school leaders are left to base their behaviour policies around their preferences which will be influenced by their beliefs and values about what is important in education "...where academies have an understanding of their behaviour ethos informed by theory, and that is consistent with the values of the leaders within that academy we've seen early evidence that's better placed to then support and improve behaviour..." (Spring cited in Morgan, 2023). In addition, as shown above, a positive impact of the approach has been the development of a culture of staff cohesion and support that is mutual across the different roles, thereby suggesting this is also part of successful implementation.

Furthermore, participants reflected on how using a trauma informed approach is a collective responsibility, suggesting that it supports the embeddedness across a whole school. The sub-theme of 'support from around and above' suggests this occurs through the practices of a staff group that are supportive of each other and connected – it becomes part of the culture of the school being described in this study as "*in the air*" and "...sort of *within our bricks and mortar now...*" This aligns with literature from Adelman and Taylor (2007) that postulates sustaining whole school change needs those involved to experience the process in a way that helps them feel valued and to be part of a collective identity.

The findings from this theme, are similar to the 'Relationships and connections' theme' when considering what could support implementation. Particularly in relation to the importance of developing a culture that encourages collaboration and cohesive working and provide opportunities for staff to engage in reflective practice and explore ways to build purposeful relationships. A rationale for this study was limited research involving non-teaching staff in relation to trauma informed approaches, however qualitative research in the field of health education did involve the views of all staff including principals; teaching and non-teaching staff, on the nature of their contribution to health education, across five French schools. The findings indicated an enabler of implementation was schools require support in creating a health education policy and ways to develop an inclusive common culture among staff which is not limited just to teaching staff but also involves non-teaching staff (Jourdan et al., 2010).

### ***Psychological and emotional impact***

The findings from this theme showed that participants reflected on how working in a school that has embedded a trauma informed approach can have a psychological and emotional effect on them. Words such as "*emotionally demanding*" and "*emotionally draining*" were used to describe some experiences. Participants referred to experiences working with both children and parents and referred to finding the approach more challenging to implement particularly when they were experiencing a sense of vulnerability themselves.

They demonstrated a willingness to support in an emotionally available way, which aligns with Nash et al. (2016) findings, regarding staff in schools being willing to engage on an emotional as well as cognitive level. However, the present study's findings acknowledged that there can be an emotional impact to this. Participants indicated that working in this way requires them to give more of themselves and be open to being emotionally available, so as to make connections with others. They are required to

empathise with people at a deeper level, in order to understand them which can be psychologically and emotionally impactful, particularly as people can have varied and complex individual histories. Reflections were made up of experiences participants had had with both parents and children that alluded to them feeling a threat to their sense of safety. This can have an impact on their capacity to psychologically and emotionally show up and continue to support in a nurturing, relational, accepting and playful way. This links to Porges (2011) polyvagal theory, that feeling safe or unsafe within our bodies biases what we think, feel and do and that it is very challenging to focus and engage when feeling threat/danger as opposed to feeling a sense of calm and safety (Bombèr, 2020).

A literature review in the USA found that a large amount of the teaching force was mainly made up of trauma survivors who are then at an increased risk of secondary traumatic stress. They suggested that educators who do not have a history of trauma or ACEs themselves are still at risk of experiencing trauma in their role at school if they experience direct, repeated exposure to traumatised children or colleagues (Smith, 2021). Even though this literature makes reference specifically to teachers, this could also be the case for other staff members and even though participants did not refer directly to this in their interviews, it could be an important factor and implication when considering the psychological and emotional impact of working in this way. This and experiencing emotional vulnerability at times, highlights the importance of having support for staff including access to supervision (Shohet & Shohet, 2020). Further this effect also suggests the importance of staff having an awareness of their own triggers and supports and to have that cohesive staff team to reach out to for support when needed, which the findings also corroborated.

In contrast to this within this theme, it was also found that working this way can increase psychological and emotional capacity as highlighted by a couple of the participants. That there is an acceptance of 'it's okay not to be okay', which may come from working in a

culture that offers staff support and cohesion, and that the effect of working in this way can support access to our emotions and levels of understanding as demonstrated in some of the other themes.

Therefore, this theme demonstrates that psychological and emotional impact needs to be a consideration when implementing a trauma informed approach and that schools could support this, for those that need it, through the provision of emotional support, such as Employee Assistant Programmes, or through supervision groups. Carroll and Esposito (2020) refer to research in relation to supervision with SENCOs and other professionals working with vulnerable children that suggested positive findings from participants; highlighting benefits such as experiencing it as restorative personally and professionally and offering opportunities to foster camaraderie. Which links further to the theme of 'Promoting staff support and cohesion'.

### ***Lining up of values***

This theme represents positive aspects of when values are aligned with a trauma informed way of working and lends itself to responding to research question 1a. It was found that when sharing their experiences some participants reflected views within this theme of links between trauma informed ways of working and their own personal values. Some participants indicating that it was "*morally right*" to work in this way and some suggesting the approach had confirmed their beliefs and validated some of their perspectives. This suggests an effect of working this way. That participants who are experiencing this, would also experience some balance between what felt 'right' and important to them and their actions and behaviours of supporting children using a more relational and nurturing approach. In contrast to one that is punitive. Even though it was also found that at times working this way is experienced as very challenging (as found in the 'Psychological and emotional impact' theme and 'Encountering friction with expectations and norms' theme). Still the findings for this theme show that for some

participants the effect of working in this way offered them a sense of personal and professional satisfaction, which can have a positive effect on wellbeing. This suggests an alignment with theory around values, and experiencing a sense of balance and consistency between thoughts, values, beliefs and behaviours (Festinger, 1957). Even when staff are experiencing challenges, coming back to the personal values that advocate for understanding, relationships and nurture, if they believe it is right, supports enactment of their values through their actions in the implementation of the approach.

A link could be made to the findings in the 'Promoting staff support and cohesion' and 'Relationships and connections', themes also. Participants reflected on ways that aspects of a trauma informed approach are modelled and 'ripples down' to other colleagues. Working in an environment which emphasises and supports staff to purposively provide safe and trusting relationships, identifying, through working this way, their capacity to experience, access and use their values, such as "empathy", to support others. Therefore, there is an indication that the combination of experiencing a working environment such as this, could enhance our values or develop them. Which would be in line with Schwartz (1992; 2012) claims that our value systems are developed from observation, experiences and influenced by our environments. Therefore, the current research suggests that values can be subject to change and adaptation through the experience of a new approach and environment over a period of time, which aligns with research findings that values can change in response to events or experiences (Sortheix et al., 2019).

When considering implementation, schools could support this by enabling opportunities for staff to explore, revisit and agree on values held as a school. This was found to be an important part of effective whole school change (Scott, 2005). Again, linking this in with the use of reflective practice groups to explore the aspect of values, either positively or when they are challenged with colleagues.

### ***Encountering friction with expectations and norms***

More relational approaches in schools are a reasonably new concept and adults are more likely to have gone through school experiencing a behaviourist approach. Some participants expressed some challenges in working with parents, and it is suggested that this could be due to a lack in understanding of the concepts and evidence underpinning a trauma informed approach, which does not advocate punishment and exclusion. This finding gives an insight into a challenge that staff experience in implementing an approach that is at odds with their generation's experiences of school and how this can link to both parents as well as staff themselves.

This theme demonstrates a different side to the 'Lining up of values' theme above and represents some potential friction that can be experienced when there are challenges to values or societal norms. The findings also suggest that some staff may experience some inner friction between nurture and discipline. That leaves them questioning the level of consequences, implying for some, it can be challenging to let the punitive aspect of managing behaviour go (which could also impact staff buy-in and societal norms of how behaviour is addressed). However, what came through from some participants was inner turmoil at times, and it being an uncomfortable experience. Having an understanding of the reasons staff do things can only go so far at times, particularly when situations are repetitive and they find it hard to see any progress. When things are stressful and difficult, we can revert back to our initial beliefs (even though they have now been challenged by new concepts). This aligns with the theory that pursuing a value can result in conflicts or incongruence with other values (Schwartz, 1992; 2012). Furthermore, the theory of cognitive dissonance (Festinger, 1957) postulates that humans seek consistency between many cognitions such as, values, attitudes, thoughts, behaviours or beliefs and values are vitally important to establish our inner peace, going against them can be overwhelming and bring experiences of tension and conflict. Furthermore, in consideration of the wider

societal and political aspect, the guidance and messages from the DfE could also be perceived as conflicting. Continuing to advocate for an approach that takes a harder stance and promoting an ethos of order and discipline predominantly based on behaviourist principles, such as the Behaviour Hubs (Bennett, 2017), whilst also calling for education to focus on supporting the emotional wellbeing of children in school (HM Government, 2021; Department of Health and Department of Education, 2018) and more recently, providing a working definition of trauma informed practice (DfE, 2022).

This also provides some insight in regard to implementation planning. Schools could give further consideration to ways that they could involve and support parents in gaining an understanding of the approach, therefore involving the wider school community more when considering the implementation of an approach with new concepts such as this. This aligns with the literature in relation to whole school approaches being defined as an integrated framework that involves all within a school community, such as parents, staff, other professionals and agencies supporting children and young people (Weare, 2015; Berger & Martin, 2021; Rutledge, 2022; Demkowicz & Humphrey, 2019). Schools could raise awareness and publicise consistent messages in relation to their purpose for taking a trauma informed approach in their communication with parents.

The findings indicated that participants had some awareness of experiencing some friction, however it could be helpful, as expressed above, for schools to develop support systems for staff when experiencing this, and ensuring there is a cohesive staff support system, so there are opportunities to discuss and also for schools to provide a space to debrief or reflect when noticing these effects, for example, following an incident. Furthermore, schools could support staff by returning periodically to the schools underpinning values and their purpose for implementing the approach. The findings suggest the level of staff buy in can be variable and therefore could be a challenge to implementation which is in line with the literature that staff buy-in is deemed essential and

that challenges to core beliefs, attributions, values and attitudes need to be given careful consideration (Doig, 2000; Gaffney et al., 2004; Adelman & Taylor, 2007; Meiksin et al., 2020; Ruttledge, 2022).

In summary, the themes identified allowed for the development of a framework (forming the acronym RIPPLE) highlighting the experiences of staff and effects on them, both personally and professionally, of working in primary schools that have embedded a trauma informed approach. Providing an insight into the impact of the human experience and answering the central question and question 1a around values. From this and in a more implicit way the findings have given insight into considerations for implementation in schools that may be thinking about making a whole school change to a more relational and trauma informed approach. Table 4 below provides a summary of the relevant considerations which have been discussed in further detail above.

**Table 4**

*Summary of relevant considerations to support implementation*

<b>R</b>	Opportunities to share positive experiences and good practice in relation to purposeful ways to develop relationships with pupils, staff and parents.
<b>I</b>	Reflective practice groups for all staff to support the development of personal insights/introspection and to enhance professional growth through reflection, sharing good practice and exploring alternatives, modelling and developing practices such as offering consistency in approach through shared language and responses given.
<b>P</b>	Providing opportunities to develop a culture that inspires staff cohesion and collaborative practices across a whole school through engagement with reflective practice and building supportive working relationships.



- 
- P** Provide access to staff supervision to support psychological and emotional wellbeing.
- 
- L** Offer opportunities for all staff (teaching and non-teaching) to come together to agree or return to the schools values; provide opportunities and space, such as, through reflective practice groups to focus on exploring personal values when they are being challenged or experienced positively through practices such as shared language.
- 
- E** Reinforcing messages to staff regarding the underlying purpose of applying a trauma informed approach and coming back to the schools values; providing support when personal values are challenged (as in L above) and providing opportunities to support parental understanding such as through education, involving the wider school community and highlighting consistent messages in communications to parents.
- 

Therefore, in taking a more systemic view, it is proposed that the findings can be linked to elements of implementation science, which promotes the uptake of evidence-based practices into everyday practice and ways to improve effectiveness and outcomes in real world contexts (Eccles & Mittman, 2006). It explores factors that may impact on the implementation process, such as context (school), barriers and how to over-come them ('Psychological emotional impact'; 'Encountering friction with expectations and norms'), education (returning to for staff and educating parents), feedback ('RIPPLE') and system reorganisation (some elements considered in relation to pragmatic ways schools could support implementation, which are summarised in Table 4 above).

### **Limitations of present study**

There were several limitations identified within the present study and some proposed research directions based on the findings. This was a small-scale qualitative

study with 8 participants from 2 schools. Therefore, while it could be considered that there is limited external generalisability of findings to wider contexts, it should be noted that transferability judgements based on the findings are still felt to be relevant to similar contexts (i.e., when implementing a trauma informed approach in a school). Lincoln and Guba's (1985) evaluative criteria for trustworthiness were used to make transferability judgements. These are discussed further above.

Rationale for gathering the views and experiences of a wider representation of staff was given, due to there being limited research with this group, however the focus was on staff in schools who had undertaken a whole school change in approach. Whole school approaches advocate for the inclusion and contributions of those across a school community, including children, young people and parents (Weare, 2015; Berger & Martin, 2021; Ruttledge, 2022; Demkowicz & Humphrey, 2019). Parents and children's views were not included as participants in this study. It is therefore suggested that when considering views and experiences around implementation of a trauma informed approach in schools, child and parents views should be addressed in future research. This is particularly important, as the findings of the current study highlighted the importance of including the pupils voice to build safe and trusting relationships and that a challenge for staff was working with parents due to their lack of understanding of the approach.

A further limitation of the present study is it only involved primary school staff. Secondary schools may indicate different or possibly more challenging experiences due to complexity of secondary age students. Therefore, future studies with a secondary school involving a range of staff, may further contribute to the field of research. Although there were six participants from school A and two from school B, which meant the weighting was not equal, there were no vast differences in their experiences, therefore participants were viewed as one group of staff sharing their perspectives and experiences of a trauma informed approach. However, this could be considered a limitation given that additional

staff perspectives from school B may have introduced further themes or contributed to minority perspectives from staff of school A.

External validity may be reduced due to the individual interpretation of the findings. Due to this achieving rigour is something that has been raised as challenging in qualitative research, as the role of the researcher is one that is active with the process when coding, organising and interpreting the data (Nastasi & Schensul, 2005). As referred to above, Lincoln and Guba's (1985) evaluative criteria were used to achieve rigour. Braun and Clarke (2022) emphasis the necessity of critical reflection whilst engaging in the analytical process and view it as non-linear with encouragement to engage with the data throughout to support credibility, which was an approach took by the present study. Braun and Clark (2022) do not view the subjectivity of individual interpretation as a limitation.

### **Implications for EP Practice and Future Research directions**

The research findings have implications, to some extent, for EP practice and for future research studies. Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems model (1979) is used as a framework when considering EP implications, starting with wider societal systems and policies. There are movements within society that are coming away from a punitive approach, towards a child's rights perspective (i.e., the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), 2010) and more recently, in parts of the UK (Scotland in 2020 and Wales in 2022) it became illegal to smack children. There are now further calls to outlaw that practice in England also. The role of the EP has moved also, towards a much more systemic model that enables them to work with whole school communities and wider systems. It enables EPs to have a more transformative voice, to highlight issues, such as promoting the principles of relational approaches to effect change in schools and within society. This small-scale study will contribute to the limited research base in relation to trauma informed approaches in schools in the UK and therefore could contribute to enabling EPs to have a voice and effect change in relation to education policies

advocating more relational approaches. A recent article in the Times Educational Supplement (TES) (Morgan, 2023) discusses approaches to pupil behaviour and Cathy Lowther, General Secretary of the Association of Educational Psychologists is quoted saying that “*EPs need to be much more involved in DfE policies around behaviour, education reform and mental health*”.

In regards to how EPs can support whole schools and their communities, EP services could become involved in supporting schools with whole school change and transition to becoming trauma informed through the development and delivery of whole school training to staff, involving what underpins the approach and ways to apply it. They could also support with policy development and the process of embedding the approach through their work with schools.

‘RIPPLE’ could be used as a potential framework to support schools considering the implementation of a more relational and trauma informed approach to behaviour management, raising awareness of the considerations and potential challenges, as well as benefits to staff. EPs could also support schools in their work with parents, to help them understand the school’s approach or if schools are considering the transition, involving parents as part of that process. The literature defines whole school approaches as an integrated framework that has multi-components across a whole school and involves all within a school community, including parents (Weare, 2015; Berger & Martin, 2021; Rutledge, 2022; Demkowicz & Humphrey, 2019). EPs could offer training around the underlying processes supporting trauma informed and relational approaches for parents and in supporting staff with ways to manage difficult conversations with parents. EPs have a role working with schools to explore any barriers and seek solutions in relation to working with their school communities.

Furthermore, EPs to work more systemically with schools to support them in implementing ways to enact the fundamental elements identified in the findings i.e. providing training on creating and setting up peer reflective practice groups (Ellis & Wolfe, 2020; Cooper & Wieckowski, 2017) where positive experiences, and sharing of good practice can take place, as well as somewhere to reflect on practice, consider alternatives and develop self-growth. As discussed above the value of schools offering supervision (Shohet & Shohet, 2020) to staff, is also something that EPs can provide to schools or assist them in exploring supervision options to support staff with any emotional impacts. Carroll and Esposito (2020) refer to ways to make supervision sustainable in schools as pressures on resources can impact the accessibility of this. They suggest training educators to become supervisors, however recognising that there may be a need for some external support which is again something EPs could offer.

Additionally, in consideration of EPs individual work with children and young people, the findings and what has been learnt from staff experiences, could support EPs in having further awareness of what may support child-adult connections and using or sharing these to support needs and build on strengths.

In relation to next steps and future research directions. There is a dearth of evidence in the literature regarding effectiveness of trauma informed approaches (Maynard et al., 2019; Chafouleas et al., 2016; Thomas et al., 2019; Berger & Martin, 2021; Wassink-de Stigter et al., 2022). Further in relation to effectiveness, a longitudinal type study to explore and monitor effectiveness over time. Different insights could be gained through further research with staff implementing a trauma informed approach across other contexts and widening it out to those that have used different models to TISUK, which was used by the primary schools in this study.

Research with parents as a focus could also contribute further in this area. This could be another qualitative study, to gather the views of parents on schools implementing a trauma informed approach, as well as identifying their views on how best to inform and educate them on the key aspects of this approach. This links into some of the implications for EP practice and how EPs can support the school community further with implementation of the approach. Other literature (Quinn et al., 2020) also highlighted this as an area for future research.

Finally, another key area of interest are children and young people as they are at the centre of this. Therefore, seeking the views of the children who are experiencing the approach. This approach is beneficial for all children (Wassink-de Stigter et al., 2022), however if children have experienced trauma this would need to be approached with great care and consideration. Methods such as participatory studies could be interesting to explore further as this may tell us something more valuable through their specific involvement and may offer further insight in relation to effectiveness. This is an area that requires further exploration and evidence.

## **Conclusion**

This research has explored the inner perspectives and experiences of staff and the effects on them, both personally and professionally, of working in schools that have embedded a trauma informed approach. It has highlighted how relationships, values, consistency and cohesion play a key role in the approach, demonstrating a 'rippling down' across children, staff and wider which can then penetrate society. Further, as identified in the literature there are implementation frameworks/blueprints for schools that refer to implementation domains in relation to whole school change such as, leadership; policy; physical environment; engagement & involvement; cross sector collaboration; training and workforce development; progress monitoring and quality assurance; finance; and evaluation (Chafouleas et al., 2016; Wassink-de Stigter et al., 2022). This research has

explored considerations for implementation of a trauma informed approach through the lens of staff across different roles within schools that have embedded a trauma informed approach in their everyday practice. Contributing further to the limited research base around staff experiences in this area and providing further insight into aspects that could support implementation further when undertaking a change in approach such as this, or any systemic change which involves a change of culture in UK schools.

## Reflective Chapter

### Introduction

Due to its individual reflective nature, this chapter will be written in the first person. Being reflective practitioners is an essential part of being a Trainee Educational Psychologist (TEP) and an Educational Psychologist (EP) and is reflected in the competencies and proficiencies, the British Psychological Society (BPS, 2017) and the Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC, 2016). Having an awareness of self, what we bring, and recognising how this impacts and influences, as well as being transparent is key to being a practicing psychologist. Critical reflection includes individual reflection and wider social critique with the purpose of transferring perspectives of practitioners on practice and enabling social action (Mezirow, 1991, cited in Rowley et al., 2023). This feels even more relevant when considering the dual practitioner role that TEPs and EPs take when they become 'scientist practitioners' and contribute through research that has applications to the real world (Sedgwick, 2019). It is a social responsibility for researchers to be self-reflective (BPS, 2021).

I view my personal research journey as an opportunity for growth and development of a skill that I feel ultimately quite inexperienced in, having done a psychology degree many years ago. For me it was also having to accept the challenges and questioning of my own decisions and having to ride that wave of uncertainty. My experience has felt like an emotional rollercoaster at times, filled with both highs and lows. My propensity to do things the 'right way' led to opportunities for reflection throughout the research process, particularly in wanting to ensure that my research met and promoted high ethical standards (BPS, 2021). Also being a reflexive practitioner (Willig, 2013) throughout, by considering my place within the research and how my own personal experiences, views and biases may influence it (Bell & Waters, 2018; Braun & Clarke, 2022). This chapter



therefore offers my reflections of my research journey throughout, how I propose to disseminate my research, consideration of my next steps and my reflections on my personal and professional development.

### **Start of the journey**

Some TEPs come into training with a strong idea of their research topic, however my experience was quite different. I found identifying a topic quite challenging. During year one there were so many areas that I found interesting and wanted to learn more about that narrowing it down and finally settling on something led to lots of questions for me. My initial thinking was that it needed to be something that made a real difference to the profession, something that was impactful, however I think this just added pressure and ultimately made it harder to settle on a topic area. I had to take this pressure off myself and tell myself that as long as what I did made a small contribution and could be helpful to children, schools and the role of the EP in some way, it would be enough. I wanted to choose something that I found really interesting but that I also really cared about.

I have had an interest in trauma, particularly childhood trauma, since I trained as a children's counsellor and went onto work in schools with children and young people. My experience during this time was that there was limited understanding within schools in relation to the underlying reasons for behaviour, and this often led to isolation and exclusion practices, even with the children I was working with. This meant any support they were having from me was stopped and abruptly at times. This didn't sit comfortably at all with me, as I was coming from a place (as a counsellor) that was trying to build relationships and offer nurture, and the school just kept coming back to their behaviour management policy which took a more behaviourist stance as opposed to a relational one. These experiences in my previous role, further reading around trauma and relational approaches, as well as the increasing empirical evidence that links trauma and poor outcomes for children, all contributed to my interest in this area. Bruce Perry's (2017) work

was of real interest to me, in particular his book 'The boy who was raised by a dog', as well as Louise Bomber (2020) 'Know me to teach me' and Karen Treisman's (2017) work on developmental trauma. What really stayed with me is Treisman's reference to the significance of relationships when considering outcomes, in particular her quote "every interaction can be an intervention". Further, when I started my TEP training we were directed to read and watch some things in relation to education and one that was particularly impactful for me was a TED talk by Ken Robinson, where he talked about their needing to be changes in the education system, in particular this quote (TED, 2010),

*".....we have to recognize that human flourishing is not a mechanical process; it's an organic process. And you cannot predict the outcome of human development. All you can do, like a farmer, is create the conditions under which they will begin to flourish."*

This prompted my thinking further about the education system in the UK and what children need to flourish. This led me to think further around how schools still continue with a predominant behaviourist model that feels very outdated. I had an awareness through my previous roles and through my training as a TEP that some schools were adopting a more relational approach and that trauma informed approaches and practices were something, although relatively new in the UK in comparison to the USA, that was growing momentum. I therefore chose this area as a topic for my thesis.

### **Developing research questions**

My initial review of the literature revealed there is little evidence, that had explored the optimal conditions required to implement and execute a trauma informed approach effectively, particularly in UK schools. Systematic reviews in the United States found many publications promoting a need for trauma informed practice in schools, however not much on the evaluation of its effectiveness or evidence to support the impact of

recommendations (Maynard, et al., 2019; Chafouleas, et al., 2016; Thomas, et al., 2019; Berger & Martin, 2021; Wassink-de Stigter, et al., 2022). In addition to this there were limited studies that explored perspectives of school staff, it was predominantly perspectives of teachers (Maynard et al., 2019; Thomas et al., 2019). These areas prompted further exploration and consideration in the development of my research. I thought a lot about how to evaluate the effectiveness of a whole school trauma informed approach having an awareness of there being a dearth in the literature, however my justification for not following this avenue was that I felt it was larger than I was able to offer, as a single researcher on a taught doctorate programme, in relation to resources and time. In addition to this I reflected on how this effectiveness could be measured from a whole school perspective, which is much wider than evaluating an intervention. I therefore chose to focus on the perspectives/experiences of staff across a school and the implementation aspect, due to wanting to gain further insight from those experiencing it in their everyday practice.

A narrative literature review was chosen to bring together what was known about the topic area and to create my research questions (Onwuegbuzie & Frels, 2016). I found that not a lot of studies on this topic had been carried out in the UK, however I did find one that brought my attention to the consideration of personal values when implementing such a shift in approach to one that most people would not have predominantly experienced. The study carried out an evaluation of the implementation of a compassionate relational approach in schools by school leaders, that was developed by EPs (Quinn et al., 2020). It highlighted that building relational approaches such as trauma informed approaches into a school system is complex. It also raised awareness of some of the factors that are supportive in the implementation within a UK school context and highlighted the necessity of an integrated approach across policy and practice. It also recognised there can be tensions between these and staff values and encouraged further research into the

alignment of a school's values with those of its teachers. This became a significant paper for me in beginning to develop my project.

My research questions and their focus however, did evolve throughout the planning process. My initial idea to focus on implementation and specifically values involved designing a simple rating scale to share with school staff who had embedded a trauma informed approach and measure their alignment with the school's values. However, this evolved further to explore the impact on staff of a trauma informed approach at personal and professional levels and how this may influence implementation, as it may gain some wider insight than values alone. This was discussed with my research supervisor. Also, the limited literature on the views and experiences, in this area, of school staff (non-teaching) (Thomas et al., 2019) was felt could offer further insight - as the study carried out by Quinn et al. (2020) was from the perspectives of school leaders only. I found it difficult to let go of values altogether however, and was aware that the personal aspect of this would encompass that. We discussed how this aspect could still be explored through my proposed methodology of semi-structured interviews. Taking things forward it was agreed that I would make my research questions slightly broader and see what came from the data, which is appropriate for an exploratory, qualitative approach to research. My research questions were revised further in light of the developed analysis which Braun and Clarke (2022) state is good practice when doing Reflexive Thematic Analysis so that the analysis clearly addresses the research questions.

### **Epistemological stance**

Before starting my training as a TEP, ontology and epistemology were relatively new concepts to me and I had not considered their influence on me as a practitioner or my research. My only experience of research has been at undergraduate level (many years ago) where we were directed to use quantitative methods, which I now know was taking a

positivist stance. During my time on the course, it has been interesting to reflect on how I view reality and how knowledge is acquired, particularly in relation to the development of my research and my research questions. Throughout I have questioned my position. I reflected on the process of gathering views and experiences of individuals in relation to an approach that influences policies and processes within a school, and the impact of my own subjective researcher lens on interpreting this information. Then reflecting on how another researcher could interpret it differently based on their different lens and position. The reflections led me to recognize that not doing it that way would mean I believe there to be a single truth, as a positivist would. However, I believe there can be many truths that are impacted on by individual experiences, beliefs, structures and events. The position of Critical Realism (CR) perceives reality as multiple, complex and objective (Robson, 2002). An interpretivism stance, however is more in line with thinking we all have unique perspectives and experiences, that are shaped by world views, values, contexts and its key focus and interest would be on individual subjective experiences and individual interpretations, assuming there are no truths or 'objective' reality.

CR acknowledges the value of positivism however, hermeneutically methods that are based on interpretation are where critical realist researchers begin, and they postulate that language provides an 'inside' or 'interior' to social life (Bhaskar, 2016, p57) which is not shared by the positivists and natural scientists (Price & Martin, 2018). With CR, it is assumed there is an observable and measurable reality - i.e. that there are staff values that will impact on the implementation and systemic considerations that will say something valuable about implementation. Although those are shaped by the social context, there are patterns and shared things/experiences that may be common across participants/staff/schools/trauma informed approaches, these enable careful conclusions or interpretations to be drawn that might communicate something about the area of study.

An interpretivist stance was therefore not taken as it does not focus on an observable and measurable reality, its main focus is on individual experiences and multiple realities (Rehman & Alharthi, 2016). I felt this would not have worked with an aim of exploring experiences, views, values and systemic considerations that will impact on implementation. CR enables conclusions to be drawn that might be valuable to consider in the wider context. I therefore took the CR position when designing my research. The appropriateness of this for my study is discussed further in the methodology section of the empirical chapter.

## **Design**

When considering my initial design, I thought about employing a case study design with one school that had embedded a trauma informed approach. I had identified the school through my local authority placement as a TEP as many EPs spoke about the school and its journey in actively using this approach. However, due to difficulties with initially recruiting participants within this one school I had to make the decision to widen it out to other schools and subsequently updated this through UEA ethics. I contacted a second primary school that I was also aware, from talking to colleagues, had embedded a trauma informed approach approximately 4 years ago, and also a secondary school that I was aware had just started their journey in implementing a trauma informed approach. My reason for this was predominantly due to trying to access more participants, as my aim was to speak to staff across schools about their views and experiences of working this way. I recognised that a secondary school in a different place in the process could bring another element to the data and if that came through, I was anticipating there may be an opportunity for comparison in relation to the experiences from the different schools. However, this was not explored due to no participants coming forwards from the secondary school. Therefore, my study focused just on the two primary schools.

Through further reflection, and as things developed from my starting point, a more exploratory qualitative design felt more appropriate than a case study design to reflect the change in focus from the staff experiences in one school, to staff experiences of implementing a trauma informed approach. My initial rationale for wanting to use a case study design was to study one school (as a unit of analysis) in depth to describe the journey through implementation for different staff members (in different roles) experiencing a trauma informed approach (using a value scale and interviews). Given the limited numbers that came forward from different levels initially, the focus was redirected on the unit of analysis being different staff (from different schools) using semi-structured interviews and Reflexive Thematic Analysis to identify themes linked to their personal and professional experiences of implementing the approach. Even though there is a lot of flexibility in a case study design and two schools would still have been appropriate for that, I was no longer collecting data through more than procedure and a stipulation of a case study design is the triangulation of data from more than one data collection procedure (Willig, 2013).

When considering methodology, semi-structured interviews seemed to fit better than focus groups containing groups of staff. This was due to feeling that asking about staff's experiences of implementing a trauma informed approach could be emotive for some of them. Furthermore, asking them about their personal values may feel too personally exposing in a group forum and they may make limited contributions. Once I developed my research questions further (in relation to the personal aspect) from: exploring the extent to which staff values align with the values embedded in a school that uses a trauma informed relational approach to: how do school staff experience the implementation of a trauma informed approach at a personal and professional level? The areas of focus (values being one) still remained as I viewed them as part of their personal experience. Therefore, further consideration was given to whether semi-structured

interviews remained the best approach. The justification for continuing with this approach to data collection, as opposed to focus groups, was that staff across different roles within a school may be less willing to share and participate if they were in a group with staff members with higher levels of authority. Therefore, in consideration of this 1:1 semi-structured interviews were considered the most appropriate method to gather the data.

## **Recruitment**

I faced some challenges when recruiting participants that were unforeseen to me. Initially it was difficult to make contact with the school to set up a time to go in and introduce myself and tell staff briefly about my project. I wanted to do this so that I was not just a name on an email and that this may help staff to feel more comfortable about putting themselves forward to be participants. This highlighted for me how challenging working with schools can be. There are so many demands on staff's time and I began to recognise that even though my research was important to me, it was quite possibly a low priority for the school in relation to all the things they had to deal with.

I was naïve in thinking that people from the school would be willing and happy to speak with me as I thought this would be a space for them to share their experiences and give them a voice, that was part of my motivation for doing the research. Even after going in and introducing myself, initially very few participants put themselves forwards. This meant going back to the gatekeeper more than once, and asking if my email to staff could be sent out again to remind them that I was still interested in gaining their views for my study. During this time, I experienced feeling like a nuisance and then having to consider my options moving forwards as I was aware that I did not have a study without enough participants. That is when I widened things out to other schools as discussed above. In the end I had six participants from school A and two from school B which meant the weighting was not equal. However, I made the decision to view the participants as one group of staff sharing their perspectives and experiences of a trauma informed approach. This decision



felt justified as following the interviews and throughout analysing the data, there did not appear to be an obvious distinction or vast differences in their experiences. I also reflected on whether the two participants from school B added anything additional, and I feel they did, they both offered some insightful contributions as did all the participants. I also reflected on what roles the participants had that chose to take part. Midday supervisor was a role that was missing. Unfortunately, none of them came forward, which was a little disappointing as I think their views would have contributed considerably, having a role that requires them to work with children during unstructured times of the day. This I have discussed further in the limitations of the study in the empirical chapter.

### **Interviews and transcription**

I found conducting the interviews initially daunting but once engaged in them I found them to be enjoyable and it was really interesting to hear participants experiences. Six of the interviews were carried out face to face and two virtually on teams. The rationale for conducting the interviews in two different ways was that following initial difficulties with recruitment in school A, I had to make the decision to go out to two further schools. Further discussions with gatekeepers highlighted that some staff may prefer to meet virtually after school towards the end of the day. Therefore, I decided to also offer a Microsoft team meeting as an option with the hope that this may support access to more participants. Further ethical approval was requested and given for this. The interviews were recorded on teams and deleted following transcription as set out in the ethics request.

Staff were told it would take no more than an hour of their time to participate in the study. There was quite a disparity in the length of the interviews. On reflection this may be due to the range of roles the participants have and that they were coming with different perspectives. The shorter interviews were with staff members that had non-teaching and more admin type roles, so less direct work with children and opportunity to implement the approach. Therefore, although their input was valuable and they are an integral part of the

school they had less to share than other participants. It was also noted that the two participants who chose to have interviews on Microsoft teams were the longest two interviews and I wonder if it enabled them to talk more freely and was a better medium for them.

Following putting together my interview schedule I did pilot the questions with a teacher and member of SLT (not in a school that took part) and this process helped to clarify some and inform some adaptations and additions. I did explore in research supervision how carrying out some of the interviews had left me feeling in relation to how the questions were delivered and my concerns over possibly missing a couple as I was trying hard to stay with the conversation and go with the participant but with an awareness that there were particular questions I needed to ask. I needed to remind myself of the purpose of semi-structured interviews, which is that respondents should have a strong role in how it proceeds, the sequence does not need to be followed and nor does every question have to be asked (Smith & Osborn, 2015). I reflected on whether I would want to do it differently another time, and I wondered if just introducing a topic and using just one or two open questions, then going with the participant may suit my conversational style better. This open conversational style and being less directive could potentially allow the respondent to lead the conversation to where the most energy resided as opposed to a greater structured response serving to limit the direction and content. Further, I had an awareness of using my consultation skills as a TEP and my prior therapeutic skills to summarise and reflect back what the participant had said, and to clarify meaning at times as it felt important to ensure that I understood their perspectives fully.

Transcribing the interviews was a long process as I chose to do them all following carrying out all of the interviews, rather than one a time following each interview. This was due to reading Braun and Clarke's (2022) recommendation that this can be the start of the analysis process where the researcher can immerse themselves in the data. On reflection

this did enable re-engagement with the data due to some of the interviews being quite spread out over a period of time, but it was incredibly time consuming and may have been helpful in that respect to transcribe following each interview.

### **Analysis of the data**

I found the process of reflexive thematic analysis anxiety provoking and really challenging. On reflection what I found the most challenging was constantly questioning myself during the coding and development of themes stages. I was seeking some reassurance that I was 'doing it right', however there is no right and wrong in thematic analysis and I had to accept that my codes were based on what I saw and subjectively interpreted from the data. I needed to make the decisions and trust in them, which I found quite difficult due to feeling inexperienced and at times 'out of my depth' having not done a qualitative study of this type before. I used Braun and Clarke's (2022) Thematic Analysis practical guide to take me through the process and remember reading that like any new process or skill being developed it becomes easier the more you do it. This was my first attempt and even through to writing up the themes I was still making changes (which I understand is part of the process) but I found this a little frustrating as every time I thought I was there, something shifted. I do not think I appreciated how much needs to be given to this part of the research process either, a significant amount of time was spent going through each element and repeating at times to ensure a thorough analysis was taking place. My research supervisor encouraged me to 'enjoy' this part of the process, but for me this was too big a challenge and on reflection I believe experiences of anxiety, self-doubt and being out of my depth, were due to feeling 'consciously incompetent' (Burch, 1970). I am hopeful that were I to do a further study using the same methodology that I would feel more confident and competent with the process having now gone through it.

A further reflection during the organization of codes phase was that I had a lot of codes that only individuals had shared, which meant that they could not be part of a

theme, as themes are patterns across the data, therefore concepts need to be shared by more than one participant. I was able to merge some with other codes once I considered them further and recognised they had similar meanings, however on reflection I wonder if my choice of a sample of members of staff in different roles across the schools meant that perspectives were quite varied and that some things raised were only specific to that role. However, having said this I found that there were still plenty of patterns identified across the data set, that developed some strong themes.

Something that also came up when going through the transcripts and coding was that a couple of the participants had made reference to being a parent at the school as well as a staff member, therefore having a dual role. They had made references a couple of times to views and experiences they had, however from a parental perspective and having shared this during supervision, I recognised not to code this part of the data, as I was not exploring parents' perspectives/experiences of a trauma informed approach. This did however plant the idea of further research with parents and their views as they are such a key part of the school community and staff work so closely with them.

### **Bias/subjectivity**

I was aware that bias was something that could present during the data collection and analysis process (Pannucci & Wilkins, 2010; Bell & Waters, 2008). Across the schools, the invitation to take part in the study went out to all members of staff and not many came forward. The researcher is aware that those that did come forward may have been those that particularly valued the approach and that could have been their motivation for taking part, that they wanted to share their experiences from a positive perspective. In consideration of this the researcher did incorporate into the interview schedule questions that would enable participants to share a wider perspective and they did do this. In relation to researcher bias, I was also aware that my views of a relational more nurturing approach could have an influence on responses during the interviews, therefore I consciously

attempted to remain neutral, not indicating my own views and reflecting back what the participants shared at times, to clarify their meaning. A research journal was also kept so I could record my reflections and discuss these during research supervision.

What was important to reflect on was what as a researcher I may bring that could be viewed as researcher bias. I attempted to remain objective, through the interview process by not influencing participants with my views and beliefs. However, I needed to acknowledge that I chose this topic because I am curious about it, because I have an interest and belief in it and what it's trying to achieve, trying to create better outcomes for children and young people in schools and it aligns with my values and my past experiences of working in this way. Bell and Waters (2008) suggest that there are many factors that can result in researcher bias, particularly in studies that have been carried out by individual researchers and particularly when they have strong views on the topic. Throughout the research process I did keep this in mind, attempting to show an objective voice and being critical in my thinking when carrying out the literature review.

However, my beliefs and values feed into my ontological and epistemological position and as stated above this aligns with taking a qualitative approach, which involves methods for analysis and interpretation that are subjective. It requires the researcher to be part of the research process not separate from it. Further that analysis is a process of meaning making as opposed to seeking one truth. It is a subjective process shaped by what we bring and Braun and Clarke (2022) claim that subjectivity drives this process. Denzin and Lincoln (2005) consider all research to be interpretative and guided by the researcher's set of beliefs and how they view the world from a qualitative place, what we bring, who we are, are seen as vital to the analysis. Our assumptions influence our research. These are not seen as contamination but a part of the knowledge production process. It is seen as a strength (Braun & Clarke, 2022). This supported me throughout the analysis process. Being reflexive throughout the analytic process enabled me to

recognize that how I coded my data and developed my themes would have been influenced by my values and experiences of working therapeutically and relationally and this could have enabled me to see things in the data that someone else may have missed. The process of being reflexive and keeping a research journal supported this.

## **Ethics**

One of the ethical issues that became apparent and required further consideration was that the area I was choosing to explore and would be asking participants to discuss could be sensitive and emotive for them. Therefore, as part of the research design an assessment of risk to the participants was undertaken, in line with consultation and reflection of the (BPS, 2017) and (HCPC, 2016) ethical guidelines and standards in relation to research involving topics that could potentially be sensitive (BPS, 2017) and that all reasonable steps should be taken to reduce risk as far as possible (HCPC, 2016). Therefore, to reduce any potential risk of harm, the participants were made aware in the participant information sheet and during my initial introduction meeting with staff in school A what my study would be exploring and what areas would be discussed so staff could make an informed choice to participate. Also, it was made clear to participants at the end of the interviews, following discussions with the gatekeepers, that they could be signposted to line managers, other colleagues or occupational health for support if they felt they needed it. I checked in with each participant at the end of the interview and ensured they were given this information. However, this was not needed by any of them.

A further ethical consideration was that there may have been a possibility of participants feeling a sense of obligation to take part, particularly as the school had agreed to take part and this could result in participants experiencing a possible expectation to be involved. Therefore, it was agreed that the gatekeepers in both schools, would send the information out to all staff giving everyone the opportunity to come forward and participate if they chose to. Also, it was stated on the participant information sheet that participation

was voluntary to try to alleviate any sense of obligation. However further reflection was given to this, due to a lack of participants coming forwards, some participants may have experienced a sense of obligation in coming forwards following the resending of emails and the mentioning in team meetings and one participant did share at the end that they had done it as a 'favour' to the gatekeeper. I discussed further with the participant that this was voluntary and did they want me to go ahead and use their data because they could withdraw if they wished. They assured me they were happy for me to use the data. I discussed this further with my supervisor and it was deemed that I had done all I could to alleviate the sense of obligation. This led to further reflections on how we cannot know or necessarily understand the motivations individuals have for taking part in research studies and all we can do is make it clear that they have a choice and I know this I did at several points both in writing and verbally.

### **Dissemination of findings**

I reflected upon whether my findings would be something others would be keen to know about, particularly as my study was a small-scale study with 8 participants. However, I came back to the 'quality' of qualitative research being assessed through 'trustworthiness' and the use of Lincoln and Guba's (1985) evaluative criteria and the processes that were followed during the analysis process (Braun & Clarke, 2022) to enhance credibility (referred to further in the empirical paper). Further, there is recognition that qualitative small-scale studies (such as this) are particularly useful in gaining further insight into how and why particular situations or behaviours occur. Further, dissemination is useful as a process that can share skills and knowledge from research with specific audiences who will benefit, as this contributes to practice-based evidence (Sedgwick & Stothard, 2021). Consideration was therefore given as to how my study's findings could be best disseminated and it is hoped that my research could impact on professional understanding and contribute to the field of in this area.

As part of my PIS and consent form I asked my participants to indicate if they would like me to share with them a summary of my key research findings and implications on completion of the project. This summary will be shared with those participants who requested it, as well as with the SLT of the participant schools and my EP service. Sedgwick and Stothard (2021) discuss three dissemination purposes, awareness, understanding and action and disseminating the summary in this way will meet the first two, awareness and understanding.

Something I will consider further post qualification is the dissemination of my research being presented at conferences, such as the BPS Division of Education and Child Psychology's TEP conference or the Eastern Region conference. These are platforms to share my study's findings, raising awareness and understanding within the EP community and also highlighting areas where further study could be carried out by EPs and TEPs to enable further development of knowledge in this area.

Further, in line with the BPS Code of Human Ethics (2021) and in anticipation of the possibility of publishing my findings, I also ensured my PIS and consent form made clear consent would include appropriate dissemination of my research findings. I believe this research could contribute to the field in relation to the implementation of a whole school trauma informed approaches and offer insight in relation to the impacts of this, which could be supportive to senior leaders when making decisions about behaviour management within schools. Further, to EPs in their support of schools in relation to this. Therefore, I will consider dissemination through journals that may be most appropriate, such as *Educational Psychologist in Practice (EPIP)*. In addition, I will consider ways to share my findings in my role as a newly qualified EP within my team at their annual research service day and with colleagues who have set up a working party in relation to the EP service becoming trauma informed. Finally, I will also consider the possibility of presenting to local SENCo forums and the Headteachers conference, to raise awareness and understanding.



## Implications for EP Practice and Future Research Directions

I believe that my research findings have implications to some extent for EP practice and for future research studies. When reflecting on these aspects I tried to consider the implications for EP practice loosely using Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems model (1979) as a framework for my thinking. Beginning with wider societal systems and policies. Some of the current shifts within society are the coming away from a punitive approach, more towards a child's rights perspective (i.e., the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), 2010). There have been shifts in the role of the EP also, towards a much more systemic model that enables us to work with whole school communities and wider systems. It enables EPs to have a more transformative voice, to highlight issues, such as promoting the principles of relational approaches to effect change in schools and within society. I am hoping that, even though this is a small-scale study, it will contribute to the limited research base in relation to trauma informed approaches in schools in the UK. I am hoping that this small-scale study will contribute in some way in enabling EPs to have a louder voice within these wider systems and at policy level and that may effect some change. A recent article in the Times Educational Supplement (TES) (Morgan, 2023) discusses that EPs are in a prime position to be advocates in relation to behaviour policies, mental health and educational reform.

A further wider societal aspect that came up for me when doing the analysis and considering the findings, was that the findings highlighted raised self-awareness within staff, as well as reflection and a change in perspective and mindset. This was also seen to 'ripple down' into other areas of their lives and influence their relationships and interactions. I view this as an avenue for possible societal change, with more people having an awareness of their process and emotional responses which could result in interactions being more considered and less reactive. This signifies some hope in a somewhat challenging world.

Moving on to ways EPs could support whole schools and their communities, I reflected on sharing my findings using 'RIPPLE' as a potential framework to support schools considering a change to more trauma informed approach to behaviour management. Further, EPs could assist schools to support parents to help them understand the school's approach and involving them in the process if considering transition, as they are a key part of the school community and whole school approaches involve all those in the community (Weare, 2015; Berger & Martin, 2021; Ruttledge, 2022; Demkowicz & Humphrey, 2019). Part of an EPs role is delivering training. Therefore, delivering training to parents around the underlying processes supporting trauma informed and relational approaches could be helpful and supporting staff with ways to manage difficult conversations with parents. While considering this aspect I am also aware of the challenges that schools can experience working with parents and families and how some can be unreachable and not engage in the school community (possibly due to their individual situations and experiences), and this will vary depending on individual school contexts. I still believe though that EPs have a role working with schools to explore the barriers and seek solutions in relation to working with their school community.

Further, as referred to in the empirical paper, there are a number of ways that EPs can use their role to work more systemically with schools to support them in implementing ways to enact the fundamental elements from the findings. EP services could become involved through the development and delivery of whole school training to staff in schools within their LA to support a whole school change in approach, exploring what underpins trauma informed approaches and what supports its implementation. In relation to this EPs could help schools to set up reflective practice groups (Ellis & Wolfe, 2020; Cooper & Wieckowski, 2017), to support staff to be more open to introspection and increase self-awareness; to offer a space for the sharing of good practice and to explore alternatives; and to enable staff to explore the aspect of values with colleagues both positively or when

they are being challenged. In addition, EPs could assist schools in providing staff supervision (Shohet & Shohet, 2020) to support with the psychological and emotional aspect of using a trauma informed approach. This could be facilitated individually or in small groups, as they are in EP services that run the emotional literacy support assistants (ELSA) training. These EP services are required to provide ongoing group supervision to ELSAs (Osborne & Burton, 2014). EPs are therefore well positioned to facilitate supervision to school professionals within a multi-agency context and could do so for those who are implementing a trauma informed approach.

Further, considering EPs individual work with children and young people, the findings and what has been learnt from staff experiences, could support EPs in having further awareness of what may support child-adult connections and using or sharing these to support needs and build on strengths.

In relation to next steps and future research directions I reflected on the dearth of evidence in the literature regarding effectiveness of trauma informed approaches. A longitudinal type study to explore and monitor effectiveness over time. A further reflection on this is that monitoring effectiveness of an approach such as this could be challenging in relation to how it can be measured as there are so many aspects that encompass it, not like a specific intervention that is more tangible. The findings also indicated to me as a researcher how the process of embedding the approach becomes a way of being for the staff implementing it, not just a way of doing, which again makes it less tangible. I believe this would be interesting to explore further though.

I also considered how different insights could be gained if further research with staff implementing a trauma informed response across other contexts and schools (including secondary schools) was carried out and also widening it out to those that have used different training approaches to TISUK. I also reflected on the involvement of parents and

how research with this as a focus could contribute further in this area. This could be another qualitative study, to gather the views of parents on schools implementing a trauma informed approach, as well as identifying their views on how best to inform and educate them on the key aspects of this approach. This links into some of the implications for EP practice and how EPs can support the school community further. Other literature (Quinn et al., 2020) also highlighted this as an area for future research.

Finally, children and young people are at the centre of this and I believe they are another key area of interest that could benefit from further research. Seeking the views of the children who are experiencing the approach. Could they be involved in the research design? Considering participatory studies with children around the topic of trauma informed or relational practices in schools as this may tell us something more valuable through their specific involvement. Could this give us further insight into its effectiveness? This is an area as highlighted above that requires further exploration and evidence.

### **Personal and Professional development**

The process of carrying out this research has contributed in many ways to my personal growth as well as my development as a Trainee Educational Psychologist. As already highlighted, my prior experience of undertaking research was limited. This process has extended my knowledge considerably, taught me things that were completely new to me, including ontology and epistemology and how they are essential to the research process. Experiencing the highs and lows throughout, in relation to working with schools, having periods of time feeling concerned that no staff wanted to participate and then conducting interviews in a way that at times felt a little challenging to my way of being in an interaction. In addition, undertaking analysis of the data which I experienced as a long and at times an incredibly puzzling process.

This was my first experience of doing a project individually and this I found difficult. I believe part of this was due to being someone that does think things through at length, is reflective but also does question things and seek reassurance when feeling uncertain. At times I experienced feeling quite isolated and alone particularly during the analysis stage. Therefore, recognizing this and reaching out to access peer support from other TEPs, as well as making good use of supervision was so valuable to support me through this process (Baxter & Jack, 2008). This has been quite a personal journey for me and as difficult as it has been at times, I do feel I have grown as a result of it. I have had to set myself boundaries and apply some discipline in order to get through it, alongside managing existing demands of the training and family life. I have discovered levels of determination and tenacity that I was not aware existed in me.

## **Conclusion**

This study aimed to explore the impact on staff working in a relational and trauma informed way and through exploration of this some barriers and facilitators to implementation were identified. My previous experiences, my values, engagement with the literature and the findings from my study have reinforced my view that we should be supporting children in school in a more flexible equitable and nurturing way. I am hopeful that my study contributes to insights into the supports and challenges of working in this way from those applying it in everyday practice. I am optimistic this will support schools who are considering the transition to a relational approach. I believe it highlights how relationships, values, consistency and cohesion play a key role in the approach, 'rippling down' to the children and staff and into wider aspects of their lives; which can then penetrate society. This is my take home from this research and leaves me feeling hopeful.

*"We have always held to the hope, the belief, the conviction that there is better life, a better world, beyond the horizon."* Franklin D. Roosevelt

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## Appendices

### Appendix 1: Headteacher/Gatekeeper E-mail

Dear [Gatekeeper Name]

My name is Salah Mellor, and I am currently undertaking a research project for my Doctorate in Educational Psychology at the University of East Anglia.

The project will involve carrying out interviews with 6-12 members of school staff (it is hoped a representation across different staff areas), within a school who are in the process of embedding or have embedded a trauma informed approach, to explore the effects that the introduction of this approach has had on school staff and their perceptions of the possible challenges and supports to implementation.

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 will need some time 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 and 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 [shalah.mellor@uea.ac.uk](mailto:shalah.mellor@uea.ac.uk) to confirm that you are willing to allow access to the school's employees providing they agree and are happy to take part.

Thank you for your time and I hope to hear from you soon.

Kind regards

Salah

Trainee Educational Psychologist

## Appendix 2: Semi-structure Interview question Guide

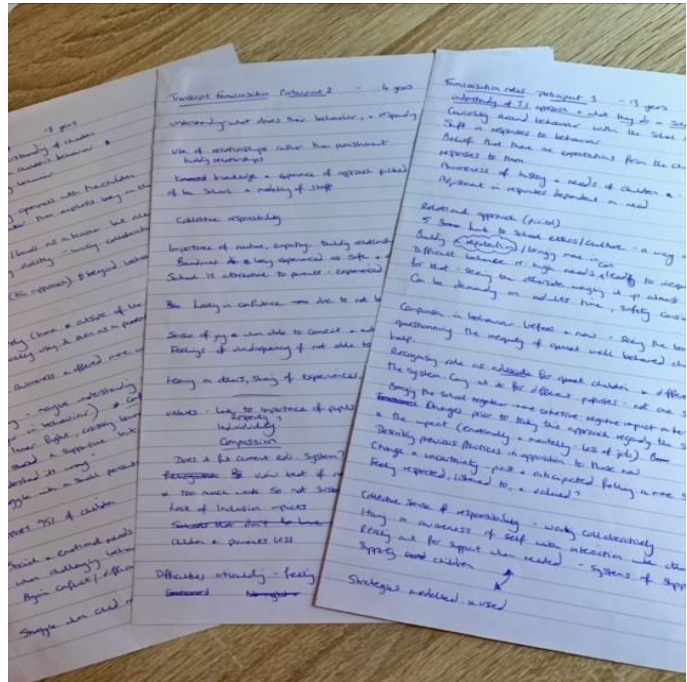
The following questions will be used as a guide and will not dictate the progress of the interview. Questions will not necessarily be asked in this order and may be dropped or added to allow the researcher to be responsive to the participants' concerns.

Areas of focus	Interview Questions	Prompts
Background/Introduction	<p>Introductions/paperwork/any questions/consent</p> <p>How are you today?</p>	
Views of the approach	<p>What is your understanding of a trauma informed approach? (Have you had training in using a trauma informed approach?)</p> <p>Can you tell me about your experiences of a trauma informed approach/the school's change in approach?</p>	<p>What is your responsibility?</p> <p>Professionally/Personally</p>
Practice	<p>What aspects of a trauma informed approach do you think work well in school?</p> <p>What aspects of a trauma informed approach do you think do not work well in school?</p> <p>To what degree do you feel able to implement a trauma informed approach in school?</p>	<p>Can you give examples?</p> <p>Are you able to tell me more?</p> <p>Practically, emotionally, mentally</p>
Personal impact/values	<p>How has applying the school's trauma informed approach impacted on you?</p> <p>Which aspects of a trauma informed approach do you feel link with your own personal values most or least?</p>	<p>Physically, emotionally, mentally</p> <p>Nurturing/discipline</p>

### Appendix 3: Reflexive Thematic Analysis

#### 1. Familiarisation with the data


Following transcription of the interviews, transcripts were read through multiple times and hand written notes were made on initial thoughts and ideas in relation to each data item then the whole data set.



#### 2. Coding

This was carried out on the computer using the comments function in word to indicate the codes and what sections of text they were relevant to (see extract below) for each full transcript. A list of the codes was created in excel. Codes were refined by going through this process twice.

25 P – also whether there's any neurodiversity, because what I also know is if there is  
 26 neurodiversity and trauma that can be quite a complex thing to unpick and see which  
 27 where that behaviour might be coming from, so sometimes it is very trauma based  
 28 and it is about that hypervigilance and sometimes it's actually I'm just really rigid in  
 29 my thinking and I need an element of control around this kind of environment that I'm  
 30 in. So sometimes those children are more complex umm but if its I don't want to say  
 31 pure trauma, but if its, or just trauma, because again I don't really believe, that kind  
 32 of lowers the importance of it, but if it is without complicating factors, then you know  
 33 it it's about digging into that background and finding out what that ACE score was  
 34 and then really understanding why that child maybe behaving in the way its behaving  
 35 and what we know is that if we increase the levels of control around our interactions  
 36 with that child, is that they never learn trust and they never build that kind of you  
 37 know, and the rupture and repair as well, because often there in a home that may  
 38 still be quite traumatic and often those relationships aren't repaired, they rupture and  
 39 they stay unrepaired. So what I do know is the relationship is absolutely key,  
 40 knowing what that child likes, knowing umm when you go to them and they might be

-  **Shalah Mellor (EDU - Postgraduate Research...**  
Individual needs as being responded to (25-30)
-  **Shalah Mellor (EDU - Postgraduate Research...**  
Reasons for behaviour as being better understood (30-35)
-  **Shalah Mellor (EDU - Postgraduate Research...**  
Relationships/being relational as being significant (35-45)
-  **Shalah Mellor (EDU - Postgraduate Research...**  
Working with child's interests as being important (40-42)

## Coding

This is a sample of list of the list of codes on excel – codes were refined and evolved throughout the process. The list of codes were printed out, cut out and colour coded in relation to participant. This was help the researcher identify how many participants had shared similar concepts in readiness for theme development.

139	Supporting behaviour as being difficult for small minority			
140				
141	Challenging behaviours as being more difficult to support			
142				
143	Challenging behaviours as impacting others/increasing number to support			
144				
145	Behaviour policy as unsuitable for some			
146				
147	Flexibility around the policy as being needed			
148				
149	Behaviour policy as negating fairness			
150				
151	Harming others as being a reason for FTE			
152				
153	SLT as being central to behaviour processes			
154				
155	Exclusion seen by SLT as being not beneficial			
156				
157	Exclusion as being a form of justice			
158				

## 3. Generating initial themes

Initial themes were generated using the printed coloured codes and post its (referred to above) which could be moved around to allow for flexibility and refinement.



#### 4. Developing and reviewing themes

The transcripts were revisited at this stage and extracts were selected in relation to the codes to assist in the development and reviewing of themes as the researcher could check that the extracts fit with the theme they were proposing.

- Some parents as lacking understanding of the approach
- Difficult to know how to educate parents about the approach
- Punitive element as being missing
- Inner conflict between nurture and level of consequences
- Staff that don't buy in moving on
- Strength of staff buy-in as being variable

**Sub-theme - Equity**

- Approach as being difficult when valuing fairness
- Support for children as being inequitable
- Behaviour policy as negating fairness
- Relationships between adult and child as being more equitable

**Selected extracts**

Some parents as lacking understanding of the approach

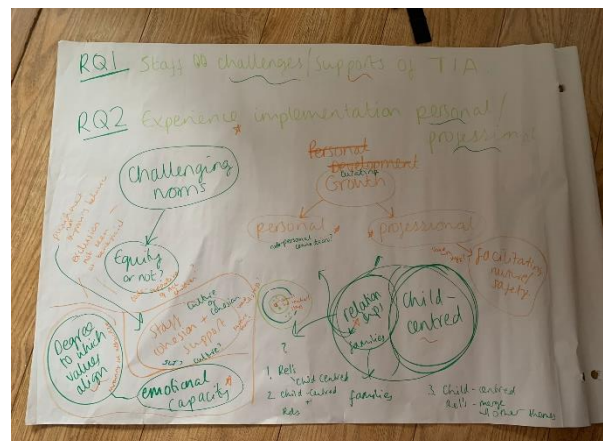
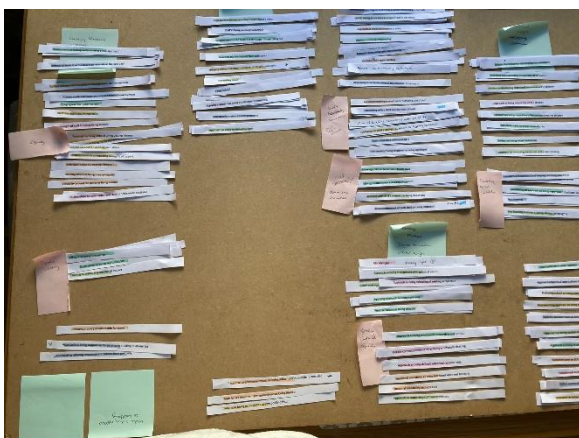
P1 "I think one of the things that we find particularly tricky at our school is our parents, so because they just want the children that may have become dysregulated in their child's class, especially the big dysregulation where they might have flipped a table or the whole class has had to exit is that the parents want that child to be punished, and they use the word punished they don't use the word consequence or restorative practice or any of that because it is and if they were you need to get the police involved, that needs to be identified as a hate crime, I mean they really can escalate it."

P1 when talking about parents "so it looks like your you rewarding from their point of view, your rewarding their bad behaviour by giving them extra forest school sessions, is your giving all the bad children the lovely things. No what we're doing is supporting their emotional needs by getting them outside more and so you know that that can be challenging..."

P3 "...I think parents think sometimes we are just not thinking things through and that's never the case, so I think our parents have, it's been harder to pull them on our side because of their perception of their much like, well they just need to not be here or umm there isn't, I don't think there's been an awareness..."

P3 "...we do have quite a fixed mentality amongst many of our parents that this happens and there should be this consequence...."

#### 5. Refining, defining and naming themes



#### 6. Writing up

Further refinement and finalisation of themes was achieved during the writing up stage.



## Appendix 4: University Ethics Approval

[← Back](#)

### Ethics ETH2223-0900 (Significant amendments): Mrs Shalah Mellor : Decision

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University of East Anglia

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Sent on **22 Nov 2022** by **Lee Beaumont**

[Download as PDF...](#)

**Study title:** Balancing Nurture and Discipline: Exploring personal and professional experiences of staff implementing a trauma informed approach

**Application ID:** ETH2223-0900 (significant amendments)

Dear Shalah,

Your application was considered on 22nd November 2022 by the EDU S-REC (School of Education and Lifelong Learning Research Ethics Subcommittee).

The decision is: **approved**.

You are therefore able to start your project subject to any other necessary approvals being given.

This approval will expire on **3rd July 2023**.

Please note that your project is granted ethics approval only for the length of time identified above. Any extension to a project must obtain ethics approval by the EDU S-REC (School of Education and Lifelong Learning Research Ethics Subcommittee) before continuing.

It is a requirement of this ethics approval that you should report any adverse events which occur during your project to the EDU S-REC (School of Education and Lifelong Learning Research Ethics Subcommittee) as soon as possible. An adverse event is one which was not anticipated in the research design, and which could potentially cause risk or harm to the participants or the researcher, or which reveals potential risks in the treatment under evaluation. For research involving animals, it may be the unintended death of an animal after trapping or carrying out a procedure.

Any amendments to your submitted project in terms of design, sample, data collection, focus etc. should be notified to the EDU S-REC (School of Education and Lifelong Learning Research Ethics Subcommittee) in advance to ensure ethical compliance. If the amendments are substantial a new application may be required.

Approval by the EDU S-REC (School of Education and Lifelong Learning Research Ethics Subcommittee) should not be taken as evidence that your study is compliant with the UK General Data Protection Regulation (UK GDPR) and the Data Protection Act 2018. If you need guidance on how to make your study UK GDPR compliant, please contact the UEA Data Protection Officer ([dataprotection@uea.ac.uk](mailto:dataprotection@uea.ac.uk)).

I would like to wish you every success with your project.

On behalf of the EDU S-REC (School of Education and Lifelong Learning Research Ethics Subcommittee)

Yours sincerely,

## Appendix 5: Participant Information Sheet

Shalah Mellor

Faculty of Social Sciences

Trainee Educational Psychologist

School of Education and Lifelong Learning

21st November 2022

University of East Anglia

Norwich Research Park

Norwich NR4 7TJ

### **Balancing Nurture and Discipline: Exploring personal and professional experiences of staff implementing a trauma informed approach**

#### **PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET**

#### **(1) What is this study about?**

You are invited to take part in a research study to explore the personal and professional effects that the introduction of a trauma informed approach has on school staff and to explore the possible challenges and support to its implementation. You have been invited to participate in this study because you are a staff member in a school that is in the process of embedding or has embedded a trauma informed approach. This Participant Information Sheet tells you about the research study. Knowing what is involved will help you decide if you want to take part in the study. Please read this sheet carefully and ask questions about anything that you don't understand or want to know more about.

Participation in this research study is voluntary. By giving consent to take part in this study you are telling us that you:

- ✓ Understand what you have read.
- ✓ Agree to take part in the research study as outlined below.
- ✓ Agree to the use of your personal information as described.
- ✓ You have received a copy of this Participant Information Sheet to keep.

#### **(2) Who is running the study?**

The study is being carried out by the following researcher - Shalah Mellor, Trainee Educational Psychologist, on the doctorate for Educational Psychology, in the School of Lifelong Learning at the University of East Anglia. The study and researcher are supervised by Dr Nicolette Collingwood, on the doctorate for Educational Psychology, in the School of Lifelong Learning at the University of East Anglia.

#### **(3) What will the study involve for me?**

You will be asked to take part in a 1:1 semi-structured interview with the researcher either face to face in school or via Microsoft Teams at a mutually convenient time. The interview will invite you to answer questions that will require reflection on your experiences and perceptions of working in a school that is in the process of embedding or has embedded a trauma informed approach and its professional and personal impact on you. Face to face interviews will be audio recorded and virtual interviews will be recorded on Microsoft Teams. If you do not wish for your video to be recorded you will have the option to keep your camera switched off and the interview will then be recorded using a digital audio recorder. The interview will be transcribed by the researcher. Any information shared will be anonymised and pseudonymised.

An option will be given to you to review your interview transcript, within a 5 day period, if you wish.

**(4) How much of my time will the study take?**

It is anticipated that the interviews will take up to an hour of your time to complete.

**(5) Do I have to be in the study? Can I withdraw from the study once I have started?**

Being in this study is completely voluntary and you do not have to take part. Your decision whether to participate will not affect your current or future relationship with the researcher, anyone else at the University of East Anglia or the School you work for, now or in the future.

If you decide to take part in the study, you can withdraw your consent up to the point that your data is fully anonymised and if you change your mind and wish to withdraw your consent to participate in the research then you can do this by emailing the researcher at [shalah.mellor@uea.ac.uk](mailto:shalah.mellor@uea.ac.uk).

**(6) What are the consequences if I withdraw from the study?**

You are free to stop the interview at any time. Unless you say that you want me to keep them, any recordings will be erased and the information you have provided will not be included in the study results. You may also refuse to answer any questions that you do not wish to answer during the interview. If you decide at a later time to withdraw from the study your information will be removed from my records and will not be included in any results, up to the point I have analysed and published the result, and this would include the submission of the thesis for assessment purposes.

**(7) Are there any risks or costs associated with being in the study?**

Aside from giving up your time, I do not expect that there will be any risks or costs associated with taking part in this study.

**(8) Are there any benefits associated with being in the study?**

It is hoped that this research will give staff in your school an opportunity to share their perceptions and experiences of going through a whole school change and to offer further understanding to other schools in the community, and/or wider, that are seeking to introduce a whole school change in behaviour management, towards one that emphasises a more relational and nurturing approach. It is also hoped that this could inform Educational Psychologists (EPs) in their various work with schools and ultimately in supporting schools undertaking this type of whole school change.

**(9) What will happen to information provided by me and data collected during the study?**

Your personal data and information will only be used as outlined in this Participant Information Sheet, unless you consent otherwise. Data management will follow the Data Protection Act 2018 (DPA 2018) and UK General Data Protection Regulation (UK GDPR), and the University of East Anglia's [Research Data Management Policy](#).

The information you provide will be stored securely and your identity will be kept strictly confidential, except as required by law. Study findings may be published, but you will not be identified in these publications if you decide to participate in this study.

**(10) What if I would like further information about the study?**

When you have read this information, I Shalah will be available to discuss it with you further and answer any questions you may have about the study at [shalah.mellor@uea.ac.uk](mailto:shalah.mellor@uea.ac.uk).

**(11) Will I be told the results of the study?**

You have a right to receive feedback about the overall results of this study. If you would like feedback, please indicate this on the consent form below. This feedback will be in the form of a summary of the research findings and will be available after August 2023.

### **(12) What if I have a complaint or any concerns about the study?**

If there is a problem, please let me know. You can contact me via the University at the following address:

School of Education and Lifelong Learning

University of East Anglia

NORWICH NR4 7TJ

[shalah.mellor@uea.ac.uk](mailto:shalah.mellor@uea.ac.uk)

If you would like to speak to someone else, you can contact my supervisor:

Dr Nicolette Collingwood, [N.Collingwood@uea.ac.uk](mailto:N.Collingwood@uea.ac.uk)

If you are concerned about the way this study is being conducted or you wish to make a complaint to someone independent from the study, please contact the Head of the School of Education and Lifelong Learning, Professor Yann Lebeau at [Y.Lebeau@uea.ac.uk](mailto:Y.Lebeau@uea.ac.uk).

### **(13) How do I know that this study has been approved to take place?**

To protect your safety, rights, wellbeing and dignity, all research in the University of East Anglia is reviewed by a Research Ethics Body. This research was approved by the EDU S-REC (School of Education and Lifelong Learning Research Ethics Subcommittee).

### **(14) What is the general data protection information I need to be informed about?**

According to data protection legislation, we are required to inform you that the legal basis for processing your data as listed in Article 6(1) of the UK GDPR is because this allows us to process personal data when it is necessary to perform our public tasks as a University.

In addition to the specific information provided above about why your personal data is required and how it will be used, there is also some general information which needs to be provided for you:

- The data controller is the University of East Anglia.
- For further information, you can contact the University's Data Protection Officer at [dataprotection@uea.ac.uk](mailto:dataprotection@uea.ac.uk)
- You can also find out more about your data protection rights at the [Information Commissioner's Office \(ICO\)](#).
- If you are unhappy with how your personal data has been used, please contact the University's Data Protection Officer at [dataprotection@uea.ac.uk](mailto:dataprotection@uea.ac.uk) in the first instance.

### **(15) OK, I want to take part – what do I do next?**

You need to fill in one copy of the consent form and email it to [shalah.mellor@uea.ac.uk](mailto:shalah.mellor@uea.ac.uk). Please keep the letter, information sheet and a copy of the consent form for your information.

### **(16) Further information**

This information was last updated on 16.09.21.

This information sheet is for you to keep

**PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM (First Copy to Researcher)**

I, ..... [PRINT NAME], agree to take part in this research study.

In giving my consent I state that:

- I understand the purpose of the study, what I will be asked to do, and any risks/benefits involved.
- I have read the Participant Information Sheet, which I may keep, for my records, and have been able to discuss my involvement in the study with the researcher if I wished to do so.
- The researcher has answered any questions that I had about the study and I am happy with the answers.
- I understand that being in this study is completely voluntary and I do not have to take part. My decision whether to be in the study will not affect my relationship with the researcher or anyone else at the University of East Anglia or the school I work for now or in the future.
- I understand that I may stop the interview at any time if I do not wish to continue, and that unless I indicate otherwise any recordings will then be erased and the information provided will not be included in the study results. I also understand that I may refuse to answer any questions I don't wish to answer.
- I understand that personal information about me that is collected over the course of this project will be stored securely and will only be used for purposes that I have agreed to. I understand that information about me will only be told to others with my permission, except as required by law.
- I understand that the results of this study will be used for a thesis assessment and may be published but that the thesis and any publications will not contain my name or any identifiable information about me.

I consent to:

Audio-recording YES  NO

Microsoft teams recording YES  NO

Reviewing transcripts YES  NO

Would you like to receive feedback about the overall results of this study?

YES  NO

If you answered **YES**, please indicate your preferred form of feedback and address:

Postal: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Email: \_\_\_\_\_

.....

**Signature**

.....

**PRINT name**

.....

**Date**