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A Comparison Between Two Schools Implementing Trauma-Informed Classroom Management

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**A COMPARISON BETWEEN TWO SCHOOLS
IMPLEMENTING TRAUMA-INFORMED
CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT**

A Thesis Submitted
In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Designation
University Honors

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This Study by Maddie Steffen

Entitled: A Comparison Between Two Schools Implementing Trauma-Informed Classroom
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Abstract

Traditional classroom management methods are ineffective with students who have or are experiencing trauma. Students will not physically be able to learn until they feel like they are in a safe space. A trauma-informed classroom provides students with a safe environment to facilitate learning. This approach to classroom management focuses on more than academics, but also the student's well-being. It involves teachers trained in trauma awareness and strategies to help students cope with their emotions and engage in learning effectively. This project will study how two schools in a large urban public school district in the Midwest part of the United States implement trauma-informed classroom management and compare what is being practiced in the classroom. It will involve evaluating and reflecting on interview data between the two schools' principals and how the responses correspond to the strategies implemented in the schools. Critical literature supporting trauma-informed classroom management will be reviewed to understand the results of this study. Through this research project, it is concluded that School 1 is further along in implementing a trauma-informed approach compared to School 2. School 1 demonstrates more evidence of strategies being practiced in the classroom, adopts a more school-wide approach with a common language used among the staff and students, and ensures that strategies are consistently applied, unlike School 2.

Introduction

In the complex world of education, every aspect contributes to the overall pattern of a student's learning journey. However, along with the academic rigor and structured curriculum, there is a silent yet widespread reality: the impact of trauma on our students. As educators, we are responsible for passing on knowledge and cultivating environments where every student can thrive, regardless of past experiences.

Students may experience trauma for various reasons in and outside of school. Some examples include violence or abuse, poverty, bullying, and grief. These experiences have a profound impact on students' mental and emotional well-being, potentially leading to symptoms of trauma such as anxiety, depression, difficulty concentrating, and avoidance behaviors. This study focuses on students in the elementary grades, but also can apply to secondary students. It is essential for educators to be aware of these potential sources of trauma and to provide appropriate support and resources to help students cope and heal. Teachers should be equipped with strategies to give to students and support them in and outside of school. The value and mission of schools should cater to the needs of students and prepare teachers to enforce their goals.

Two schools in a Midwest urban school district will be compared in terms of how they implement classroom management strategies in a trauma-sensitive school. By understanding the extreme effects of trauma on learning and behavior, educators can foster environments that prioritize safety, trust, and empowerment.

The two research questions that will be investigated in this project are: What are the critical aspects of an elementary school implementing a school-wide trauma-informed approach? and What aspects of trauma-informed classroom management need to be included in an

elementary school beginning to implement the approach? The two questions will be responded to in the results section of this paper.

The following sections will explore the principles and practices of trauma-informed classroom management, its practical applications, and its transformative impact on students and educators will be examined. Strategies and goals for teaching in a trauma-sensitive school are described in great detail. Through this study, we aim to determine the strategies that best support students who are experiencing or have experienced trauma. This includes the tools and insights necessary to create nurturing and inclusive learning spaces where every student feels seen, heard, and valued. This research project will unravel the complexity of trauma-informed classroom management and embark on a path toward fostering resilience, empathy, and academic success for all students. This paper examines the pattern of trauma-informed classroom management, a pivotal approach in modern education that acknowledges and responds to the diverse traumas students may carry with them.

Literature Review

Classroom Management Goals and Effects

Classroom management has an immense role in schools and, when done effectively, can highly impact students. There are many known advantages to a trauma-informed approach. Some of these advantages include creating a safe and positive learning environment, ensuring engagement, and facilitating teaching (Blodgett, 2018). Multiple approaches to classroom management exist with similar goals and intended outcomes of maximizing appropriate conduct and minimizing student misbehavior. However, despite all of the advantages listed, each of these strategies requires teachers to adjust their instruction to the needs of their students.

Nonetheless, it is crucial to determine what strategies and practices will benefit the students and create a school-wide approach that implements and aligns these strategies in the school and district. Classroom management issues are a massive problem in classrooms today and primarily affect the amount of learning occurring. Research shows that trauma and toxic stress can cause underlying reasons for students having a difficult time in school academically and behaviorally, creating issues for effective classroom management (Blodgett, 2018). That is why classroom management should be reconsidered and adapted to what students are facing and experiencing. This new approach should focus on social-emotional skills and trauma-informed care to better assist students and prioritize their emotional health and learning.

Furthermore, classroom management encompasses a lot that educators need to be equipped with, but the purpose of good classroom management is generally the same. The primary goals of classroom management include promoting an inclusive atmosphere that accommodates all ability levels, encourages student engagement to increase focus, motivation, and productivity, reduces undesirable behaviors, and establishes opportunities for personal and academic growth. Quality classroom management allows educators to do their job correctly and ensures students achieve their full potential (“FutureLearn”, 2023). Teachers should have a foundation of knowledge base about classroom management. This foundation starts with building trusting relationships. Strong teacher-child relationships positively impact students, their learning, and classroom management.

An example of positive teacher-student relationships is the characteristics of the “warm demander,” who is caring and supportive while holding the students to high expectations (Tartwijk, 2009). In the *Handbook of Classroom Management: Research, Practice, and Contemporary Issues*, Evertson and Weinstein describe the importance of a positive teacher.

When classroom management strategies rely on punishment and external rewards, they may negatively affect the classroom community (Evertson & Weinstein, 2006). Teachers must consider students' age, ethnicity, culture, past experiences, and socioeconomic status to develop a supportive, orderly, and productive classroom.

ACEs, Trauma, and Toxic Stress

Classroom Management is a critical part of effective teaching and, more specifically, culturally responsive management, as it should cater to the needs of the students. Students experiencing trauma and stress may not respond well to traditional approaches to classroom management due to weakened executive functioning skills (Kuhn et al., 2023). The skills include inhibitory control, where the student is easily distracted and has difficulty focusing on a single task; working memory, where the student asks for repeated instructions and may struggle with reading; and cognitive flexibility, where students only see through one lens and struggle with the concept of fairness. These skills are affected when the child's brain is altered due to trauma. The effects can be from exposure to multiple Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE). ACEs occur when a child is exposed to traumatic events that may have immediate and lifelong impacts (Blodgett, 2018). ACEs can have major impacts on students' overall well-being. Some of these issues include disrupting neurodevelopment, social, emotional, and cognitive impairment, health-risk behaviors, disease, disability, and the potential of early death (Krugman, 2012). An ACE score is given based on 10 types of childhood trauma and the increased risk of developing health problems later in life. ACEs affect students neurologically and prevent them from developing social, emotional, behavioral, and academic skills.

There is a cycle of panic in the trauma response of students. Research shows that exposure to ACEs can impact a developing brain. When looking at a child's brain exposed to one

or more ACEs, it is seen that the hippocampus, the part responsible for managing memory, processing emotion, and spatial awareness, decreased in size and activity (Kim et al., 2015). The hippocampus shrinks from the overactive amygdala. This part of the brain helps regulate emotion and process information. It is also damaged when the student is constantly on high alert or in fight-or-flight situations, perceiving everything as a potential threat or danger (Kuhn et al., 2023). Students feel a sense of lack of control when experiencing trauma and may decide to gain control by acting out in the classroom. The “survivor behavior” may look like fighting, interrupting, spacing out, or an explosion of emotion. A nurturing environment may be threatening to a child. When a student displays undesirable behavior or acts out, the educator needs to change their mindset regarding what may happen in the student’s life. Instead of “What is wrong with them?” to “What happened to them and how did they learn to adapt to it?” (Jennings, 2019). Many students who have experienced adversity and trauma may have a difficult time building and maintaining healthy relationships. This makes the educators work especially important because they have the opportunity to foster and maintain relationships that nurture resiliency for these vulnerable young people.

Trauma disrupts the development of core cognitive, social, emotional, and behavioral competencies needed for success in school. Toxic stress may be a result of the trauma experienced. Some examples include abuse, neglect, extreme poverty, violence, household dysfunction, and food insecurity (Franke, 2014). When a child is experiencing stress from outside of school, it is difficult for them to have a clear mind ready to learn in school. A study of 2,101 K-6th grade students at ten elementary schools with 55% free and reduced lunch revealed an effect between the number of ACEs and the risk of poor attendance, behavioral issues, and failure to meet grade level in math, reading, and writing. As the number of ACEs increase, the

percentage of children with more areas of school problems increases (Blodgett,2018). Because of the trauma, stress, and developmental delays from adverse childhood experiences, schools need to rethink classroom management.

Teaching in a Trauma-Sensitive Classroom

Effective classroom management is vital for students who are experiencing trauma. Schools need to consider this when reflecting on and establishing an appropriate approach. Trauma-informed classroom management understands that students need a safe, nurturing, and supportive environment before they are physically and emotionally able to learn. Trauma, defined by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), is an event or circumstance resulting in physical, emotional, and life-threatening harm. These harms have lasting adverse effects on the individual, including mental, physical, and emotional health and overall social well-being (SAMHSA, 2022). It is common for students to be sent to the office or out of the classroom as an immediate response to behavioral issues that arise in the school. To reduce challenging behaviors and improve learning outcomes and opportunities for students with ACEs, educators should have an understanding of what behaviors associated with trauma look like in the classroom, how to create an emotionally safe environment, recognize triggers of students, how to respond to de-escalate the situation and to help students practice skills of self-regulation (Bashant, 2020). Becoming trauma-informed is a shift in mindset with classroom management. When implemented effectively, it has a ripple effect across the school environment and culture.

Trauma-sensitive schools need appropriate care and service to benefit each student in the classroom. It is essential to connect and build relationships, promote safety and trustworthiness, respect students by allowing them to engage with choice and collaboration, and encourage skill-

building and competence. Providing trauma-informed care supports a welcoming environment that minimizes unnecessary trauma and focuses on the positive relationships between teachers and students. Judith Herman's stages of trauma recovery are to create a safe environment, process the unresolved trauma memories, and make connections with others (Herman, 1992). Teachers can guide students in progressing through their recovery process. It begins with realizing the impact of trauma, recognizing the symptoms, and responding by integrating knowledge about trauma (Phifer, 2016). The older, more traditional methods of classroom management focus heavily on rules. They are more teacher-centered and authoritarian, and the students are expected to follow the rules. As educators consider how they will meet the needs of their students, they need to consider that this style is not realistic for students with ACEs, trauma, and toxic stress.

SEL Framework

Recently, there has been a shift in classroom management. Corrective discipline policies like "zero tolerance" are being reviewed as the restorative practice of social-emotional learning (SEL) framework is becoming more integrated (Hulvershorn & Mulholland, 2018). It is a promising approach to universal prevention of mental, emotional, and behavioral health problems. Social-emotional learning fosters emotional intelligence, behavior regulation, and identity formation. The design needs to be flexible and adaptable to meet the needs of all students and reflect the diverse student body to develop meaningful engagement (Cipriano, 2023). SEL must contain components of classroom climate and integration of explicit and implicit SEL into instruction. When educators consider implementing a SEL approach in their classroom they should consider essential questions like: How is the classroom set up to support students? How are activities or lessons allowing students to grow in social-emotional skills?

Objectives of school-based SEL interventions include emotional recognition and management, positive goal setting and achievement, empathetic thinking, positive relationship development, and responsible decision-making (Barnes, 2019). Every single child deserves to feel safe, valued, and seen in connection to their classroom. Instead of focusing on punitive consequences, behavior management should be centered around relationship building. Students need the opportunity to practice the skills that support their learning and development. The Collaborative of Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) framework defines the 10 competencies of what SEL looks like in the classroom and comprises of explicit SEL instruction, SEL integrated with academic instruction, youth voice and engagement, supportive school, and classroom climate, focus on SEL, supportive discipline, a continuum of integrated supports, authentic family partnerships, aligned community partnerships, and systems for continuous improvement (CASEL, 2018).

The world is growing in consensus on the importance of education in attending to students' social-emotional development. New studies and widely read materials suggest that students' attitudes, mindsets, feelings, and actions can propel various outcomes like preparedness for college, career achievement, mental well-being, and interpersonal connections (Allbright et al., 2019). Nevertheless, despite this increasing recognition, many districts and schools struggle to adopt methods to nurture students' social-emotional competencies. An article from the *Journal of Research in Innovative Teaching & Learning* shares a study of 10 outlier middle schools attempting to implement SEL approaches. Six practices were identified to support students' social emotional well-being in schools. The six strategies include promoting positive school climate and relationships, supporting positive behavior, encouraging elective courses and extracurricular activities, incorporating time for SEL-specific classroom practices and curricula,

hiring, organizing, and training qualified staff, and using measurement and data used to influence decisions (Allbright et al., 2019). Identifying how schools' policies and practices may advance students' success, health, and happiness will provide a clearer understanding of the most beneficial SEL practices.

School Alignment

When implementing a school-wide approach educators would need to ask questions like: Do the administrators support teachers and staff with ongoing training to implement appropriate classroom management strategies based on the needs of their student body? The role of the administrator is to create a supportive school culture, provide clear expectations, resources, and staff training, and develop SEL policies and programs that align with the school's missions and goals. The role of the teacher is their day-to-day responsibility of incorporating SEL into their daily practices. Building positive relationships, providing a safe, inclusive environment, and teaching the skills needed to promote identifying and managing emotions, resolving conflicts, and making responsible decisions are targets for teachers. Other roles that play a part in the structure include school counselors. They provide individual and group counseling, conduct assessments and interventions, and collaborate with teachers and families (Selby, 2023). However, a big misconception is that it is up to the guidance counselor to provide the necessary care to students experiencing trauma, but educators need to implement SEL daily.

For SEL programs to create a positive learning environment, all school staff must be involved in implementing the program, especially the teachers who directly interact with students (Cole et al., 2005). This collaboration creates a school-wide movement that will lead to the success of the school's goals and mission. The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) has presented a five-factor SEL model to affect varying social and

personal skills (Weissberg et al., 2013). The five competencies of the model include self-management, self-awareness, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making. Benefiting from these areas will lead to short and long-term outcomes, including positive attitudes and social behavior, emotional distress, academic success, and increased mental health (Ross & Tolan, 2018). Schools that implement this have adopted SEL standards in their curriculum and provide federal funding for the program. An aspect to contemplate is whether the curriculum is being used effectively. On the individual level, this is causing a problem. Do teachers push it aside to focus on other academic standards? The number of staff qualified to implement a trauma-informed approach is assessed at the school or district level. Looking at the macro level, is state and federal funding seen in the policies supporting the program? Richard Milner, the author of *“These Kids Are Out of Control,”* had shared classroom management recommendations that teachers and professional development facilitators should work together to improve. This includes adopting a learner lens, creating family and community partnerships, being stern and fair, and developing a frame of mind for success (Milner et al., 2019). Teachers and administrators must do better to reimagine classroom management for equity and justice.

How SEL is put into effect by administrators and teachers should be constantly reflected on. The EAB, an educational institution firm based in Washington, DC serving over 2,500 schools, conducted a nationwide survey in October 2022 to learn about the impacts of recent student behavior. Over 1,100 educators responded nationwide and revealed that 84% say students' behavioral skills are currently behind that of students before the pandemic. Eight in 10 educators from the survey say there is a troubling disconnect between administration and teachers (Prothero, 2023). Students lack social-emotional skills such as self-regulation and

relationship-building. According to the EAB report, principals need to support teachers in implementing SEL programs that the districts invest in. It was mentioned that they are “program rich, but impact poor” (Prothero, 2023). The administration needs to follow up that the staff of the school are implementing the strategies from the program to see the benefits. Barriers like lack of training, pressure on teachers to catch students up academically, and insufficient mental health support staff may exist. Responses from this survey revealed that 55% of administrators say their district has clear behavior management strategies and provides training, while only 36% of educators agree (Prothero, 2023). Administrators and teachers have different views on classroom management, specifically behavior management and strategies being implemented in schools. Classroom management strategies and implementation must evolve to benefit students and schools.

Summary

How classroom management is implemented in a school will determine how successful a student is in school. Although not all schools are at the same stages of implementing trauma-informed care strategies and an SEL framework, it is essential to note its positive impact on student achievement and overall classroom management. Changing from a zero-tolerance approach takes commitment. Classroom management should be revised, evolved, and continuously reflected on to provide the best care to all students. The execution and application of how schools offer students opportunities to grow and learn academically, emotionally, behaviorally, and socially is critical to effective classroom management. The skills gained will allow students to self-regulate in cognitive, motivational, and behavioral dimensions to be successful as learners. A school’s classroom management approach should prioritize trauma-informed care and exhibit clear alignment within a school system. Adverse childhood

experiences (ACEs)-sensitive schools have united with the social-emotional learning (SEL) movement. It is essential to determine if the practices are seen from the top down in a school. This research study will lead to understanding trauma-informed care between two similar demographic schools regarding classroom management based on observations made in the classroom and interview data.

Methodology

This research study focused on discovering the parallels between two trauma-sensitive schools and their use of classroom management. The interview responses and what was observed in the classroom and school were compared. By including the data points of the principal and observations, common themes arose and were examined. This methodology section will explain the research design, how data was collected and analyzed, the limitations of the study, the timeline of the study, and the sampling strategy. All of the necessary parts of this research study and data acquired in the accomplishment of this study are included.

The approach used in this study was primarily qualitative research. This is the best approach for this study because comparisons are made between interview responses and what is observed in the classroom. Qualitative research allows questions to be answered that cannot easily be put into numbers. This approach aims to grasp the quality of responses and investigate the participants' perspectives in the study to effectively comprehend the dynamics of trauma-informed classroom management. The qualitative research approach is crucial in understanding the thesis context of how schools implement a universal design of trauma-informed classroom management.

The underlying beliefs of the core of this study make way for the research design. It is a key component to understand that I, as the researcher, am making observations based on how I

interpret and experience them. The same goes for the interviewees as they assess the questions depending on the reality unique to them. This research provides a bottom-up, exploratory approach where specific observations from the classroom and data from the interviews are gathered, and then general conclusions are based on them. The research strategy involves observing and capturing participants' perceptions in an uncontrolled environment of their classrooms and school.

The research design encompasses the participants involved, materials used, procedures followed, and how data was collected and analyzed. The research conducted was completed in two parts. The first part involved comparing two interviews with the principals from two elementary schools in an urban school district from the Midwest. The second part consisted of evaluating the observations collected by UNI students from both schools during Level III week. The interviews with the two principals revealed their expectations for their school. At the same time, the strategies being implemented in the classroom were presented using the data provided by the Level III documents, including tallying the number of self-regulation strategies observed at the two schools. A bar graph was created to represent this quantity. The expectations and outcomes at both schools were reviewed and compared to how the two schools are different.

Copies of transcripts of both interviews were provided to the two coders and each individually selected lines of dialogue from the text. Each coder then put the lines of dialogue into codes. The two coders met and shared how they categorized each line of dialogue from the transcript and found a high degree of agreement. Any discrepancies were discussed and an agreement was made.

The schools both had 25 UNI students complete their Level III experiences at the two schools in this district. The schools will be named School 1 and School 2 in this research project.

Both schools have a similar demographic, with over 90% being of low socio-economic status, over 75% English Learners, and over 80% of students with an IEP (“Iowa Schools Performance Profiles”, 2023). This similar demographic representation of students in both of these two schools within the same school district allows for them to be compared more efficiently.

The participants involved are the principals from the two schools. They will be named Principals 1 and 2 for Schools 1 and 2. The interview with Principal 1 was conducted before the thesis process and the transcript is found in the book *Thriving in Today's Schools: The Science of Classroom Management Elementary and Middle Level*. The interview with Principal 2 was conducted during the thesis process by myself, the student thesis author. How do they support their staff and their students? Interviewing the principals to measure the school's policy with trauma-informed care is essential.

Written notes and observations from the classrooms were used, as well as, the audio recordings of the interviews. The procedure of the study and how data is collected includes two parts: interviews and observations. The questions between the two correlated to determine similarities and differences between answers. The questions asked during the first principal interview were asked to the other principal at the second interview to compare responses more consistently. Some of the questions that were asked in the interview include: How has classroom management changed for you as a teacher? How have you applied it to your PD? What strategies do you teach your staff to help students self-regulate? How do you feel about the Zero-Tolerance approach? We will use data from Level III week to collect data on how the teachers implement trauma-informed care. The 25 students at Schools 1 and 2 have the same instructor for classroom management and had to complete the same assignment for their coursework. All students at both schools had to observe how their cooperating teacher used trauma-informed practices as part of

their classroom management plan. This data was access and identifying information was removed from the assignment. We then examined which classroom management instructional strategies were used throughout both schools. A chart was created showing specific techniques that were implemented at each school. We also looked at what the principals discussed and what was being implemented in both schools.

The observations were grouped based on themes of approaches and how often each was being implemented at each school. This was where quantitative data could be collected through grounded theory. Another analysis method used was a constant comparison approach, where the advisor and I coded and interpreted the data. Determining comparisons and agreeing on the themes analyzed helped establish interrater reliability in this study. The process of the thesis and this study followed this outline. The approaches in this thesis justify the need, value, and importance of this study and studies like this. For effective classroom management in low-income schools, it is pivotal to have a trauma-informed approach.

Results

This research study explains how two schools implement a new approach to social-emotional learning in their classroom management strategies. The interview responses reveal how the schools implement their approach and compare the methods applied. From evaluating, coding, and establishing themes from the principal's interviews, it was clear that the two were similar but distinct patterns emerged regarding the approaches and strategies used and how they support their school. From observations made in the classroom and school by the students at UNI, I wanted to conclude if what was shared in the interviews was being seen in the school. How do they align? I anticipated hearing about challenges with classroom management in the interviews and what the staff are doing to combat these struggles. A constraint and concern that I

had going into this was the aspect of trusting the responses from the principals. Are they being honest in their responses? There was no way for me to determine their responses' validity. Still, I hoped to receive either validation to support or negate how they implement practices based on their interviews. Overall, I anticipated seeing correlations between trauma-informed classroom management practices being implemented and what the schools say they are implementing.

In order to assess the interviews, both the thesis author and thesis advisor independently coded the responses for themes from both principals. Then, we collaborated and discussed our thematic findings within the coded responses. This conversation enabled the insights to represent the data accurately and provided transparency and reflection of the responses. Examples of themes were found in both schools, while others were unique to each school. The data was categorized into codes and then counted to determine the validity and occurrence of being mentioned during the interviews. This data is consistent with the fact that both schools have trauma-informed classroom management as a vision and goal, but School 1 is further along in implementation compared to School 2. The data was put into a table to represent examples of the themes with the coded responses for each school. The number of times a response aligned with a code from each principal represents the percentage. The codes found in Principal 1's interview responses are, Establishing Baseline, Teacher Self-Care, Anti-Suspension, Anti-Reward/Punishment, High Expectations, Trauma-Informed Instruction, Find Best Environment, Understanding ACEs, Breathing Techniques, Peace Corner, and Common Language. All of these themes were represented in multiple responses to convey that the school values them. An example quote from the principal is provided for every code.

School 1 - Table 1			
Code	% of	Definition	Example

Response s			
Establishing Baseline	21%	Helping teachers figure out a way to help their students reach an emotional status where they are calm.	“We talked about how to teach what a student’s baseline breathing would look like. Fast breathing isn’t baseline; when a student is unregulated, their heart is probably beating fast, and their breath is faster than normal.”
Teacher Self-Care	15%	Helping teachers recognize they need to work on their own mental health in order to be the best teacher they can be.	“We talk about trauma, not as something that only occurs to people trapped in toxic situations, but instead think about trauma as something that happens to all of us.”
Anti-Suspension	15%	Identified that suspending a student is not the most effective way to improve behavior.	“In my old district, we didn’t do any social-emotional learning. It was pretty typical discipline; if a student broke a rule, they were punished and got a phone call home and if it was bad they were suspended. I saw first-hand that this didn’t work.”
Anti-Reward/Punishment	10%	Helping teachers understand that simple reward and punishment techniques are not the only way to help motivate students.	“When we try to show our staff a mind shift from punishment to teaching kids how to self-regulate, all while showing kids that we are here to support them, we typically find that teachers buy-in.”
High Expectations	8%	Having high expectations for students, but also recognizing that students bring trauma into the classroom.	“It definitely isn’t one person, it is a common message we send that we need to hold our students to high standards, but we think about what it takes to make

			that happen.”
Trauma-Informed Instruction	7%	Recognize that traditional methods of classroom management do not consider student emotions and how they affect behavior.	“We need to meet the students where they are at. We don’t just mean academically; we mean emotionally as well.”
Find Best Environment	5%	Allowing teachers to let students move to another classroom or place where they can regulate their emotions.	“We had a student who had almost daily tantrums and physical outbursts, and now he uses the peace corner to get right and in most cases, he returns to the class and gets back to work.”
Understanding ACEs	5%	Helping teachers recognize how ACEs impact students’ behavior and ability to regulate themselves.	“I would have new teachers study the research on ACEs and how they affect students’ ability to get to baseline.”
Breathing Techniques	5%	Mindfulness and breathing techniques are one of the possible strategies that teachers are encouraged to use when students become unregulated.	“When I worked with the teachers, we talked about teaching a student to recognize when they are breathing faster than normal and then find a way to get regulated before they make a decision.”
Peace Corner	5%	Peace Corner is one of the possible strategies that teachers are encouraged to use when students become unregulated.	“We worked with a student and taught him to go to the peace corner and cross his feet and arms when he started to feel unregulated.”
Common Language	5%	All teachers and staff members use common terms to communicate how they are helping students regulate their emotions.	“We all use the same language. We know if a student is regulated or unregulated and when a teacher needs assistance, that is the first thing we ask.”

Note- A principal’s response could receive more than one code and the percentages reflect how many times a code came up in the principal’s interview responses.

Eleven themes were found in School 1's codes representing the interview as a whole. The top codes include Establishing Baseline, Teacher Self-Care, Anti-Suspension, and Anti-Reward/Punishment. The principal of School 1 shared how establishing baseline is something that both teachers and students can benefit from. It is where a person tries to return to an emotionally calm state. This is an excellent support for teachers to understand how they can help unregulated students return to their baseline. The principal expressed how crucial it is for teachers to know their baseline, to care for their well-being, and to be the best teacher they can be. Principal 1 in the interview said that, "Before we talk about helping students reach their baseline, we talk to our staff about what their baseline looks and feels like" (Kuhn et al., 2023). The other two most common codes revolved around classroom management, which the principal disagrees with and does not believe works. School 1 does not take the approach of suspension and using award and punishment to improve behavior and motivate students. Instead, School 1 has a climate culture that gives students the best opportunity to grow and learn through the different strategies they implement, which include having high expectations, using trauma-informed instruction, breathing techniques, peace corners, and finding the best environment for students. The principal highlighted that the school uses the same language across all staff. The principal states, "We all use the same language. We know if a student is regulated or unregulated and when a teacher needs assistance." This identical language helps the school communicate their shared goal regarding classroom management.

In the interview with the principal of School 1, there was an emphasis on prioritizing students' and teachers' mental and emotional well-being over solely focusing on academic achievement. The responses indicated that the principal recognizes the importance of creating a supportive and nurturing environment where the needs of individuals are met rather than

concentrating all their efforts on academic outcomes. However, the principal clarified that educational success is intertwined with factors such as emotional regulation, mental health, and a sense of belonging within the school climate. This trauma-informed approach implies a commitment where students and teachers feel valued, supported, and equipped to thrive academically and personally.

Along with the findings that the school focuses on the staff and students well-being the table also presents a breakdown of different strategies and approaches implemented by School 1 in trauma-informed classroom management. The strategies that emerged from the interview help prepare students for learning. All staff are informed on how to help students self-regulate and the benefits of bringing students to their baseline. Teachers use self-regulation in many different ways, but a common one the principal mentioned was having a peace corner in the classroom. This is an area that the students are aware of, which is private and provides calming techniques and fidget toys. Students know how to recognize when they are feeling triggered and have the peace corner to remove themselves from the situation. The principal noted that it may be necessary for some students to need a short break outside of the classroom to reset. This can include a walk down the hall or a trip to the school's flex room. This room is available as an "as-needed" resource, but the ultimate goal is for the student to return to the classroom. The students know the expectations of the room and their job when they get there, which is going to their "spot" with their preferred objects. Some students like to listen to music; others like to blow bubbles or shoot baskets. With each student's plan, the flex room teacher has a conversation with the student about what made them visit the room, strategies to try next time something like this happens again, and eventually sending them back to their classroom. Another strategy for self-regulation is mindfulness breathing. Teachers are trained to teach students to recognize when

they are breathing faster than usual and find a way to get regulated before making a decision.

Overall, School 1 spends instructional time every day working on these techniques, even under pressure to perform academically, because the teachers understand that students need these skills to perform academic tasks. School 2 has some similarities and differences to School 1, and the data representing the interview from School 2 is below.

School 2			
Code	% of Responses	Definition	Example
Mindshift	29%	Changing teachers' view of classroom management to a trauma-informed approach.	“It took a while, and we are still not there, but I feel like I can walk down the halls and I can start focusing on academics because at the time, our behaviors were getting in the way.”
Teacher Self-Care	19%	Helping teachers recognize they need to work on their own mental health in order to be the best teacher they can be.	“But I just want my teachers to feel supported but also know that they don’t need any more on their plate. That is why some PD days are an hour max.”
Anti-Suspension	15%	Identified that suspending a student is not the most effective way to improve behavior.	“The last district I worked in would just suspend kids when they have a problem with them. I saw first-hand that it doesn’t work. I wanted to make sure we never did that here.”
Relationship Building	11%	Building relationships with students is the most important thing in developing a positive classroom environment.	“When I got here, I kind of flipped the script. It was purely about getting back to relationships”
Reject Stereotypes	8%	Helping teachers identify stereotypes or biases that they might have and helping them overcome them.	“A lot of our African-American students like to wear their hoods up, especially in the morning,

			and I have teachers who make a big deal about it and start confrontations with kids about it. Who cares, they like wearing them, they aren't causing any problems, just leave them alone."
Balanced Approach (Firm, but fair)	6%	Having high expectations for students, but also recognizing that students bring trauma into the classroom.	"When we have a student that does something they aren't supposed to, it's like, okay I might be in trouble but now I can at least have a conversation but you gotta know your kids. However, there are consequences for their actions."
Teacher Autonomy	6%	Allowing teachers to choose which strategies work best for them.	"We're really good at throwing things at the wall and seeing if it sticks."
Find Best Environment	5%	Allowing teachers to let students move to another classroom or place where they can regulate their emotions.	"Yes, we have safe seats and we have all those things. And we actually have other classrooms as part of our Love and Logic. So you go to another classroom just to get yourself ready."
Trauma-Informed Instruction	5%	Recognize that traditional methods of classroom management do not consider student emotions and how they affect behavior.	"When this student needs a break, no instruction can happen because she's just off."

Note- A principal's response could receive more than one code and the percentages reflect how many times a code came up in the principal's interview responses.

Ten themes were promoted by coding the interview responses from School 2. The top results include Mindshift, Teacher Self-Care, Anti-Suspension, and Relationship Building. The principal primarily discussed how the Zero-Tolerance approach was taken in a past district where they administered. Suspensions were the main form of management, which they did not want to

continue at School 2. They recognized that this approach to classroom management does not work. It will not correct behaviors. The principal states, “All that’s doing is just instilling fear and power.” It is ineffective and doesn’t provide students with tools to correct their behavior. At School 2, there was a heavy emphasis on relationships and building those connections with students to yield a positive learning environment. It is a balance between understanding the trauma the students may have experienced and the reason underlying their behavior, holding them to high expectations, and providing consequences when needed.

The principal mentioned building relationships with students by making jokes, relating to them, hanging out with them at recess and lunch, and constantly reminding them of how much love the principal has for them. During the hiring process, the principal highlighted that School 2 looks for teachers who love kids and are determined to make a difference in the students’ and families’ lives. Along with the notion that all staff internalize building relationships as a core goal, the principal at School 2 references changing the teachers’ mindsets to fit the trauma-informed classroom management approach.

The principal understands that there needs to be a school-wide shift in thinking of how to support students best when they become unregulated to influence the ideal classroom environment. When a student is unregulated, they struggle to manage their emotions, behaviors, or reactions effectively. This can significantly impact how much learning and the quality of learning that is taking place in the classroom. Supporting students’ emotional well-being can involve implementing new strategies, providing training and support for staff, and creating systems and resources that promote emotional regulation and positive behavior for all students. The interview responses from the principal at School 2 revealed that teacher autonomy is given regarding teachers’ classroom strategies with their students.

A focal point in the interview responses regarding strategies implemented by the staff at School 2 revolved around finding the best environment for students when they are feeling frustrated or overwhelmed. Some teachers implement a Safe Seat, allowing some students to remain in a classroom being taught but not the one they were struggling with regarding behavior or managing emotions. When students need a break and no instruction can happen, they can go to another teacher's classroom in the same grade level designated for them. They can sit in that classroom where no instruction is missed. When the student is ready, and the teacher feels good about it, the student can return to their class. Another option is going to an empty room in the school where they can calm down and regulate their emotions. School 2 is shifting towards a trauma-informed approach to classroom management, focusing on building a shared teacher mindset, fostering positive relationships, challenging biases, and providing support and flexibility to meet the diverse needs of students.

Four common codes were developed between the two interviews with Schools 1 and 2. They include Teacher Self-Care, Anti-suspension, Find Best Environment and Trauma-Informed Instruction. It was evident from the schools that both principals focused on students' well-being and ensuring teachers were supported to be successful in the classroom. School 1 had 15% of their responses aligned with this code, and School 2 had 19%. In both interviews, there were responses that the anti-suspension and Zero-Tolerance approach is ineffective, with both schools having 15% of all responses aligned with this code. Similar strategies mentioned among the two principals was providing students with alternative locations to regulate and calm emotions. Lastly, School 1 had 7% of responses, and School 2 had 5% of all responses corresponding with the code of trauma-informed instruction and the importance of recognizing how emotions affect

behavior. Along with those similar codes, each school had individualized codes based on their interview responses.

The codes unique to School 1 centered around strategies that teachers can implement to help students self-regulate and support teachers in their classroom management. School 2 revolved around the importance of relationships and the mind shift to trauma-informed classroom management. This is seen in School 1, where 5 of the 11 codes represent different strategies, totaling 48% of all the responses. School 2 had 45% of the responses related to the codes Mindshift, Relationship building, and Trauma-informed Instruction.

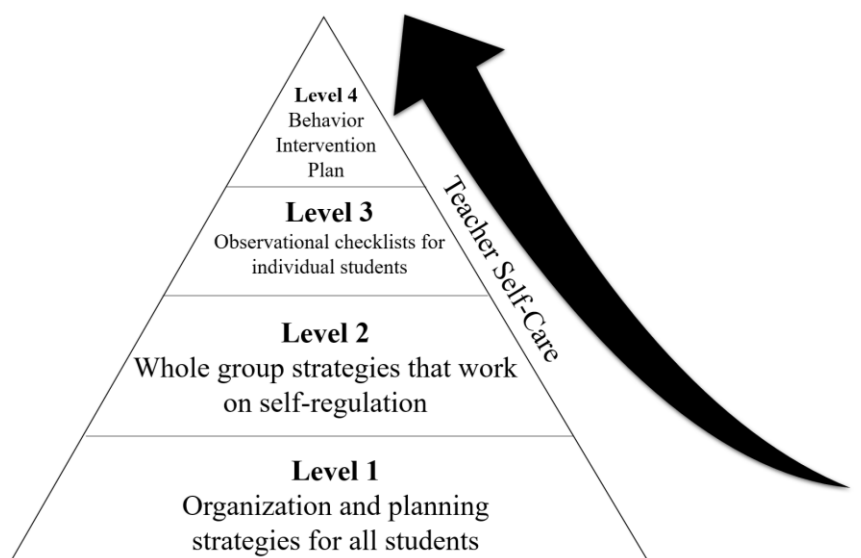
Both interviews emphasized the importance of integrating social-emotional learning (SEL) strategies to foster emotional regulation and enhance classroom management and academic performance. They underscored that establishing relationships with students and equipping them with the necessary tools for success is needed for the likelihood of effective learning within such an environment to grow. The schools differed in the specific strategies that were said to be implemented in the schools. School 1 provided more details of particular strategies that all teachers are trained to utilize in their classrooms than School 2. School 1 gave examples of the methods used, including the peace corner, breathing techniques, establishing baseline, and finding the best environment, whether that is a short break or the flex room. School 2, however, gave one example of finding the best environment for learning to take place with their Safe Seat or taking a break in the empty classroom. From the interview, it is clear that the principal of School 2 encourages teachers to implement different strategies but may need to follow up to enforce if teachers are executing. The principal gives the teachers a choice in deciding what will work best for their students and classroom.

During the interviews, the principals were asked how they get buy-in from staff and what they are being trained on in Professional Development (PD) days. School 1's principal shared that the common language used across the school promotes effective communication and ensures all teachers are on the same page. They get buy-in from staff by merely sharing the benefits of teaching kids how to self-regulate while showing them that they are there to support them. Principal 1 explains that they "give a lot of examples since you can't teach a specific technique to every student," but the buy-in from teachers is how School 1 ensures that all teachers are implementing the strategies. School 2's principal emphasized hiring young teachers who can be molded to fit the school's goals regarding trauma-informed care compared to how they train teachers to support students with strategies in their PD. The principal said, "I can't teach teachers to love kids. It's either you have that, or you don't, and we find that out real quick in our interviews." This explains how the principal wants teachers to have the same mindset but refers to them as "having it or not" instead of training the teachers in ways to support the students. This idea of already having the mindset of loving kids is how School 2 receives buy-in from the staff to implement strategies. The interviews concluded that School 1 takes a more school-wide approach to implementing trauma-informed classroom management strategies.

The amount of buy-in from the two school's staff is an indication of how well they feel about the school culture, teacher support, and vision and goals of the school. With both schools highlighting the importance of implementing a trauma-informed approach to their classroom management, the buy-in is evident with the teacher turn-over rates at both schools. The rates were found for the last three years at both schools. School 1's turnover rate was 0% in 2021, 13% in 2022, and 7% in 2023. School 2 had a rate of 47% in 2021, 33% in 2022, and 20% in 2023. This shows that School 1 has a lower teacher turnover, which can be attributed to the buy-

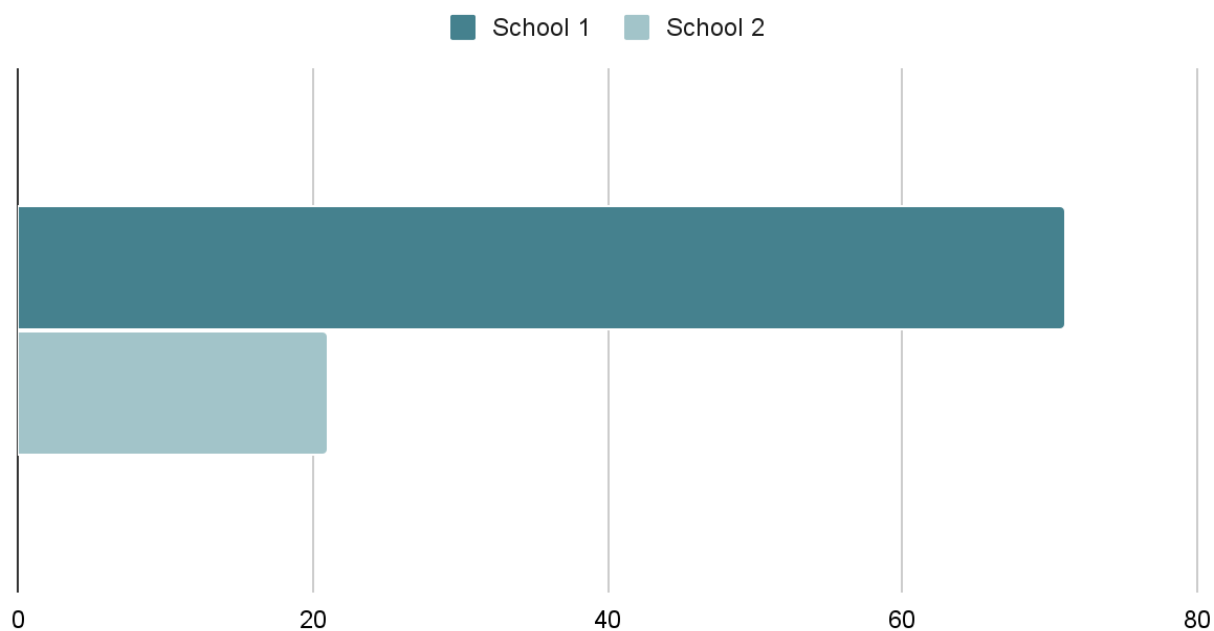
in School 1 receives from staff. As School 1 remains low throughout the past three years, School 2 has made great progress in decreasing the rate of turnover. This is an example of how School 2 is working on implementing their approach and receiving buy-in from staff.

The second part of the evaluation was established by comparing an observation document completed by UNI students in each school during Level III week. The semester of data that was pulled is from the Fall of 2023. There were 25 students at School 1 and 25 students at School 2 who did their participation week during this period. Level III week is a requirement for education majors for their field experience, where they spend a week in the classroom with one teacher, doing a mix of observing and teaching lessons. During Level III week, a requirement from the Classroom Management Methods course is to complete a Level III Field Experience Assignment after the week. This assignment was identical for both schools. The assignment asked various questions and included a section for daily reflection. This included a summary of events from the week, describing the levels of classroom management witnessed and strategies implemented by the teachers. The levels were described in a pyramid format to represent the strategies teachers can implement based on the needs of the students.



The data used in this part was gathered from the level II strategies observed in both Waterloo schools during Participation Week by the UNI students. This level focuses on self-regulation strategies that schools and teachers can apply daily in their classrooms and schools. It is of relevance because trauma affects students' self-regulation, social skills, and a student's health and sense of wellbeing. As both schools in this study have trauma-sensitive students, these strategies can have a positive impact on their ability to improve their well-being. The self-regulation strategies in the Level III assignment include Zones of Regulation, mindfulness practices, peace corner, flexible seating, movement/song, and other self-regulation strategies. The number of strategies seen in each school was tallied from the assignment. The results from this calculation reveal a quantitative approach to compare where each school stands. School 1 had 71 total Level II strategies observed, while School 2 had 21 strategies observed by the UNI students at each school.

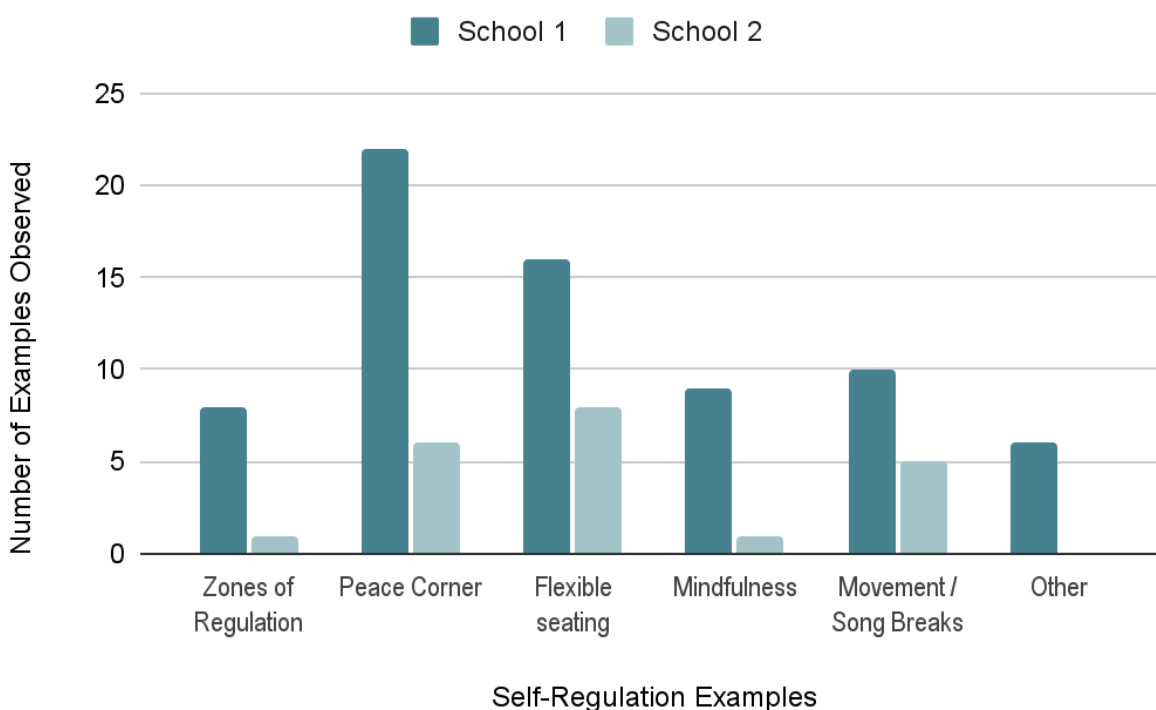
Total Self-Regulation Strategies Observed



This evidence demonstrates that School 1's teachers implemented more strategies than observed at School 2. However, like the result of the interview with School 2's principal, they don't include many specific strategies that all the teachers implement. The specific types of strategies observed in each school are reported in the table and graph below.

Number of Self-regulation Strategies at School 1		Number of Self-regulation Strategies at School 2	
Zones of Regulation	8	Zones of Regulation	1
Peace Corner	22	Peace Corner	6
Flexible Seating	16	Flexible Seating	8
Mindfulness	9	Mindfulness	1
Movement / Song Breaks	10	Movement / Song Breaks	5
Other	6	Other	0

Number of Self-Regulation Examples (Fall 2023)



In each category of self-regulation strategies, more observations of these strategies were found in School 1 than in School 2. Zones of Regulation is a method that increases students' self-awareness and social-emotional skills. It provides students with the ability to label their feelings, feel comfortable expressing them, and receive help coping with them. School 1 had eight UNI students who experienced this evidence compared to one at School 2. The peace corner was brought up in School 1's interview, which was the highest observation found between both schools, with 22 observations of teachers utilizing this space in their classrooms versus the six observations at School 2. Both principals mentioned flexible seating to find the best and least restrictive environment for students. School 1 had 16 observations of this strategy compared to School 2's eight observations. Mindfulness and promoting social-emotional well-being were seen nine times at School 1 and once at School 2. The approach of incorporating movement and song into the classroom was used by both schools, with School 1 having ten observations and School 2 having five. Lastly, School 1 had six observations that were in the Other category, while School 2 had none.

The principal's interview responses with the coded themes from both schools match the student feedback assignment results. The results of the specific observed strategies correlate to School 1's implementation progress, which was presented in the interview. School 1 shared different strategies they use and train teachers on, and it is evident that many teachers are actually implementing these strategies within their classrooms. School 2 had fewer strategies that were observed to be implemented by the teachers that week. This relates to how School 2 prioritized teacher autonomy regarding implementation. It is evident that some teachers provided resources and strategies for students if they chose to do so, but most of the school's teachers did not implement these strategies.

Discussion

For schools wishing to implement trauma-informed care practices, it begins with the mindset of the staff. How do teachers and administration believe that management should be handled? With a trauma-informed perspective, staff focus on students' emotional well-being and understand behaviors are a response to trauma. Having the mentality that punishment is ineffective in classroom management compared to providing students strategies to respond to their behaviors positively. Once a school changes to this mindset, it is about getting all staff on board. This begins with using common terms and training teachers about the effects of trauma. When staff understands the reason behind students' actions, it can help determine how best to assist them. This leads to the next step of implementing trauma-informed care by providing specific strategies for teachers to help students understand the reasoning behind their behaviors and how they can cope and manage their feelings. A part of this is ensuring that the strategies are being implemented. It is important to note that this part takes time and reflection, depending on what works best for each classroom of learners. From the results of this study, School 1 is in the third step of implementation and is working on determining what specific interventions are helping students when dysregulated. School 2 is in the mindset phase and is trying to get all staff on board. Their vision aligns with trauma-informed care, but they are working to shift the mindset among all their staff.

Trauma-informed classroom management is more than just having it as a vision and discussing it. There needs to be a plan on how the staff will implement and make the necessary changes to see positive results. Staff should be well-prepared with training and understanding of trauma's role in their classroom management success. The strategies applied should be observable and ensured by the administration. Between the interviews and observations of what

is being applied in these two schools' classrooms, this study provides evidence that School 1 is further along in the transformation process than School 2. The following steps after this study will be to dive deeper into how School 1 is getting teachers to implement and how the benefits compare between the different stages of implementing a trauma-informed approach to classroom management.

Conclusion

This research project is a comparative study that identified strategies implemented by two schools in a large urban school district. The aspects of the elementary school that are further along in implementing a school-wide approach include specific strategies that teachers are trained on and ensured to utilize in their classrooms. Along with this is the common language used across the school so all staff and students can communicate how to cope with and manage emotions. The aspects of the elementary school that need to include some key elements include giving teachers choices without providing specific strategies with training and ensuring implementation is being done. School 1 provides teachers with more self-regulation strategies to use in their classrooms to help their students recognize when they are unregulated and how they can individually and independently cope with the overwhelming feelings. As students are equipped with more tools they can use when feeling unregulated, they'll be better able to correct the course and become more independent learners.

The limitations of this study varied. Only two schools are being compared to each other. Comparisons are able to be made because they are within the same district with similar demographic of students and staff. This study can be replicated between other schools that are from the same district. Another limitation is that although School 1 has had much success, its standards of success are used as a model when comparing School 2. Themes were determined

among trauma-informed classroom management and how schools like these two populations implement it. Time was also a factor, as only one week of observations was being reviewed. We cannot know if things would be different if we observed different times in the school year or a longer duration of time. This study compared the number of times regulation strategies were observed in the classrooms, but the 25 individuals were different at each school, so there is a limitation in the interpretation of the strategies observed because they are coming from a different group of 25 UNI students. Despite these limitations, there is value in seeing alignment between administration, teachers, and what is happening in the classrooms. This research study cannot speak for all schools, but it gives an example of two schools trying to implement a school-wide social-emotional learning approach to classroom management. This study can be replicated to find similar or differing results and themes in schools with similar demographics.

The importance of this research is to provide evidence-based strategies that work with students who have experienced trauma and implement them in a class-wide and individual behavior management system in schools. It is crucial for teachers to be provided with training around trauma-informed practices. Understanding why certain strategies are effective and comparing them to others regarding how childhood trauma affects students' development results in the student's learning outcomes and the teacher's overall classroom management.

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