

TRAUMA-INFORMED PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT: A CORE COMPETENCY FOR K-12 TEACHERS IN SASKATCHEWAN

This study explored what a group of Saskatchewan teachers understood about the effects trauma has on student learning and behaviour and how trauma-informed professional development can both support teachers and students. A practitioner action research approach was used. The theoretical perspective was social constructivism. Data was collected through information collected from surveys, an online Moodle and interviews with participants.

Introduction

Statistics Canada reported that one-third of children aged 15 have self-reported some form of maltreatment during their childhood (Public Health Agency of Canada, 2018).

Saskatchewan ranks highest of the provinces for police reported family violence against children and youth (Conroy et al. 2019).

Adverse childhood experiences (ACE) can negatively impact health (Petrucelli et al. 2019).

Methods Overview

Practitioner action research (PAR) methodology was chosen as it has elements of practice and inquiry (Shaw & Lunt, 2018).

PAR can empower participants and can impact change (Henthorn et al. 2022).

A qualitative approach was used to interpret the data. Pieridou et al., (2020) suggests that a qualitative approach encourages the researcher to think reflectively while also building researcher-participant relationships.

Research Design

Using Twitter – an open call to Saskatchewan teachers to participate in study was made.

Survey – participants took part in an online survey that attempted to capture their understanding of trauma.

Moodle – participants took part in an online Moodle which highlighted prevalence of trauma, effects on the brain and learning and gave suggested resources.

Interview – what professional development is needed, what they gained from the information, and their thoughts on what is needed for PD.

Research Questions

What do teachers in Saskatchewan understand about the effects of trauma on learning?

What trauma-informed professional development supports are needed to support educators?

How could online, blended and distance education play a role in helping teachers support students with trauma?

Theoretical Framework - Social constructivism. As teaching is a highly social profession and due to the nature of the research design, social constructivism was the guiding framework. Vygotsky (1978) and Palincsar (1998).

As Barak and Green (2021) assert, social constructivism promotes collaboration and practical knowledge.

Participants were invited to interact with each other through the Moodle process.

From the qualitative data, four themes emerged:

Professional Development – participants indicated this as important for all teachers

Supports for Students – having meaningful support to provide for their students

Understanding the Impact of Trauma – a more fulsome understanding of the impact and prevalence of trauma will assist teachers.

Priorities – PD as a whole school/division approach, understanding intergenerational trauma and its impact.

Supporting Online Professional Development

Online professional development can eliminate barriers some teachers in Saskatchewan face such as access, affordability, and availability.

Affordability- less driving time and the costs associated, in person PD is often more expensive, and online PD often does not impact personal PD as much.

Availability – Teachers can have more options to PD when travel is not a factor.

Access – Having more access to PD because of the remote nature. Travel barriers removed for remote and rural teachers. It can also fit into teacher’s schedule.

Future Research And Recommendations

Future Research – A more in-depth study should be considered that includes a larger group of teachers.

Research with the two universities in Saskatchewan to determine if pre-service teachers have an adequate understanding of trauma and trauma-informed classrooms.

Recommendations: Professional development supports and teacher practice recommendations for Saskatchewan teachers.

Consultation with professionals from agencies such from the Child Trauma Research Center at the University of Regina to assist in development of PD (Child Trauma Research Center).

Access to online PD opportunities for teachers and access to resources.

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