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**School staff's understanding and perceptions  
of trauma-informed practice and the barriers to  
implementing this at a whole-school level: A  
grounded theory exploration.**

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## Table of abbreviations

<b>Acronym</b>	<b>Definition</b>
ACE	Adverse Childhood Experience
BPS	British Psychological Society
CBT	Cognitive Behavioural Therapy
CPD	Continuous Professional Development
CLA	Child Looked After
CYP	Children and young people
EBSA	Emotionally based school avoidance
EF	Executive Function
EP	Educational Psychologist
EPS	Educational Psychology Service
GT	Grounded Theory
HCPC	Health and Care Professions Council
IPA	Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis
LA	Local Authority
LSA	Learning Support Assistant
PEP	Principle Educational Psychologist
PTSD	Post-traumatic stress disorder
RTA	Reflexive Thematic Analysis
SEMH	Social, Emotional, and Mental Health
SENCo	Special Educational Needs Co-Ordinator
SEND	Special Educational Needs and Disabilities
SES	Social Engagement System
SLT	Senior Leadership Team
SSEP	Specialist Senior Educational Psychologist
TA	Teaching Assistant
TEP	Trainee Educational Psychologist

TIP	Trauma-Informed Practice
UK	United Kingdom
UPR	Unconditional Positive Regard
VCET	Vulnerable Children's Education Team

## **Abstract**

**Background:** This is a qualitative research study which explores school staff perceptions of trauma-informed practice in the context of mainstream secondary schools. Research indicates high rates of prevalence of young people who experience trauma and highlights the potentially devastating impact this can have on child development. Literature has suggested that educational settings are best placed to offer early intervention and support (Spence et al, 2021), yet despite this, there is a distinct lack of research which explores the experiences of school staff and the perceived barriers to implementing trauma-informed practice. The present study seeks to fill this gap in literature with a view to improve support for both professionals and young people.

**Method:** In line with social constructionist epistemological underpinnings, this study adopted a constructivist grounded theory methodology (Charmaz, 2014). Through processes of purposive and theoretical sampling, data was collected through four focus groups and one semi-structured interview, to gain the views of seventeen participants in different roles across four schools. Data was analysed according to iterative processes advocated by Charmaz (2014), and outcomes theoretically sensitised through a review of relevant literature. Based on the outcomes of data analysis, a conceptualised grounded theory was developed.

**Findings and Discussion:** The findings identified seven constructed categories which contributed to the development of the grounded theory. The grounded theory provides a theoretically informed framework for organisational trauma-informed practice, which promotes the development of a shared, whole-school ethos which underpins policy and practice. In addition, the framework conceptualises notions of fostering a sense of safety and belonging, prioritising positive relationships, developing a holistic understanding of complex trauma, safeguarding of emotional and physical wellbeing, and supporting and upskilling staff. The implications for professional practice and future research are considered, and limitations of the study acknowledged.

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## **1.0 Introduction**

### **1.1 Background and interests of the author**

This study is concerned with exploring school staff's current understanding of trauma-informed practice (TIP), its implications for their role, and their perceived barriers to implementing this approach at a whole-school level. From a personal perspective, my interest in this area was sparked during a previous role as a School Wellbeing Assistant, where I delivered interventions to students with social, emotional, and mental health (SEMH) difficulties. A large proportion of the children and young people (CYP) I worked with had experienced trauma or circumstances of adversity, and shared negative experiences of education. The high levels of need among this group presented a cause for concern and motivated me to explore what support CYP who had experienced trauma needed in school settings. In my current role as a Trainee Educational Psychologist (TEP), I have continued to develop an awareness of trauma-informed approaches and have noted increasing requests from schools for training and support in this area. These experiences led me to question what school staff currently understand about TIP, its implications for their role, and what their perceived barriers are to adopting the approach. This was with a view to improving support and outcomes for both teaching staff and CYP themselves.

This research sought to explore the individual yet interacting perspectives of school staff in an inductive manner. The social constructionist epistemological underpinnings of this research are aligned with my own beliefs and world view, as I consider that reality is subjective and can only be understood through our personal constructs, experiences, and interactions with others. When approaching this research therefore, I consider my role as researcher to be integral to the collection, analysis, and interpretation of data, constructed through interactions with participants. Acknowledging my close interaction and involvement with the research process and in line with my social constructionist epistemological standpoint, I chose to adopt a first person narrative throughout this study.

### **1.2 Context and positioning of the current study**

This study is positioned within a developing body of research and literature which offers understanding and conceptualisation of the use of TIP in educational settings. In the United Kingdom (UK), statistics demonstrate high rates of prevalence (33% -

50%) of young people who experience trauma or adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) before they reach eighteen (Carlson et al, 2020; Torjesen, 2019; UK Trauma Council, 2020). Complex trauma is known to have significant impacts upon CYP's development (Cook et al, 2017), and national research and guidance advocate for trauma-informed, relational approaches in schools to support this vulnerable student group (ARC, 2021; Billington et al, 2022; NICE, 2022). Despite this, very little research has been conducted in the UK which explores how TIP is being applied in schools, nor school staff's understanding and perception of the approach. This research aims to fill this gap in the literature with a view to illuminating understanding, highlighting implications for practice and future research, and to provide insight at a systemic level.

A constructivist grounded theory (GT) methodology was adopted to explore this social phenomenon and was considered to provide a rigorous methodology in line with social constructionist epistemology (Charmaz, 2014). This research was conducted towards the completion of the degree of Doctorate in Applied Educational Psychology at The University of Nottingham, within the LA in which I have been on placement for the second and third years of my training.

### **1.3 Outline of Chapters**

Chapter 2 presents an initial literature review which provides the background, context, and rationale for the current study. This was completed prior to the collection of data and thus is purposefully broad in line with GT methodologies.

Chapter 3 outlines the methodology of the current study. The philosophical underpinnings of the research are identified, and the methodological procedures followed are discussed. The research quality and validity are evaluated, and ethical considerations highlighted.

Chapter 4 presents the findings of the current study following data collection and analysis. The findings are presented according to each research question and are enhanced by direct quotations from transcripts.

Chapter 5 presents a second literature review which discusses research and theory relevant to the findings presented in Chapter 4. Literature reviewed enabled a theoretical understanding of the findings to be developed.

Chapter 6 provides the GT of the current study, as constructed through a process of data collection, analysis, and theoretical sensitisation. A visual representation and written explanation are provided.

Chapter 7 offers a discussion of this study considering relevant literature presented in Chapter 2 and highlights the unique contribution it offers to research and practice. A critical evaluation of the study's strengths and limitations is presented, and the implications of its outcomes for professional practice are considered.

Chapter 8 is the final chapter of this study and presents a concluding summary of the research. Key findings, implications for practice, and the study's unique contribution are outlined.

## **2.0 Literature Review – Part 1**

### **2.1 Introduction**

GT aims to enable “the discovery of theory from data” (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p.1), where new concepts can be drawn from empirical findings (Dunne, 2011). GT thus advocates that a thorough review of existing literature should not be carried out before a researcher begins data collection, so they may approach the project without prior knowledge or bias (Dick, 2014; Nathaniel, 2006). This enables a ‘pure’ interpretation of data collected and generation of new theory informed only by obtained findings (Charmaz, 2014). In practice however, this position sparks debate, particularly in the case of postgraduate research. To present a theoretically informed research project and gain ethical approval, students are expected to present a comprehensive review of literature and ground their research within this (Birks & Mills, 2015). Whilst literature on this topic remains polemic (Dunne, 2011), consensus typically agrees a literature review should be conducted when using a GT methodology, yet how and when this takes place remains open to discussion (Cutcliffe, 2000; McGhee et al, 2007).

Recognising the doctoral requirements and context of this research, I have chosen to present two literature reviews within the present study. Firstly, a purposefully broad review of literature pertaining to trauma-informed approaches in education was conducted, with the aims of presenting a clear context, background and rationale for the current project (Hallberg, 2010), whilst limiting the influence of theoretical standpoints. A second literature review was conducted upon the completion of data collection and analysis, to facilitate a theoretical sensitisation in the development of the final GT (Thornberg & Charmaz, 2014).

In this literature review, I will first present a clarification of key terminology used throughout this study before the relevance and importance of the topic for doctoral research is considered in light of national and local contexts. A discussion of the prevalence and impact of complex trauma on development will be shared, alongside the roles for professionals working in education. This will be followed by a critical review of literature discussing school responses to trauma, including TIP and alternative perspectives. Before the research rationale, aims and questions are



presented, I discuss what literature tells us about school staff's perspectives on trauma-informed approaches, and the theories upon what might inform these.

## **2.2 Terminology**

Multiple terms and constructs have been developed in relation to trauma, thus it is important to develop a shared understanding of terminology used in the current study (Ota et al, 2019). While post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) typically refers to an intense emotional, physical or psychological response triggered by a reminder of a traumatic event or sense of threat (Shalev et al, 2017), complex trauma refers to prolonged, ongoing or multiple traumatic exposures which often occur in early childhood and may impair the development of the individual across their lifetime (Marquez Aponte, 2020; National Child Traumatic Stress Network, 2017; Wamser-Nanney & Vandenberg, 2013). The current study focuses upon complex trauma, its impact on CYP's development, and educators' roles in supporting them.

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) offer a definition of trauma which considers three factors: events, experiences, and effects (SAMHSA, 2014). They summarise;

*Trauma is defined as an event, series of events, or set of circumstances that is experienced by an individual as physically or emotionally harmful or life threatening and that has lasting adverse effects on the individual's functioning and mental, physical, social, emotional, or spiritual well-being. (SAMHSA, 2014, p. 7)*

Whilst the event refers to an objective incident/s which produces a stress response, the experience refers to an individual's subjective reaction to this event (Ota et al, 2019). To define an experience as an example of complex trauma, as suggested in the above definition, the effects must be considered to have long-standing impacts on the individual (Griffin, 2020).

When considering trauma in CYP, the term 'adverse childhood experience' (ACE) is often referenced. Research suggests that most young people experience complex trauma through exposure to ACEs rather than individual events (Cavanaugh, 2016; Romano et al, 2014). ACEs refer to ten categories of traumatic events or circumstances of adversity that predict a variety of poor outcomes in later life (EIF, 2020). The ten ACE categories include physical abuse; sexual abuse; psychological

abuse; neglect (failure to provide); neglect (failure to supervise); exposure to domestic abuse; family member with mental illness; family member who misuses substances; caregiver incarceration; and parental separation or divorce (EIF, 2020). These categories can be grouped into acts of commission, where an intent to cause harm is present; acts of omission, where physical and/or emotional needs go unmet; and family dysfunction, such as parental separation or divorce, caregiver incarceration, or a caregiver with mental illness (Gilbert et al, 2009). A plethora of research around ACEs and their impact has been conducted and ACE questionnaires are widely used in clinical practice as a helpful assessment tool (Kelly-Irving & Delpierre, 2019). However, academics highlight that caution should be taken to avoid over-reliance on ACEs as they risk over-simplifying causality of need and are deterministic by nature (Edwards et al, 2019). Furthermore, additional research is required to further determine what experiences or circumstances are recognised as an ACE, as well as their 'weighting' of impact (Lacey & Minnis, 2020).

Finally, in reference to responding to trauma, several terminologies have been coined and exist within the literature, including TIP, trauma-informed care, and trauma-informed approaches (Berger, 2019; Maynard et al, 2019; Thomas et al, 2019). These terms appear to be very similar in definition and are used interchangeably, referring to a framework for practice "that is grounded in and directed by a complete understanding of how trauma exposure affects service user's neurological, biological, psychological and social development" (Homes & Grandison, 2021, p. 8). As the dominant term in literature and policy documents, the term TIP will be used primarily throughout this project, however alternative terms will be used to promote a fluent writing style.

## **2.3 National, local, and legislative contexts**

Before reviewing literature which discusses the impact of trauma on CYP's development, I will first provide national and local context to position the current study.

### **2.3.1 Prevalence**

Research emphasises the challenges faced when attempting to determine the rates of prevalence of CYP who have experienced trauma or ACEs (DfE, 2021; EIF, 2020; Lewer et al, 2020). This is due to differences in definitions and potential under-

reporting biases within longitudinal and retrospective cohort studies (EIF, 2020; NAPAC, 2021). This results in a range of statistics, informed by a variety of measurements. It is therefore extremely difficult to obtain an accurate figure of the numbers of CYP who may have experienced trauma, and the below information provides a guide only; it is likely that these figures may represent just the ‘tip of the iceberg’.

Data obtained through cohort studies previously suggested that the prevalence of ACEs was incredibly high, where up to 64% of the populations studied experienced at least one ACE, and 22% experienced three or more (Cavanaugh, 2016). More recent research from the UK has suggested that this figure is closer to 25% (NAPAC, 2021). Overall, recent statistics indicate that between one-third and one-half of all children in the UK will be exposed to at least one traumatic event or ACE by the time they reach eighteen (Carlson et al, 2020; Torjesen, 2019; UK Trauma Council, 2020).

### **2.3.2 Context of TIP**

Across the country, there has been a growing awareness of the importance of supporting CYP’s SEMH in education, with a recognition that children’s wellbeing is ‘everybody’s business’ (Weare, 2015). Since the early 2000’s the government has continued to establish and develop initiatives which prioritise student wellbeing (DfES, 2005; DoH & DfE, 2017). In line with this, the last decade has seen a significant growth in educational professional’s knowledge and understanding of their role in supporting pupils who have experienced complex trauma, particularly following the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic (Greig et al, 2021; UK Trauma Council, 2020). At a national level, it seems that government legislation and advice on approaches to behaviour support are somewhat at odds with the guidance and calls for action published by research bodies, charitable organisations, and Educational Psychology Services (EPSs) (Billington et al, 2022; Brighton and Hove City Council, 2018; City of York Council, 2019; DfE, 2022; EIF, 2020; Timpson, 2019). Whilst many documents have been published advocating a relational approach in line with TIP principles (to be discussed in section 2.4), such as the ARC (2021) *Call to Action* and NICE (2022) SEMH guidelines, the DfE’s (2022a) recently consulted *Behaviour in Schools Guidance* and *Suspension and Permanent*

*Exclusion Guidance* (2022b) continue to promote a behaviourist approach using rewards and sanctions. Interestingly, responses by consultation to these guidance documents expressed stakeholder concerns of a lack of recognition that behaviours are a form of communication, as well as requests for increased prominence on the importance of relationships, avoidance of punitive approaches, and increased flexibility for pupils with SEND (DfE, 2022c). These responses may suggest many stakeholders, including teaching staff, parents, and local authority (LA) professionals, are advocating for principles in line with TIP.

In relation to the implementation of TIP in school settings across the UK, it is very difficult to determine the extent to which this has taken place due to a lack of statistics and research in this area. However, I am aware of several pioneering primary and secondary schools across the country who have successfully begun implementing TIP as a whole-school approach. For example, Parklands Primary School in Leeds was highlighted in Dunnett and Jones' (2022) guidance for a considerable reduction in exclusions and an outstanding OFSTED rating following the implementation of relational practice and policy. Hope School in Liverpool represents an additional setting praised by OFSTED for their attachment and trauma sensitive approach, stating;

*Based on academic research you have developed a school that is sensitive to supporting pupils with attachment and complex trauma histories. [...] The emphasis changed to understanding the internal reasons for behaviour. This approach empowers pupils to control their own behaviour without external controls [...] Behaviour in school is exemplary and pupils make outstanding progress in their learning. (OFSTED, 2019, p. 1-2)*

A third setting, Springwell Academy Leeds, was recently awarded 'trauma informed school status' by Trauma Informed Schools UK and was praised for the promotion of positive relationships within the school, where "relationships with children are a strength of the school, interactions are positive and peaceful" (Springwell Academy Leeds, 2021). These examples, although few, represent a powerful picture of the potential of TIP and relational policies as applied at a whole-school level.

At a local level, within the LA where this research took place, I am not aware of any settings currently implementing TIP at a whole-school level. However, the EPS have

a dedicated development group towards promoting this approach, including the development and delivery of training packages and practical resources designed to increase staff awareness of the impact of complex trauma and school responses. By contrast, statistics demonstrate that the regional area in which this research took place had among some of the highest rates of exclusion and suspension across the country, indicating that perhaps traditional, behaviourist approaches are ineffective and change towards TIP should be further pursued (DfE, 2023).

## **2.4 The impact of complex trauma**

Brooks (2019) presents a powerful analogy of children's early development as similar to the foundations of a house. Whilst not consciously remembered, these foundations are integral to a person's continued growth; should these foundations be unstable, "the whole building will be unstable" (Brooks, 2019, p. 17). Experiencing complex trauma can, using this analogy, cause damage or instability in a child's developmental foundations. Research literature has identified that complex trauma can have a devastating impact upon the development of emotional literacy and regulation skills, learning and cognition, relationships and social skills, as well as neurological trajectories (Cook et al, 2017; Green & Myrick, 2014). In secondary educational settings, this can translate into challenging behaviour, school avoidance, struggling with forming and maintaining friendships, and difficulties accessing the curriculum without additional support (Cohen & Barron, 2021). Moving beyond school, it has been identified that trauma and ACEs have positive associations with poor outcomes in adulthood, including drug or alcohol abuse, significant physical and mental health problems, and even early death (Cavanaugh, 2016; Garami et al, 2019). To guide the reader, the impact of complex trauma will be explored according to each area of development, however it is recognised that each area cannot be considered in isolation and likely to be overlapping and interactive by nature, thus I will refer to each area of development where appropriate throughout this section (DfE & DoH, 2015).

### **2.4.1 Implications for cognition and learning**

Research has identified that children who experience trauma in their early lives are more likely to require additional support in school, have SEND, and finish school without sufficient qualifications (Brooks, 2019; Downey, 2007). A primary way in

which trauma can impact cognition and learning development is through limiting executive function (EF) skills (Wu et al, 2011; Chen et al, 2020). EF consists of several interrelated neurocognitive skills which contribute to overall academic performance, emotional regulation, and social development (Carlson et al, 2013; Best & Miller, 2010). Emerging research has identified CYP who have experienced trauma performed significantly poorer in EF assessment measures than those who had not (Adubasim & Ugwu, 2019; Perkins & Graham-Bermann, 2012; Wilson et al, 2011). Findings highlighted that trauma and ACEs can impair the neurological development of the frontal regions of the brain, crucial in EF, due to prolonged exposure to stress and consequentially raised levels of cortisol which is influential in physiological development (Bucci et al, 2016).

Whilst these findings highlight a potential impact of complex trauma on cognition and learning development, some caution must be taken to consider the research limitations. Firstly, research studies in this area are few and limited to adolescents, with less research conducted exploring earlier developmental implications of complex trauma (Chen et al, 2020). Additionally, research has found that social and emotional consequences (discussed in section 2.4.3), including intrusive thought patterns and states of hyperarousal, limit an individual's capacity to employ cognitive thinking skills and maintain attention, making it difficult to separate the impact of trauma on cognition and learning and SEMH (Porges, 2009).

#### **2.4.2 Implications for communication and interaction**

Research suggests children who experience complex trauma may encounter delays in expressive and receptive language development, limiting their capacity to engage with language rich or dependent environments including educational settings (Downey, 2007; Yehuda, 2005). Similarly, trauma-affected CYP often find it difficult to interact appropriately with their peers and frequently become involved in conflict situations (Downey, 2007; Yehuda, 2005). Early research studies identified that CYP who had experienced ACEs typically achieved lower verbal IQ scores, demonstrated limited expressive vocabularies, and struggled to understand more complex syntax than their peers (Attias & Goodwin, 1999; Pearce & Pezzot-Pearce, 1997; Putnam, 1997; Silberg, 1998). Downey (2007) suggests these concerns could stem from attachment difficulties, as the individual's early relationships may have been devoid

of rich language learning experiences, including the language of emotions and relationships. Alternatively, some research studies identified that language difficulties could be caused by neurological influences of complex trauma and recognised the impact difficulties in EF and problem-solving skills may have on an individual's peer interaction and conflict resolution skills (Adubasim & Ugwu, 2019; Kavanaugh et al, 2017; Noll et al, 2010).

These findings may offer a helpful explanation as to why many students who have experienced ACEs or trauma struggle to verbally express themselves and why they often become involved in conflicts with their peers and teachers. However, very little research upon the impact of complex trauma on communication and interaction skills has been conducted within the last decade, thus future research may be required to increase the reliability and validity of such findings.

### **2.4.3 Implications for SEMH**

Across the four areas of development, complex trauma has perhaps the most significant impact upon CYP's SEMH (Brooks, 2019; Green & Myrick, 2014; Wall, 2020). This section will discuss the implications of complex trauma on CYP's attachment needs, emotional literacy and regulation, behavioural regulation, and self-concept.

Given the emphasis upon nurturing, positive relationships in TIP (Homes & Grandison, 2021), it is very difficult to discuss trauma and its impacts on CYP without also discussing theories of attachment (Bowlby, 1979). Rooted in psychoanalytic principles, attachment theory refers to an enduring emotional or affectionate relationship usually developed between an infant and their primary caregiver (Gillibrand et al, 2016). Theory suggests this relationship facilitates safe opportunities for an individual to learn about the world around them, with a secure and familiar 'base' to return to (Bowlby, 1979). If an individual has been unable to establish a secure attachment in their early childhood, perhaps due to ACEs or trauma, this has a profound, negative impact upon their sense of safety, interactions with others, and ability to engage fully within a learning environment (ARC, 2022; Brooks, 2019; Slonim, 2014). The concepts of trauma and attachment, though distinct, are often overlapping (ARC, 2022), where children who have been exposed to ACEs and trauma have developed insecure attachment styles. This means they

might find it more difficult to establish and maintain trusting, meaningful relationships with others, and in turn feel increasingly heightened and preoccupied in social environments (Bergin & Bergin, 2009). In education, research has emphasised the need to establish “connection before correction” (Golding, 2015, p. 152), ensuring CYP have secure attachments in their education settings to enable them to engage with learning. Whilst the principles of attachment remain a widely accepted and applied theory in both the fields of psychology and education (Bergin & Bergin, 2009; Brooks, 2019; Rose et al, 2019), the approach has been critiqued as determinist and outdated, promoting a potentially misogynistic view of women and mothers as the primary caregiver (Gillibrand et al, 2016).

Research literature identifies three significant ways in which complex trauma can impact upon CYP’s SEMH; difficulties with emotional literacy and regulation, behavioural difficulties, and challenges establishing a sense of self (Cohen & Barron, 2021; Cook et al, 2005; Frydman & Mayor, 2017; Wall, 2020). These academics have recognised that CYP who have experienced trauma often struggle to recognise how they are feeling, regulate their emotions, and demonstrate impulse control. This may lead to engagement in risk-taking behaviour, emotional dysregulation, experiencing anxiety or intrusive thought patterns, and challenging behaviours in school (Cavanaugh, 2016). As a result, young people who have been exposed to trauma or ACEs are more likely to be permanently excluded from their educational setting (Brooks, 2019). Whilst data could not be found which identifies rates of exclusion among CYP who have experienced trauma specifically, wider student population data reports that during the academic year of 2020-21, almost 4000 pupils were permanently excluded, whilst a further 352,454 pupils received suspensions (DfE, 2023). The vast majority of these exclusions took place in secondary schools (89%), where rates were over 10 times that of primary settings. This highlights a significant concern and, whilst other factors also contribute to exclusion rates, demonstrates a need for trauma-informed approaches (NICE, 2022; Timpson, 2019; Weare, 2015).

#### **2.4.4 Neurological implications**

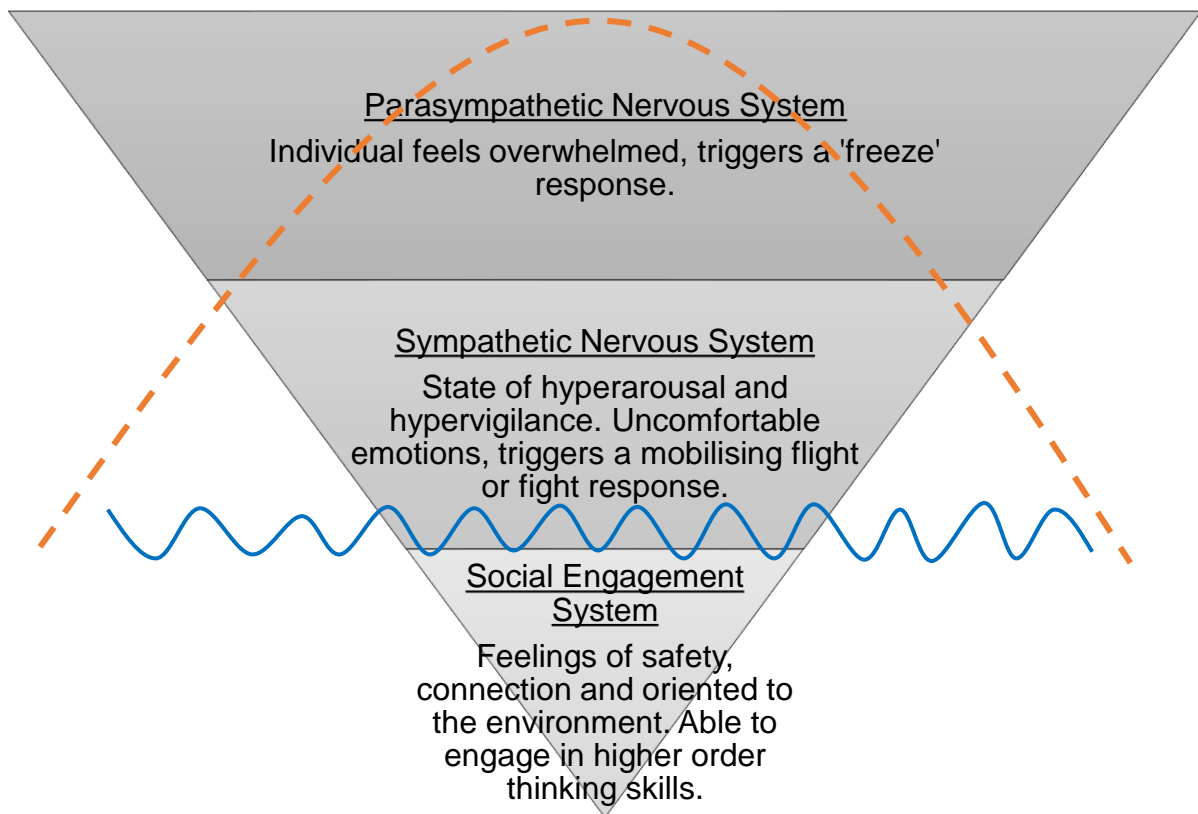
As touched upon throughout section 2.4, a body of literature has emerged highlighting the neurological impact of complex trauma (Adubasim & Ugwu, 2019;



Downey, 2007; Wilson et al, 2011). Research in neurology has identified that exposure to early trauma has the potential to “affect the size and functionality of brain structures” (Adubasim & Ugwu, 2019, p. 2) and influence the responses of neurobiological pathways and mechanisms (Hart & Rubia, 2012). This, as discussed, has consequences across all areas of development (Cavanaugh, 2016; Garami et al, 2019). In this section, I will present a key theoretical framework for understanding the implications of trauma on the body and its responses; the polyvagal theory (Porges, 2009).

Porges’ (2009) polyvagal theory offers a theoretical framework to explain the impact of complex trauma in relation to the brain stem and autonomic nervous system.

Figure 2.1 presents a visual representation of Porges’ (2009) theory.



**Figure 2.1 - Diagram representing the Polyvagal Theory, adapted from Porges (2009)**

In brief, the polyvagal theory describes a three-tiered autonomic nervous system which influences human emotions, physiological, and behavioural responses. The first tier or system, the social engagement system (SES), is engaged when the parasympathetic nervous system detects feelings of safety, an orientation to the

environment, and a connectedness to others (Porges, 2009). In the SES, one can engage in higher-order thinking skills and demonstrate the ability to relate and connect with others (Porges, 2009). The second tier is engaged when the autonomic nervous system detects feelings of danger or uncomfortable emotions such as anxiety. Here, the sympathetic nervous system triggers a mobilisation reaction as arousal levels increase, initiating a 'fight' or 'flight' response. At this tier, the individual is less able to relate and connect with others or engage higher order thinking skills including EF (Porges, 2009). Finally, in the third tier, the parasympathetic nervous system engages an emergency 'freeze' state when the autonomic nervous system detects very high levels of arousal and feelings of threat or overwhelm. In this state, the body and mind dissociate and 'shut down', to protect the individual and conserve energy (Porges, 2009).

The polyvagal theory is significant in trauma literature and offers a theoretical application for trauma-informed responses. As indicated by the blue line on Figure 2.1, the polyvagal theory suggests most individuals are typically engaged in the SES or 'fight' or 'flight' systems, returning to a feeling of safety and connectedness quickly and rarely engaging in the third, 'freeze' tier (Porges, 2009). However, indicated by the orange line, trauma-affected individuals find it difficult to recognise feelings of safety, connection, and orientation to their environment, and as such spend much of their time in a state of hyperarousal and hypervigilance, reaching the third, 'freeze' tier much quicker (Porges, 2009). The polyvagal theory is useful in acknowledging that emotional, behavioural, and physiological responses are not actively chosen by an individual but driven by the autonomic nervous system.

Porges' (2009) polyvagal theory offers a comprehensive and psychologically informed framework for understanding trauma and the autonomic nervous system (Liem, 2021). Attempting to draw meaningful links between scientific theory, research, and practice, the application of the polyvagal theory aligns closely with educational psychology practice (Birch et al, 2015; Kelly, 2017; Slonim, 2014). Whilst a large body of researchers seem to embrace Porges' (2009) theory (eg. Beauchaine et al, 2007; Dana, 2018; Hastings et al, 2008; Price et al, 2017), the empirical evidence for the polyvagal theory remains subject for debate and scrutiny

among academics, who question its validity and the accuracy of its evolutionary underpinnings (Grossman & Taylor, 2007; Shaffer et al, 2014; Slonim, 2014).

## **2.5 A role for professionals in supporting complex trauma**

### **2.5.1 Teaching staffs' role**

As vast numbers of CYP are likely to have experienced trauma, and due to resources, systems, and services they have in place, literature has suggested that educational settings are best placed to offer early intervention and support (Spence et al, 2021). Just as it is acknowledged that young people's SEMH is 'everyone's business' (Weare, 2015), it is advocated that TIP should be a whole-school initiative (Brunzell et al, 2015; NEA, 2021).

As research demonstrates trauma-affected young people may be lacking in skills across the areas of development, teachers have a role in the direct teaching of these skills (Frankland, 2021; McLaughlin & Clarke, 2010). Furthermore, school staff can work to prioritise positive relationships and adjust the school environment to facilitate feelings of safety, connectedness, and calm (Porges, 2009). Dorado et al's (2016) research suggests that TIP has the potential to be more powerful at a whole-school level, where consistency of approaches can be ensured, and practices can reach a far greater number of students. LA guidance similarly seems to promote this, with EPSs such as City of York Council (2019) and Brighton and Hove City Council (2018) producing guidance for schools on creating trauma-informed and attachment aware behaviour policies. Ultimately, through adopting a trauma-informed approach, school staff have a powerful potential to inspire and implement positive change for CYP who may have experienced trauma and ACEs.

### **2.5.2 Educational Psychologists' role**

Educational Psychologists (EPs) can make a unique and valuable contribution to education as scientist-practitioners; applying psychological knowledge in practice to operationalise theory, test working hypotheses, and collaboratively form action plans to initiate positive change (Birch et al, 2015; Boyle & Lauchlan, 2009; Kelly, 2017). EPs are well positioned to engage with a breadth of work at different levels, including systemic, consultative, and intervention practices, across a range of settings and needs (Gillham, 1978; Fallon et al, 2010). This includes applying their skills in

advocacy of CYP who may have been exposed to trauma or ACEs. By delivering therapeutic interventions, training opportunities for school staff, conducting assessments and consultations, and supporting schools to implement new policies and pedagogies, it is recognised that EPs can be a key resource in supporting complex trauma (Luthar & Mendes, 2020; Diamanduros et al, 2018).

Reviewing the literature suggested that research is beginning to explore the role of the EP in supporting trauma in more depth. Whilst findings are emerging, outcomes identified that EP skills applied at an organisational, group, and individual level can promote positive outcomes for CYP and school staff (Little & Maunder, 2021). As the EP role is influenced by socio-political contexts (Birch et al, 2015; Lee & Woods, 2017), it is likely that their ways of working in this area will continue to expand, develop, and adapt in light of emerging legislation and guidance. To understand how to offer the most valuable support to both school staff and CYP, it is important that EPs continue to explore what teachers know and understand about trauma, their role in this area, and how to respond.

## **2.6 Literature relating to TIP**

Having outlined the impact of complex trauma on CYP’s development and the role for professionals, I will now present literature on TIP in school settings. With origins in American mental health and social care services (Harris & FalLOT, 2001; Bloom, 2013), trauma-informed approaches are now understood as a framework for practice “that is grounded in and directed by a complete understanding of how trauma exposure affects service user’s neurological, biological, psychological and social development” (Homes & Grandison, 2021, p. 8). Upon its development, five key principles fundamental to a trauma-informed model of practice were agreed, which remain consistent throughout literature identified in this review (Elliot et al, 2005; Harris & FalLOT, 2001; Homes & Grandison, 2021; SAMHSA, 2014). Table 1 presents a summary of these key principles. It is recognised that to fully implement TIP, there is a requirement for an organisation to systemically align itself with the five key principles and initiate change at every level; this often requires a “profound paradigm shift” and time to fully embed (Homes & Grandison, 2021, p. 11).

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Key Principle	Outline
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1.	Safety	The organisation strives to ensure actual and perceived safety, both physical and emotional, of staff and clients. This includes efforts to prevent re-traumatisation.
2.	Trustworthiness	Policy, procedures, and decisions are designed and followed with transparency in order to build and maintain trust among all members or users of the organisation.
3.	Empowerment and Choice	All individuals' strengths and experiences are recognised and built upon. Clients and staff of the organisation are empowered to have a meaningful choice in decision-making processes.
4.	Collaboration and Peer Support	The organisation recognises the value in collaborative working and strives to level any power differences between staff and clients. The power of positive relationships is emphasised and often operationalised through opportunities for peer support and supervision.
5.	Cultural, Historical, and Gender Issues	The organisation is aware of and actively works against cultural, racial, and gender stereotypes and bias. Historical trauma is recognised and responded to appropriately. This includes culturally and ethically responsive policies and protocols.

**Table 2.1 - Key Principles of TIP, adapted from Harris & Fallot (2001) and Elliot et al (2005)**

In educational psychology, TIP falls within the umbrella of 'relational approaches', alongside theories and strategies including restorative practice, attachment aware, and ACE informed approaches (Billington et al, 2022; Easterling, 2022; Lauridsen & Munkejord, 2022; Morgan et al, 2015). Informed by humanistic psychology values as well as attachment theory and the polyvagal theory, TIP places fostering a sense of safety, connectedness, and positive relationships at its core (Bowlby, 1979; Maslow, 1954; Porges, 2009; Rogers, 1959). Literature advises that adults should

demonstrate unconditional positive regard (UPR) to CYP at all times, whilst still clarifying boundaries and expectations for behaviours (Rogers, 1959). CYP are supported, through intervention and direct teaching methods, to build upon skills important for learning and development (Avery et al, 2020; Berger, 2019; Brooks, 2019). Research advocates the implementation of TIP at an organisational level; guidance published by the Scottish Government suggests that the approach should be applied in much the same way as a disability-informed model, where whole organisations adjust practices and environments to ensure they are accessible to all (Harris & Falot, 2001; Homes & Grandison, 2021).

With reference to applications in educational settings, literature suggests that whole-school TIP typically focuses on three areas; teaching new skills, promoting positive relationships and nurturing environments, and demonstrating flexible responses to challenging behaviour. For example, schools implementing TIP directly taught their students emotional literacy and regulation skills such that they could better recognise their own emotional state and learn to self-regulate (Wall, 2020). Similarly, conflict resolution skills were taught to encourage CYP to form and maintain positive peer relationships (Koslouski & Stark, 2021), and all pupils' learning needs were individually considered so targets and tasks could be differentiated (Cohen & Barron, 2021; Márquez Aponte, 2020). Furthermore, research literature identified that schools often adopted a trauma-informed or relational behaviour policy as opposed to a behaviourist sanction and reward system, where students were offered time to reflect, return to a calm state, and opportunity to talk about the incident instead of receiving immediate reprimand (Green & Myrick, 2014; Howard, 2019). To support school staff's continuous professional development (CPD) around TIP, research indicates teachers received training in the form of professional conferences, workshops, after-school training, and conducting voluntary research and reading (Brunzell et al, 2019). Having said this, concerns were highlighted among literature that training was not available consistently to all educational professionals and varied in quality (Howard, 2019).

With regards to the successes of TIP, emerging studies are beginning to demonstrate a positive impact. Research measuring the impact of trauma-informed approaches found improved outcomes for CYP in academic attainment, emotional regulation and literacy, as well as a reduction in exclusion rates and higher sense of

self-esteem among pupils (Bergin & Bergin, 2009; Dorado et al, 2016; Frankland, 2021; Weare, 2005). In addition, studies determined that opportunities to access training, discuss trauma-responsive policy, and access peer supervision improved staff's feelings of confidence and competency in working with trauma affected CYP (McLaughlin & Clarke, 2010; Forber-Pratt et al, 2021; Howard, 2019). Whilst research outcomes have been overwhelmingly in favour of whole-school TIP, the approach remains relatively new in the field of educational psychology and as a result studies examining its impact are few (Cohen & Barron, 2021; EIF, 2020; Maynard et al, 2019). Of those which have been published, a great majority were conducted in America and Australia, and, to my knowledge, exceptionally few have been carried out in the UK. This may suggest that TIP is at the emerging stages in schools in this country and indeed demonstrates a need for further research in this area. Of those studies which have been conducted, systematic literature reviews have expressed concerns around the quality of methodologies used, for example Nolan et al (2021) found many studies to be anecdotal in nature, failing to implement rigorous scientific measures resulting in outcomes which were unreliable.

### **2.6.1 Critique of TIP**

Given the potential vulnerabilities of CYP who have experienced trauma in reference to development and outcomes (Brooks, 2019), it is important to be critically reflective of TIP and consider alternative psychological frameworks. TIP is a relatively new concept in education and so a significant limitation to our understanding of its efficacy is the considerable lack of research evaluating its impact in practice (Cohen & Barron, 2021; EIF, 2020; Maynard et al, 2019). Maynard et al (2019) concluded that whilst this should not prevent educational settings adopting a trauma-informed response, they advised organisations to proceed with caution and rely closely upon guidance documents as very little is known about potential negative consequences or costs. Outcomes of literature identified in this review revealed several tensions in the implementation of TIP. For example, results indicated an emphasis on striving to promote emotional wellbeing above academic attainment, yet many studies reported tensions in pressure to improve academic outcomes and significant challenges in teachers' role and remit to go beyond teaching the curriculum (Howard, 2019; Wall, 2020). Whilst TIP was developed with public sector organisations in mind (Harris & Fallot, 2001), I hold concerns that given the highly demanding nature of educational

professionals' roles and the intense pressure upon teaching staff to obtain good academic outcomes for their pupils, initiating systemic change within schools to implement TIP will likely be incredibly challenging.

At a wider level, some concerns have been expressed within the literature around the implications of the approach's principles themselves. One significant concern raised is the potentially deterministic nature of the approach, as it assumes those who have experienced trauma will present with communication and interaction difficulties, poorer academic outcomes, or SEMH needs, which may not be the case (Winninghoff, 2020). Tolwinski (2019) challenges suggestions that exposure to trauma may impair neurological development, raising theories of neuroplasticity and emphasising that "no experience determines development and ensures a particular life course" (p.144). In response, I would argue that TIP is not firmly deterministic, but hopeful that the implementation of its principles may bring about positive change or perhaps prevent potential difficulties following traumatic exposures (Brunzell et al, 2019). In addition, Berliner & Kolko (2016) argue that the key principles of TIP are essentially characteristics of good organisational practice and care which should be extended to all individuals and are not necessarily specific to trauma. This highlights the potential of TIP in schools to improve the educational outcomes and experiences of all students, not just those who may have experienced trauma.

## **2.6.2 Alternative Perspectives**

Considering critiques of TIP and with a view to limiting researcher bias, I will present two alternative psychological perspectives which may be applied in support of CYP exposed to trauma.

### **2.6.2.1 Behaviourist Perspective**

The behaviourist paradigm remains a dominant approach to managing behaviour in schools and is underpinned by the seminal theories of Skinner (1957), Pavlov (1927), and Watson (1930). Behaviourism proposes that processes of development, actions and responses are learnt through cycles of consequence and reinforcement; positive behaviours can be encouraged through reward, and negative behaviours can be discouraged through sanctions (Gulliford & Miller, 2015). Behaviour choices ultimately cannot be considered in isolation, but must be viewed in light of antecedents, consequences, and interactions with others and the social world



(Landrum & Kauffman, 2011). As behaviourism assumes that an action can be altered or influenced by the responses of others, the context and environmental conditions, it can be inferred that all behaviours seek to serve a function; by identifying the features and functions of an action, it allows intervention to target and address specific, potentially challenging behaviours (Gulliford & Miller, 2015). In application of CYP who have experienced trauma, behaviourism may suggest that incidents of trauma or adversity have led to learned responses and behaviours that may not be helpful or appropriate in different contexts or environments, and therefore may require 're-training' through positive and negative reinforcement. In practice, behaviourist approaches are often criticised as reductionist, failing to explore the internal factors or motivations for behaviours nor address underlying contributors which may be leading to SEMH needs and difficulties (Wilkenfeld & McCarthy, 2020). As behaviourism continues to inform many policies and practices used in school settings, yet rates of exclusion and SEMH needs continue to rise, many have argued that an alternative, perhaps relational, approach should be considered (ARC, 2022; EIF, 2020; DfE, 2022a; NICE, 2022).

### **2.6.2.2 Cognitive Perspective**

Alternatively, the cognitive paradigm proposes development takes place in the form of a progression of mental processes including EF, language, and memory (Piaget, 1962). These processes must be learnt and occur in stages, becoming increasingly complex with age. When applied to consider complex trauma, the cognitive perspective may suggest that learning opportunities to develop early mental processes, such as EF, may have been inhibited by traumatic exposure and events, and so additional opportunities and intervention must be provided to support CYP to develop these skills. Similarly, as the cognitive paradigm postulates that behaviours are external expressions of internal thought processes, these thoughts may be maladaptive or learned responses to challenging psychosocial experiences (Gulliford & Miller, 2015). Contrary to behaviourist theory, the cognitive perspective considers internal factors such as constructed memories and thought processes. In educational settings, professionals could apply this theory when a CYP has experienced trauma and is presenting with SEMH needs to explore with them their cognitive responses to classroom situations and consider how thought process could be reconstructed to allow for more helpful responses (Rait et al, 2010).

Both cognitive and behaviourist perspectives are criticised for being reductionist; cognitive theories fail to consider the impacts of environmental factors on CYP's emotional wellbeing, where behaviourist paradigms reduce behaviours to learned responses. Cognitive-behavioural approaches attempt to address this and postulate that an individual's thoughts, feelings, and behaviours are interlinked, and SEMH requires an awareness of how cognitions and emotions impact upon actions (Sapp, 2004; Rait et al, 2010). Cognitive-behavioural therapy (CBT) is a popular therapeutic intervention underpinned by these principles with a significant evidence base for supporting anxiety, low mood, and other SEMH needs (Harrington et al, 1998; Lang et al, 2010 Weeks et al, 2017). Berliner and Kolko (2016) proposed that trauma focused CBT could be helpful to support CYP to overcome challenges and develop healthy coping strategies. However, I would argue that this does not go far enough, and suggest that whole-school, organisational approaches in line with TIP values can potentially have a wider impact on CYP (Dorado et al, 2016; Nolan et al, 2021).

### **2.6.2.3 Integrative perspectives**

In practice, educational psychology often promotes an integrative perspective and suggests that in real-world casework, it is difficult to truly separate out paradigms and behaviour is likely to be influenced by a combination of factors (Gillibrand, 2016). Adopting an integrative approach and considering perspectives from several psychological theories will enable a fuller picture of need and facilitate a holistic assessment which can inform targeted support (Mahmoudi et al, 2012).

Psychological theory including Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory and Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems theory offer helpful frameworks which can be applied in understanding of behaviour and development, and which recognise that behaviour is likely to be driven by both internal factors such as cognitions and biological drive, but also as a result of social interactions.

## **2.7 Literature relating to school staff perceptions and what informs these**

With reference to GT methodologies, an in depth or systematic review of school staff's understandings and perceptions of TIP at this point would not be appropriate due to its potential to limit a 'pure' interpretation and analysis of data (Charmaz, 2014). However, for the purposes of doctoral study, it was necessary for me to complete a literature search to establish the context of the current study and ensure

its unique contribution. As a result, I have chosen to present some broad themes which exist within research but will also focus upon what literature suggests might inform school staff's perceptions.

### **2.7.1 School staff perceptions of TIP**

Scoping the literature identified that a majority of teachers who participated in research studies perceived TIP to be a useful and important approach. School staff considered the principles of TIP to be in line with their own values as an educator, and a helpful framework towards improving the ethos and culture of their school (Berliner & Kolko, 2016; Easterling, 2022; Lauridsen & Munkejord, 2022). These teachers acknowledged TIP offered a rewarding framework through which they could advocate the emotional wellbeing of students above academic achievement (Koslouski & Stark, 2022). At a systemic, policy level, findings indicated school staff perceived a trauma-informed response to behaviour management in a more positive regard than traditional behaviourist policies; teachers shared it allowed for a “more flexible approach” (Howard, 2019, p. 557) with increased opportunity for reflection and restoration (Brunzell et al, 2019)

Whilst these findings echo positive academic critique on TIP, it is important to be mindful that as participation in research projects is voluntary, data and outcomes are subject to participant bias as those who have participated may be more intrinsically interested in the approach (Mertens, 2005). Furthermore, whilst teachers' perceptions were positive overall, study outcomes identified some barriers regarding its implementation in practice. For example, despite research which suggests schools are best placed to support students exposed to trauma (Quadara & Hunter, 2016; Spence et al, 2021), teachers were concerned about how to provide this support within their role and remit. Many teachers felt they were lacking in competencies and confidence to effectively support trauma affected students (Howard, 2019), and sought additional training and opportunities to collaborate with their colleagues (Brunzell et al, 2019; Koslouski & Stark, 2021). Furthermore, results revealed that many staff members dedicated their own time towards CPD and expressed concerns about how their senior leadership team would respond to the time they allocate to these practices throughout the school day (Howard, 2019; Koslouski & Stark, 2021).

## **2.7.2 Frameworks for Understanding Perspectives**

I will discuss two theoretical frameworks which are useful in considering social and psychological processes which might influence school staff's perspectives on TIP. These include ecological systems theory and attribution theory.

### **2.7.2.1 Systems Theory**

Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems theory proposes that human development is influenced by their environment and the social interactions which take place within it. In brief, Bronfenbrenner's (1979) theory suggests that development and arising difficulties must be considered in light of four interconnecting systems. These include the child's microsystem, their school and home environments and relationships with peers, siblings, and parents; the mesosystem, including interactions between components of the microsystem such as home and school; the exosystem, factors which do not directly impact the CYP but may influence the microsystem such as parents' employment or financial position; and finally the macrosystem, including wider political, cultural and economic systems (Birch & Frederickson, 2015; Bronfenbrenner, 1979). When applied to school staff perspectives, the macrosystem is likely to have a significant impact on beliefs and experiences which are informed and driven by current national and local contexts and government agendas.

Forber-Pratt et al (2021) draw links between Bronfenbrenner's (1979) systems theory and how teacher perspectives may be affected by their differing roles and positions of power within a school. They suggest that as staff members in different positions are likely to interact with a student in different systems, this is likely to affect their perceptions of approaches used as well as their own capacity and responsibilities (Forber-Pratt et al (2021). When applied to hierarchies and the different roles of staff in schools, members of staff in more senior positions, such as Headteachers, are likely to view their role in supporting CYP who have experienced trauma differently to those in lower positions, such as Class Teachers or Teaching Assistants. Furthermore, members of staff with additional responsibilities and interactions within a CYP's ecological system, such as Special Educational Needs Co-ordinators (SENCOs) or Designated Safeguarding Officers, may hold differing perceptions on TIP to colleagues who are less actively involved in supporting pupils

with educational or circumstantial difficulties. Ultimately therefore, staff's role, responsibilities, and interactions within an ecological systems model are all likely to inform their perceptions and understandings of TIP.

### **2.7.2.2 Attribution Theory**

Attribution theory is an application of cognitive psychology which considers how individuals invoke reason for events or circumstances, and how these attributions influence actions (Gulliford & Miller, 2015). In educational psychology, attribution theory has been applied in research of low attainment outcomes and challenging behaviour in schools. Attribution research in this area has established that often teaching staff attribute challenging behaviour to home factors, where parents or carers consider school or peer factors mostly to blame (Miller, 1999). Furthermore, research findings suggest that teachers are more willing to offer support and intervention when they attribute challenging behaviour to factors outside a young person's control, including disabilities or conditions such as attention deficit hyperactivity disorder or autism, as well as circumstances of adversity and traumatic events (Reyna & Weiner, 2001). In a similar way, school staff attributions regarding pupil academic and SEMH development are likely to inform their perceptions of TIP and their role in supporting CYP who have experienced trauma. This may give rise to differences in opinion of teachers depending on their attributions; some may recognise traumatic experiences to be outside a CYP's control and therefore perceive TIP with enthusiasm, where others may attribute the consequences of ACEs to home factors and therefore consider intervention and support strategies to be outside their remit.

## **2.8 Rationale**

Having presented a purposely broad review of the current research and context of TIP in schools, I will now outline the rationale for the current study. This rationale is positioned within the existing body of research and current socio-political context.

Statistics reveal the alarming prevalence and impact of trauma among young people across the UK, with up to half of all children experiencing at least one traumatic event or ACE before they reach eighteen (Carlson et al, 2020; Torjesen, 2019; UK Trauma Council, 2020). These experiences can have a devastating impact on CYP's development, including emotional literacy and regulation skills, academic progress

and EF, peer relationships and social skills, and neurological development (Brooks, 2019; Cook et al, 2017; Green & Myrick, 2014). CYP who experience complex trauma are more likely to have SEND, be excluded from school, and leave education without sufficient qualifications (Brooks, 2019). As a result, educational settings and school staff have a significant role in supporting CYP with the powerful potential to implement positive change (Frankland, 2021; Mclaughlin & Clarke, 2010). In turn, EPs have a responsibility to support schools in this role.

TIP is a potentially powerful approach in enabling CYP who have been impacted by trauma and ACEs to have a more positive experience of education and make progress both emotionally and academically (Harris & Fallot, 2001). TIP describes an organisational way of working which is informed by an understanding of trauma and its impacts on all areas of development (Homes & Grandison, 2021). Reminiscent of humanistic psychology values, TIP promotes a sense of safety, positive relationships, and empowered sense of self at its core (Berger, 2019; Bowlby, 1979; Maslow, 1954; Porges, 2009; Rogers, 1959). As a result, charitable organisations, research bodies and EPSs across the UK have begun to call for an adoption of relational, trauma-informed approaches in educational settings as an alternative to more traditional behaviourist systems (ARC, 2021; Billington et al, 2022; Brighton and Hove City Council, 2018; City of York Council, 2019; DfE, 2022; EIF, 2020; NICE, 2022; Timpson, 2019).

Whilst some schools have begun to implement TIP and demonstrate successes (e.g. Dunnett & Jones, 2022; OFSTED, 2019; Springwell Academy Leeds, 2021), research highlighted inconsistencies in approaches across settings (Howard, 2019; Thomas et al, 2019; Wall, 2020). Furthermore, a lack of confidence and competency as well as requirements for additional training opportunities were pertinent amongst teaching staff throughout research studies (Brunzell et al, 2019; Hill, 2011; Forber-Pratt, 2021; Koslouski & Stark, 2021). To provide the best support through training and guidance for schools, EPSs and other educational professionals must draw upon research evidence and findings (Birch et al, 2015; Boyle & Lauchlan, 2009; Kelly, 2017).

Thus far, very little research has been conducted in the UK exploring the application of TIP in schools, particularly upon the implementation at a whole-school level, and

the perceptions and understandings of school staff (Cohen & Barron, 2021; EIF, 2020; Maynard et al, 2019). This may suggest that TIP is at the emerging stages in schools in this country and indeed demonstrates a need for further research in this area. Given this recognition and the local context within my placement LA, there is a requirement for research to be conducted into school staff's understanding and perceptions of TIP and the perceived barriers to implementing this at a whole-school level. This is with a view to improving advice and training opportunities offered to school settings and enhancing practice and support within schools for CYP who have experienced trauma.

## **2.9 Research aims and Questions**

The current doctoral research project aims to offer a unique contribution to the field of research in TIP by exploring school staff's current understanding and perceptions of trauma-informed approaches, its implications for their role in working with CYP, and finally what the perceived barriers are to its implementation at a whole-school level. As well as attempting to fill this gap in research literature, I hope findings will be valuable to EPSs as they develop their knowledge of current practice in this area. This information can be used to inform future practice, training opportunities, and LA service agendas to improve support for both school staff and CYP. A qualitative research design will give voice and opportunity to educators to be able to share their lived experiences, knowledge, and concerns.

I therefore propose the following research questions:

1. What are secondary school staff's understandings of trauma-informed practice and its implications for their role?
2. What are the barriers to implementing trauma-informed approaches at a whole-school level, according to school staff's perspectives?

In line with the GT methodology adopted in this study, these research questions are intended to be exploratory and inductive in nature allowing me to draw conclusions from data outcomes, rather than pre-established theory (Charmaz, 2014).

## **3.0 Methodology**

### **3.1 Introduction**

In this chapter, I will discuss methodological issues relevant to the current study, and present in depth the procedures adopted for data collection and analysis. I will begin by briefly discussing the philosophical underpinnings of real-world research, including matters of ontological, epistemological, and methodological consideration, before positioning the current study within this. Following this, qualitative research methods and their implications are discussed, including my rationale for the selection of a constructivist GT methodology. An outline of the research design, including stakeholder engagement, participant sampling and recruitment follows, before an account of the data collection and analysis procedures. To aid transparency, frequent references are made to additional documents which supported in this process and are included within the appendix of this study (Birks and Mills, 2015). This chapter concludes with a critical evaluation of the methodologies adopted and discussion of key ethical considerations and how these have been addressed.

### **3.2 Ontological and Epistemological Positioning**

A researcher's philosophical positioning influences all decisions made throughout the research process, thus an understanding of theoretical underpinnings must be established before embarking on a research project (Mertens, 2005). A clear philosophical grounding enables research to be truly reflexive, "well-defined and epistemologically congruent" (Walsh et al, 2015, p. 587). When adopting a methodology such as GT, a clarity of epistemological underpinnings, including the researcher's role and influence on data collection and interpretation, is particularly significant given its nature as ontologically and methodologically flexible (Walsh et al, 2015).

As defined by Mertens (2005), "A paradigm is a way of looking at the world" (p. 7); it comprises of philosophical assumptions (an ontology and epistemology) which direct thoughts, actions, and research (methodology). The ontology of a paradigm relates to how an individual views existence and the nature of reality (Lincoln et al, 2011). Ontologies are typically categorised into two groups, the first determines that the world is a fixed, "objectively knowable" (Moore, 2005, p. 106) place, where the second defines the world as subjective, temporary, and thus "unknowable" (Moore,



2005, p.106). Epistemology is concerned with how an individual learns and obtains knowledge, and considers the relationship between the knowledge holder, such as the researcher, and the object to be understood (Hofer & Pintrich, 2004). The ontology and epistemology dictate a paradigm's methodology or approach to research and enquiry (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017).

### **3.2.1 Positivism and Post-Positivism**

The positivist paradigm considers that reality is objective and quantifiably knowable (Robson, 2011; Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017); a single 'true' reality exists, and researchers can form an understanding of it through experimental, quantitative methods that establish cause and effect relationships (Comte, 1856). Positivism is often referred to as 'the scientific paradigm' or method, as its epistemology dictates that knowledge is gained through direct experience, observation, and experimentation (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017). Post-positivism maintains the ontology that a knowable reality exists but recognises that our understanding of it must always be imperfect due to human error and limited understanding (Panhwar et al, 2017). Post-positivism recognises that while researchers should aim for objectivity, one's hypotheses, personal values, and experiences can all influence their philosophical constructs (Robson, 2011).

Whilst historically, quantitative research guided by a positivist or post-positivist paradigm was considered standard practice for research in educational psychology (Gelo et al, 2008), more recent academics have questioned the relevance of applying the 'scientific method' in this field of research (Burnham, 2013; Gulliford, 2015). Much of the EP's role is concerned with supporting CYP with complex and atypical needs to bring about positive change, therefore perhaps rendering working towards generalisable conclusions inappropriate and irrelevant (Gulliford, 2015).

### **3.2.2 Post-Modernism and Social Constructionism**

Developed out of critical questioning regarding the suitability of objectivist ontologies and scientific paradigms in fields of social science (Robson, 2011), the post-modernist movement offers diametrically opposed world views which advocate that reality is subjective and interpreted by one's experience and perception.

The social constructionist paradigm sits within the post-modernist movement and maintains a relativist ontology, where multiple and differing views of reality exist,

which have been socially constructed through lived experience and interactions (Burr, 2015). The epistemological assumptions of social constructionism suggest that knowledge is subjective, where humans learn and are shaped by those around them in an interlinking and interactive process (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Meaning is drawn through cognitive processing of one's interactions and experiences, therefore personal characteristics including culture, race, religion, gender, and social economic status are all influential in the construction of reality (Burr, 2015).

From a social constructionist perspective, in academic study, the role of the researcher is to "understand the multiple social constructions of meaning and knowledge" (Robson, 2011, p. 24). Developed out of hermeneutics, research offers a means to make sense of a situation or event, from a certain perspective (Mertens, 2005). Aligned with a subjectivist epistemology which suggests knowledge is gained through social interactions, constructionist thinkers typically adopt qualitative research methods, often involving opportunity for communication between the researcher and participants (Lincoln et al, 2011). Furthermore, unlike positivist methodologies, research within the social constructionist paradigm recognises the researcher's own influence in the study and acknowledges that one's values cannot be separated from their observations and established 'truths' (Punch, 2005).

Within the field of psychology, qualitative approaches have gained traction as a holistic research method which allows for 'depth over breadth' (Gelo et al, 2008). With arguable increased validity in real world research, methodologies within a social constructionist paradigm are conducive to reflexive practice (Gulliford, 2015; Moore, 2005) as an in-depth exploration of experience and perspective grounded in social context is promoted.

The current study is concerned with exploring and clarifying school staff's perceptions and understandings of TIP, and the perceived barriers to implementing these approaches at a whole school level. The exploratory, inductive nature of the research, as well as emphasis on perceptions, led me to adopt a social constructionist perspective which considered the multiple and differing viewpoints of staff members, informed by their social interactions and experiences within their school contexts. A social constructionist paradigm feels particularly pertinent to this research project given the importance of relationships and social experiences in TIP

(Brown et al, 2017). In line with the underpinnings of a relativist ontology and subjectivist epistemology, I considered the influence of participants individual characteristics and contexts throughout the data collection and analysis process (Mertens, 2005; Punch, 2005). Similarly, in acknowledgement that my own constructions and experiences as well as interactions with participants were likely to influence the outcomes of this project, I chose to write the written account of this study in first person.

### **3.2.3 Qualitative methods considered for the current study**

Several qualitative research methods are employed within educational psychology which explore participant experiences and perceptions within a social context, and enable researchers to draw meaning from social phenomenon (Billington & Williams, 2017). Researchers must carefully consider which method will be most suited in answering their research question, but also in alignment with their epistemology and values (Ashworth, 2015).

For the current study, discourse and conversation analysis were discounted and considered inappropriate in answering the research questions, due to their specific focus on language as a primary means of constructing reality (Langdrige, 2004). I felt that these methods may draw away from other potential contextual, emotional, or cognitive processes which may contribute to staff perceptions and understanding (Burr, 2003), therefore considered these methods as unhelpful in exploring the aims of this study.

Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) was considered as a potentially appropriate method towards exploring the research questions, as it can enable exploration factors which influence individuals' perceptions and holds lived experiences at its core (Demuth & Mey, 2015). However, IPA is limited in that it provides highly descriptive accounts of participant experience, yet does not extend to explain it, restricting the researcher's depth of understanding in the topic and ability to apply findings in future practice (Willig, 2013). As key stakeholders in my research included the EPS I was on placement with and the participating schools and individuals (see section 3.3.1), it was important to me that this research would directly inform practice. IPA was thus discounted as I felt it would not offer the depth

of exploration needed to fully understand the intricacies of school staff's perceptions of TIP, nor offer an outcome fully applicable to inform practice.

A third method considered as potentially facilitative towards the aims of this study was reflexive thematic analysis (RTA). RTA aligns closely with the social constructionist paradigm as it emphasises the researcher's influence and integral positioning as necessary in the data collection and analysis process, through which descriptive themes and categories are generated to draw meaning from an event or situation (Braun & Clarke, 2021). However, adopting a similar rationale to rejecting IPA, I considered that RTA lacks the depth and rigour of analysis required to obtain a conceptualised understanding of staff perceptions of TIP, and would not allow me to develop a theoretical knowledge of the topic (Biggerstaff, 2012). RTA was additionally discounted as it is criticised by academics as lacking roots in epistemological paradigms and theoretical frameworks (Clarke et al, 2015).

### **3.2.4 Grounded theory methodology and the current study**

GT, in its broadest sense, is described as “a research paradigm for discovery” (Glaser, 2005, p. 145). As an epistemologically flexible design, GT has been applied by both positivists and post-modernists alike; though the application of the method may differ, the core principle of GT is to offer a bridge between research outcomes and theory generation (Walsh et al, 2015). In contrast to alternative methods of research, GT does not aim to test hypotheses or contribute to pre-existing theory but offers a rigorous and systematic approach to studying social interactions, phenomena and processes with the aim of establishing a theory ‘grounded’ in context and data collection (Birks & Mills, 2015; Charmaz, 2014). GT is an inductive research process which should be approached by the researcher without preconceptions or hypotheses, therefore making it an appropriate method when little is known about a topic (Willig, 2001).

For the current study it was important to adopt a method which would enable me to develop a thorough, conceptualised understanding of school staff perceptions of TIP, and the barriers they have encountered in its application. GT goes beyond alternative research methods such as those discussed in section 3.2.3, offering contextualised explanations of phenomena rather than description alone, therefore it was considered a helpful method for exploring the aims of this research. I felt the

theory development within a GT study would allow for greater reflexive consideration of implications for practice and improve outcomes for key stakeholders (see section 3.3.1). Furthermore, as little is known about the application of TIP in educational settings in the UK, in line with GT principles I was able to approach the study without preconceptions or hypotheses with the aim of “construct[ing] an explanatory theory that uncovers a process inherent to the substantive area of inquiry” (Chun Tie et al, 2019, p. 2).

Classic GT was initially developed within the field of sociology by Glaser and Strauss (1967) and sat within the post-positivist paradigm. The method was proposed as an alternative to the traditional scientific method of quantitative research, and sought to outline a systematic, rigorous approach to collecting and analysing data which would ultimately result in the formulation of an objective, ‘grounded’ theory (Birks & Mills, 2015; Bryant & Charmaz, 2007). Glaser and Strauss (1967) proposed that by working in a methodological, unbiased way, the researcher is distinct from participants thus outcomes should remain unchanged irrespective of the researcher. This concept came under criticism however by post-modernist thinkers, who suggested the researcher plays an interactive role within the data collection and analysis process, thus cannot be separated from a study’s outcome (Bryant & Charmaz, 2007). Glaser (2002) has since responded to such critique by proposing that GT offers a methodological paradigm in and of itself, thus is epistemologically flexible and can be applied to quantitative and qualitative research alike. Straussian GT, developed by Strauss and Corbin (1990) offered an alternate, post-positivist method which was much more prescriptive than its predecessor, however this version is said to be far removed from original GT principles, creating a potentially entirely new, deductive methodology (Willig, 2013).

Charmaz (2000) developed a third, popular GT method entitled constructivist GT. As suggested by its name, this version of GT adopts a post-modern paradigm which, in contrast to classic GT, maintains a relativist ontology and subjectivist epistemology (Charmaz, 2014). In line with social constructionism, constructivist GT promotes the notion that multiple and differing views of reality exist, and one’s world view will be shaped by social interactions, individual characteristics, and experiences (Breckenridge et al, 2012; Burr, 2015; Mertens, 2005). According to constructivist GT methods, to understand and discover a phenomenon or world view, a researcher

must embark on an iterative process of qualitative study, interpreting participants views and constructs to go beyond a descriptive understanding and develop a contextually embedded theory (Charmaz, 2008; Mills et al, 2006). A further contrast between constructivist and classic or Straussian GT is the foregrounding of researcher reflexivity. A guiding research question is established at the start of the project, and the researcher's thorough and critical reflections upon their own perspectives and theoretical development towards answering this question is what enables an informed and socially relevant theory to be developed (Charmaz, 2008).

After determining that GT would offer an appropriate and productive methodology to explore the aims of my research project, it was important that I consider which version of GT would be most suitable. I chose to follow constructivist GT due to the rationale that it was most closely aligned with my own epistemological and ontological positioning within the social constructionist paradigm (Birks & Mills, 2015). As little was known about the research topic, the flexibility of constructivist GT allowed me to adapt my approach to data collection in line with emergent codes and categories, whilst continuing to seek answers to and critically reflect upon a pre-established research question (Charmaz, 2008). Furthermore, I consider that the emphasis placed upon researcher reflexivity, as well as the importance of developing a clear rational and research question before beginning data collection, supports the expectations and requirements of doctoral research projects, thus strengthening the quality of this study.

### **3.3 Research Design**

#### **3.3.1 Stakeholders**

The term 'stakeholders' refers to those who are invested in or have a stake in a piece of research and will be impacted by its outcomes and findings (Friedman & Miles, 2006). The stakeholders in this research project included the LA, EPS, other LA Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) services such as the Vulnerable Children's Education Team (VCET), The University of Nottingham, and the schools and participants who took part.

It was important that this research not only met the university requirements necessary for completing the Doctorate in Applied Educational Psychology but was also completed in partnership with my placement EPS. To encourage stakeholder

engagement, discussions were had with the EPS Principal EP and my placement supervisor to explore current SEND and EPS service agendas and consider how the current research may sit within and contribute towards these. I also discussed the current context and implementation of TIP across the LA, to determine the focus of my research question and ensure the project was contextually and academically relevant, in line with GT principles (Ralph et al, 2014). Service level agendas as well as wider SEND service initiatives included focus on improving outcomes for vulnerable young people and reducing exclusion rates across schools, therefore my research project was positioned well within this to enable an understanding of school staff's knowledge of the impact of trauma on young people and the support mechanisms in place currently. Upon completion of the project, I committed to share broad, overall findings with the EPS, and the schools and individuals who had participated.

### **3.3.2 Participant Sampling**

#### **3.3.2.1 Initial recruitment and purposive sampling**

GT methodology promotes that participant sampling should be guided by the research area being studied to gain a contextually relevant data set (Baker & Edwards, 2012; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Initial data collection should therefore be purposive, followed by a process of theoretical sampling as themes and categories begin to emerge (Charmaz, 2014).

Guided by the research aims to explore TIP at a whole-school level, it was important that the initial sample of participants be reflective of a school's staff population. I hoped this would enable a rich picture of staff's multiple and differing viewpoints, informed by their perspectives from different positions within the school structure. In turn, this would give rise to research outcomes which are representative of educational settings thus informing relevant implications for practice (Boddy, 2016). I therefore sought to recruit at least one participant in each of the following roles:

- A member of Senior Leadership Team (SLT)
- Special Educational Needs Co-Ordinator (SENCo)
- Class Teacher
- Teaching Assistant (TA) or Learning Support Assistant (LSA)
- A member of pastoral staff

Additional inclusion and exclusion criteria were determined regarding the educational settings and individual participants, as outlined in Table 3.1.

Inclusion Criteria	Exclusion Criteria	Rationale
Secondary schools within the EPS LA	Primary, nursery and post-16 settings Schools outside the EPS LA	To support stakeholder engagement Rates of exclusion are significantly higher in secondary schools (DfE, 2023)
Mainstream provision setting	Specialist provision setting or pupil referral unit	Additional needs of pupils attending alternate provisions are likely to influence practices and policies in place
Internal members of school staff with educational responsibilities	Internal staff members who do not have educational responsibilities External employees working within the setting	The research question seeks to explore trauma-informed practice in education External members of staff may have less knowledge of the school's practices and policies
Members of staff who have been in their role for a minimum of one year	Members of staff who have been in their role for less than one year	Members of staff who have been in post longer than one year will have a greater experience to inform their participation, resulting in a richer data set.

**Table 3.1 - Table detailing the inclusion and exclusion criteria, alongside rationale, for initial participant recruitment.**

After receiving ethical approval from the University of Nottingham's Ethics Committee (Appendix 1), I began the recruitment process by first emailing EPs within my placement EPS, asking them to recommend any mainstream secondary schools within the LA who they considered might be interested in taking part in my research (Appendix 2). It was made clear to EPs that volunteering schools did not need to have received prior training or hold specialist knowledge in TIP as the research was exploratory in nature and concerned with staff's current understanding. Upon recommendations made by EPs, emails were then sent out to Headteachers of seven secondary schools to provide details of my research project and seek



expressions of interest (Appendix 3). Of these, five schools expressed an initial interest in the project, with whom informal meetings were organised to discuss the aims of the study in more detail, including ethical considerations and recruitment and data collection processes, and gain consent from Headteachers for their schools to take part.

Following initial discussions, four Headteachers volunteered and provided consent for members of staff in their school to take part in my research. Paper and emailed copies of the participant invitation letter (Appendix 3) were then shared again with Headteachers to distribute among staff members who met the research inclusion criteria, and whom Headteachers considered may be interested in taking part. Potential participants were asked to email myself directly to express their interest in taking part. Staff members' job role and years of experience were confirmed at this point to ensure the inclusion criteria had been met. Members of staff who met the inclusion criteria and confirmed their interest in participating were contacted to arrange a mutually convenient time for a focus group to go ahead, at each respective school. To ensure I was adhering to professional codes of research conduct and ethics (BPS, 2021; HCPC, 2016), participants were sent an Information Sheet (Appendix 4) and were asked to read this carefully before providing their informed written consent (Appendix 5) before taking part in a focus group.

Table 3.2 provides an overview of the variety of job roles held by participating school staff.

Job Role	Number of Participants
Member of SLT	4
SENCo	1
Class Teacher	3
Teaching Assistant/Learning Support Assistant	7
Pastoral Staff Member	1

**Table 3.2 - Table indicating the variety of job roles held by participants at the purposive sampling stage.**

Table 3.3 demonstrates the years of experience in their current job role, held by participating school staff.

Years of Experience in Current Role	Number of Participants
-------------------------------------	------------------------

1-5 years	11
6-10 years	2
10+ years	3

**Table 3.3 - Table indicating the professional years of experience held by participants the purposive sampling stage.**

An additional table summarising the composition of each focus group, including number of participants, job role, and years of experience in their current role, is included in Appendix 6.

### 3.3.2.2 Sample Size

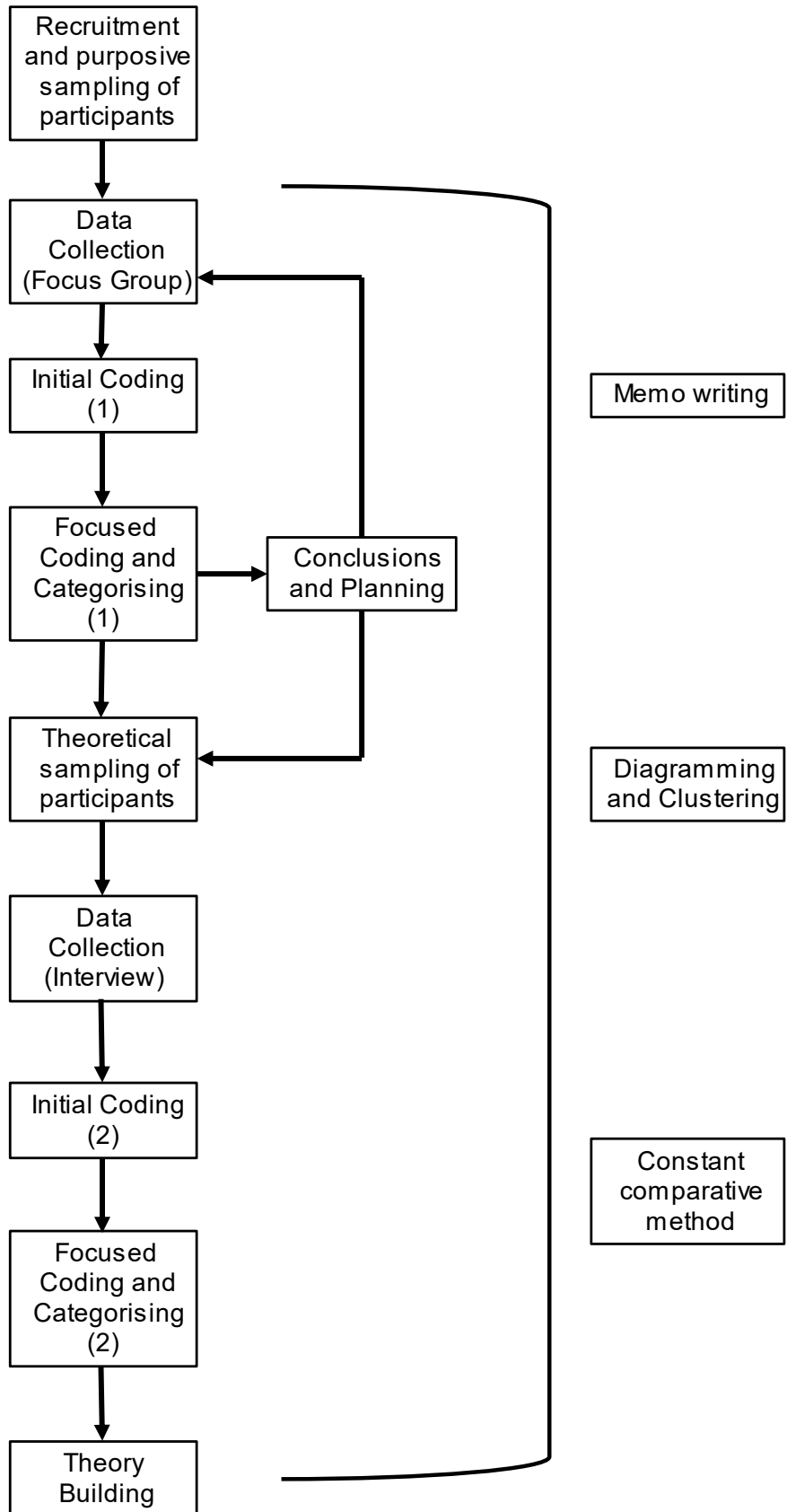
Upon the completion of data collection, sixteen participants took part in the research study at the stage of purposive sampling, and one further participant at the stage of theoretical sampling (see Section 3.4.6), making the total sample size for the current study seventeen participants working across four mainstream secondary schools in the LA. Given the epistemologically flexible nature of GT (Walsh et al, 2015), previously conducted research studies demonstrate a wide range of sample sizes, dictated by the methodology chosen. Guidance on constructivist GT does not specify a recommended sample size, but rather emphasises that researchers should strive to reach a point of data ‘saturation’ (Charmaz, 2014; Cohen et al, 2013; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Data collection should continue until it no longer highlights new perspectives or theoretical insights, and when established themes become rich and detailed categories (Aldiabat & Le Navenec, 2018). Furthermore, qualitative researchers have argued that as with participant sampling, the sample size should be dependent on and grounded in the research topic and purpose, therefore making it difficult to predetermine (Baker & Edwards, 2012). This is particularly pertinent for GT methodology which aims to develop a contextually relevant theory, thus prioritising quality of sample over quantity of participants (Birks & Mills, 2015; Charmaz, 2014; Hennink et al, 2019).

Guest et al (2016) suggest that a minimum of three focus groups can be sufficient to allow data to reach a point of saturation. In the current study, a minimum sample size of three secondary schools, each with four to six volunteering participants, was determined. It was considered that three or more participating schools would be sufficient to offer a representative of the range of school contexts and theoretical positioning of teaching staff across the LA. A minimum of three was also considered

satisfactory for comparisons to be made between groups, ensure outcomes were not unique to a single school population, and allow opportunity for questions and theory to be developed in line with GT methodology (Robson, 2011; Morgan, 1998). Guidance on group numbers for individual focus groups varies but typically ranges from three to twelve participants (Fowler, 2009; Morgan, 1988; Winlow et al, 2013). Researchers do agree however that establishing the optimal number to facilitate productive group dynamics and discussion is a careful balance and must be considered in relation to the field of study and practicalities of recruitment (Cohen et al, 2013; Winlow et al, 2012). In the current study, a focus group size of four to six participants was considered optimal, due to the rationale that this was a large enough size for the sample to include staff members from a range of roles thus ensuring the group was representative of the wider school community, whilst remaining small enough to allow each participant to contribute their views (Wibeck et al, 2007). Finally, I was mindful of the recruitment difficulties arranging focus groups may bring, especially within the time-pressured field of education and within the scope of the doctoral thesis project (Maas et al, 2021; Winlow et al, 2012). A minimum of three schools, with four to six volunteering participants each, therefore felt a realistic and manageable sample size to recruit.

### **3.4 The Procedure and Data Analysis**

This section will outline and critically reflect upon the procedure I took to collect and analyse data. To reflect the iterative nature of constructivist GT, where data collection occurs in parallel with analysis rather than following a linear sequence (Charmaz, 2014), I have chosen to present these considerations alongside one another in this chapter. Figure 3.1 provides a visual representation of the constructivist GT process I adopted in this research and its structure will be used to aid explanation of the stages of data collection and analysis I followed. Key concepts will be explained in the following pages to aid the reader's understanding.



**Figure 3.1 - A visual representation of the data collection and analysis process followed in the current study (adapted from Charmaz, 2014)**

### **3.4.1 Initial data collection: Focus Groups**

Due to the epistemologically flexible nature of GT methodology, a wide range of data collection methods have been adopted by researchers, with Glaser (1998) broadly acknowledging that “all is data” (p.8). Within constructivist GT, Charmaz (2014) promotes data collection methods which are informed by ethnographic practice, enable rich detail, and capture a diversity of contexts and perspectives (Birks & Mills, 2015). In the current study, focus groups were conducted as the primary method of data collection. Focus groups were chosen due to the rationale that they most closely aligned with my epistemology and the constructivist principles of Charmaz’s (2014) method. In addition, focus groups allow opportunity for participants to respond to or build upon one another’s contributions, resulting in a richer, more balanced discussion than could be offered by conducting individual interviews (Barker et al, 2002; Birks & Mills, 2015). Finally, focus groups offered an efficient method of data collection, gaining the perspectives of more participants within a set time frame than could have been achieved through individual interviewing (Krueger, 2014).

Although they can offer several advantages, I was also aware of factors which might limit the success of focus groups as my chosen data collection method. For example, group dynamics can significantly influence participant engagement and discussion, thus as researcher and facilitator, it was important I established an environment of mutual respect and UPR, where participants felt able to contribute openly and honestly to discussion. One way in which I ensured this was through the co-construction of ground rules at the start of each focus group, as indicated in Appendix 7. Choosing whether to opt for homogenous groups (eg. staff employed by the same school or with the same job role) or heterogenous groups (eg. staff working in different settings or staff with a diversity of roles) was an important consideration in facilitating positive group dynamics. Whilst there is debate among academics as to which approach is preferential, guidance suggests a careful balance, with “enough diversity within groups to stimulate discussion and sufficient homogeneity to facilitate comparison” (Barbour, 2005, p. 746). Using this rationale, and for practicality purposes, focus groups were conducted with members of staff working in the same setting, with a diversity of job roles.

In line with the objectives of constructivist GT, I took an intensive approach to interviewing guided by the key characteristics outlined by Charmaz (2014, p. 56):

- *Selection of research participants who have first-hand experience that fits the research topic*
- *In-depth exploration of participants' experience and situations*
- *Reliance on open-ended questions*
- *Objective of obtaining detailed responses*
- *Emphasis on understanding the research participants' perspective, meanings and experience*
- *Practice of following up on unanticipated areas of inquiry, hints and implicit views and accounts of actions*

The use of intensive interviewing and probing questions is considered to aid GT researchers in establishing and exploring conceptual categories (Glaser, 1978). Although intensive, it was important that focus groups remained informal and conversational in style to facilitate positive group dynamics. While Robson (2011) suggests focus groups typically last for a duration of between one and two hours, I felt this length of time was extensive and unreasonable for participants who were likely to have demanding professional roles. To ensure time for a valuable discussion while reducing demands on participants, I proposed that focus groups would last a duration of no longer than one hour (Robson & McCartan, 2016).

A semi-structured focus group schedule was developed to support a smooth, fluid running of discussion as well as prompt introductions and initial development of ground rules. The schedule was developed with reference to seminal texts on TIP in education, including Harris and Fallot (2021), Cavanaugh (2016), and Brooks (2019), as well as Charmaz's (2014) methodological reflections. While a semi-structured schedule was developed around key elements of exploration within the research area of focus, it was acknowledged that focus groups should remain flexible and responsive to the content of discussions and my own interpretations and theoretical sensitivity as a researcher (Mertens, 2015; Robson & McCartan, 2016). In accordance with constructivist GT processes, emergent codes and categories identified between focus groups were used to inform questions and guide discussions of future data collection opportunities (Charmaz, 2014); the semi-structured focus group schedule was adapted to reflect this. The initial focus group schedule, as well as an exemplification of how this was adapted in line with the development of theory, is included in Appendices 7 and 8.

A small pilot of the focus group schedule was conducted with an opportunity sample of volunteering participants who were recruited from my peer group but also represented members of the school staff population, on 6<sup>th</sup> November 2022. Participants of the pilot included two class teachers and one teaching assistant. Completing a small pilot study provided me with opportunity to evaluate and reflect upon my skills as an interviewer, as well as refine and improve the focus group schedule (Cohen et al, 2015). Volunteering participants provided feedback on several factors, which were recorded on a draft focus group schedule used during the pilot (Appendix 9) and further reflected upon in my thesis diary. These reflections enabled me to develop the focus group schedule and its application in the following ways:

- Rewording or simplification of questions to ensure clarity and understanding.
- Omission of questions where themes or concepts were repeated or considered unhelpful in answering the research question.
- Reordering of questions to ensure a natural and fluent progression of topic areas. Flexibility in this area was important as questions and prompts would be led by the discussions of each focus group.
- An improved understanding of time required for participants to engage in a rich discussion and allow opportunity at the end of focus groups for additional thoughts to be shared.

### **3.4.2 Recording and Transcription of Focus Groups**

Each focus group was audio recorded using a digital voice recorder and stored securely on a password protected device. Prior to beginning each focus group, participants were reminded that the session would be recorded for transcription and analysis purposes and were asked to give their consent. I informed participants that recordings would not be shared and would be deleted upon the completion of this research project. Participants were asked to refrain from using names or other identifying features where possible during the discussion but were assured that recordings and transcripts would be made anonymous and any identifiable characteristics shared would be omitted or edited to ensure confidentiality was maintained.

All interviews and focus groups were transcribed by the researcher before data analysis took place, aided by the transcription software 'Transcribe' (DENIVIP, 2023). Transcribe allowed me to input audio recordings, which were automatically transcribed by the software, providing an output on an integrated text editor. To ensure I was familiar with and immersed in the data, I listened to each audio recording multiple times, whilst simultaneously editing and proof-reading transcriptions to ensure accuracy as well as anonymity. In line with GT purposes, transcription focused upon verbatim illustration of spoken word only, and did not include non-verbal or additional linguistic forms of communication (Oliver et al, 2005).

### **3.4.3 Initial Coding**

Data analysis in GT typically follows a three-stage process, moving from identifying lower order codes and concepts, to higher levels of abstraction and identification of theoretical codes and categories (Birks & Mills, 2015). Coding is an integral process in GT, and constructivist GT recommends a progression of initial coding, followed by focused coding, whilst maintaining a constant comparative method (Charmaz, 2008). A constant comparative method of analysis involves making direct comparisons within and between data sets, to allow development of abstract concepts and categories (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Throughout the coding process, memoing, diagramming and clustering (see section 3.4.7) took place to enable me to reflect upon and monitor any prior ideas, skills, and experiences which were likely to affect how codes were developed and assigned (Charmaz, 2014). For novice GT researchers, line-by-line coding is recommended as a thorough, systematic approach which minimises the potential to overlook themes and constructs (Charmaz, 2014; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). I used this method throughout the stage of initial coding, generating a wealth of codes and interacting closely with small, bound amounts of data; Appendix 10 offers an example of line-by-line initial coding. As guided by Charmaz (2014), I aimed to complete initial coding stages with speed and spontaneity, and without preoccupation with directly answering the research question. To aid speed, all initial and focused coding was completed by hand, as I felt more competent using this method as opposed to computer software such as NVivo. During initial coding, I aimed to identify codes which were succinct and



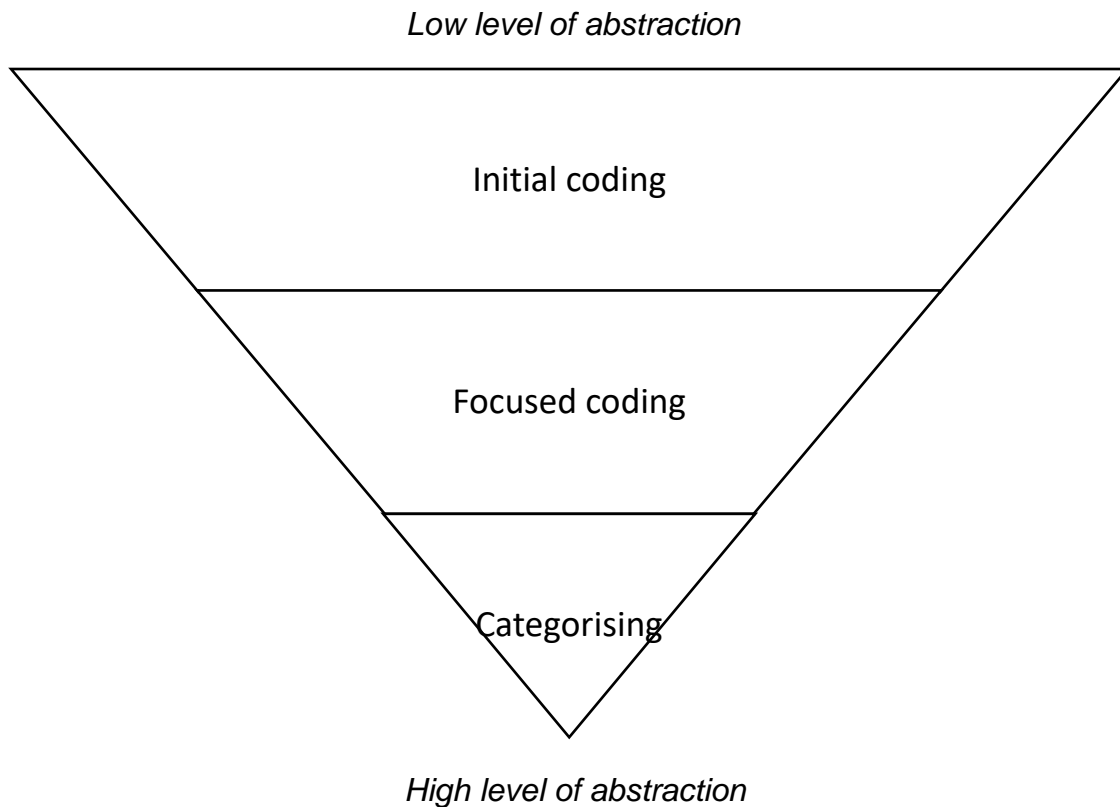
remained close to the data, rather than those which felt theoretical or abstract; it was hoped that this approach would limit data being 'forced' to fit codes. Where a line of text did not give rise to a code upon first glance, I made a note of this and returned to it later in order to apply new insight. Efforts were made wherever appropriate to code using gerunds in order to foreground actions and processes and engage with the data in an interactive, heuristic manner (Charmaz, 2014); for example, "*they dunno how to handle it, how they're feeling*" was initially coded as '*managing emotions*', and "*we can have the one-on-ones a lot, so then we can[...]*" was initially coded as '*working directly with CYP*'. By a similar rationale, in-vivo codes quoted directly from participants' voice were generated where applicable, preserving their perspectives and emphasising participant experience as central in theory development; examples of in-vivo codes include "*yeah, but we're the first port of call*" coded as '*being the first port of call*', and "*needed to access XXX and chat and chill in safe spaces*" coded as '*accessing safe spaces*'.

Although a line-by-line coding method was adopted, I allowed myself some flexibility in this to ensure my analysis encompassed all emerging thoughts, ideas, and concepts at the initial coding stage. For example, where one line of data reflected more than one idea, I allowed multiple codes to be assigned; one example of this was "*and then you can diffuse that situation and respond in a[...]*" which was assigned codes '*diffusing a situation*' but also '*responding to incidents*'. In addition to this, I acknowledged that initial codes were provisional and allowed changes to be made to initial analysis where codes could be removed, amended, or added to when considered appropriate and helpful, and in consideration of new emerging themes and constructs across the data set (Charmaz, 2014). A constant comparative method was applied, whereby provisional analysis could be iteratively compared between focus group transcripts and across stages of analysis, adapting, removing or adding codes where emerging constructs and insights began to take hold (Charmaz, 2014).

#### **3.4.4 Focused Coding and Categorising**

After the initial coding stage, I began a process of focused coding and categorising in line with constructivist GT methods. At this stage of analysis, data and codes identified at the initial coding stage were scrutinised, organised, and evaluated to a

higher level of abstraction, as represented visually in Figure 3.2 (Charmaz, 2014). Initial codes were filtered to identify those with higher analytical value, such as those which were most closely aligned to the research question or those which appeared more frequently across the data sample (Charmaz, 2014). This provided direction towards the identification of theoretical categories, where focus codes were synthesised, and connections highlighted.



**Figure 3.2 A visual representation of increasing levels of abstraction across data analysis stages (adapted from Charmaz, 2014)**

As with initial coding, a flexible and reasonable approach was taken in the generation of focused codes, as guided by Charmaz (2014). Initial codes were analysed such that they directly informed or influenced emerging focused codes; some initial codes were re-coded as focused codes, some were collapsed and merged under one focused code, and some remained as they were. Constant comparative analysis was applied utilising skills of deduction and verification to ensure focused codes were applicable across transcripts and confirm they were exhaustive of all ideas and concepts (Birks & Mills, 2015). Memoing, diagramming and clustering took place in parallel throughout this stage of analysis, to enable a

high level of reflexivity and criticality of developing theoretical categories (Charmaz, 2014). Appendix 11 offers an example of focused coding, which is directly comparable to the initial coding exemplified in Appendix 10, to aid transparency of the research and data analysis processes. Appendix 12 offers a tabularised summary of identified focused codes and conceptual categories.

### **3.4.5 Theoretical Sampling and Interview One**

Theoretical sampling is a unique and distinguishing element of GT which is considered essential to the process, and its omission can significantly jeopardise the quality of a GT research study (Hood, 2007; Urquhart et al, 2019). The process of theoretical sampling allows researchers to return to data collection as directed by their analysis to clarify and further explore emerging ideas, categories and constructs (Charmaz, 2014).

Within the time constraints of completing a doctoral research project, I embarked upon theoretical sampling once tentative focused codes and some abstract categories had begun to emerge. It was hoped that by completing theoretical sampling at this point in the research journey, I could limit potential for concluding data collection prematurely, and the aims of theoretical sampling would be increasingly informed by prior findings (Charmaz, 2014).

In this study, theoretical sampling was motivated by the participant sample itself, as well as to address questions and loose hypotheses which had been identified through memoing. A memo on time constraints and staffing has been included in Figure 3.3 to exemplify questions I held prior to theoretical sampling, and how they were addressed and built upon after. Upon the conclusion of initial focus groups, whilst members of SLT were included in the participant sample, a Headteacher had not been recruited thus far. As a key element of the research question involved exploring whole-school practices and several emerging categories involved systemic factors, I considered it necessary to seek theoretical sampling of a Headteacher to engage in discussion upon systemic factors, their role in these, and seek clarification upon questions that had arisen thus far in the data analysis process.

<p><b>Memo: Time constraints and staffing</b></p> <p>A significant barrier to implementing TIP at a whole school level which has emerged from all focus groups thus far is feelings of lack of time to learn about the approach and put actions into place in practice, and also a lack of staff members to facilitate and embed approaches. I am aware of the increasing demands on teaching staff and wonder what implications this has for EP practice. I also wonder if Headteachers might share this perception and if so, what systemic factors might be influencing this. Could additional support or intervention could be offered 'from the top down' to ease time demands, increase staff capacity and thus support implementation of TIP?</p>	<p><b>16.01.23</b></p>
<p><b>Additions made following theoretical sampling</b></p> <p>Interestingly, the interviewed Headteacher agreed that staff capacity and time constraints are a considerable barrier to implementing TIP at a whole school level. She discussed that key features of the approach such as offering reflection, repairing and restoring opportunities are very difficult to offer within the demands of the school day. The Headteacher demonstrated a strong understanding of the approach and its potential value and discussed that developing an ethos of shared understanding within the school where staff are given 'permission' to prioritise wellbeing over academic achievement may support staff to embed TIP. Furthermore, supervision and promotion of staff welfare was also discussed as potential ways to increase staff capacity.</p>	<p><b>06.02.23</b></p>

**Figure 3.3 - Memo demonstrating my reflexivity upon the emerging concepts of time constraints and staffing before and after theoretical sampling.**

As Headteachers had been contacted initially to gain consent for their school's participation in the research project and gain access to additional staff members, all Headteachers were contacted again directly by email to remind them of the research project and ask if they would like to volunteer as a participant. One Headteacher responded and expressed a wish to volunteer. When it was confirmed that the Headteacher met the inclusion criteria, a convenient time and date was arranged to conduct a semi-structured interview via Microsoft Teams. The interview lasted a duration of thirty-three minutes and thirty-four seconds. Due to time constraints, further theoretical sampling was not pursued.

To ensure I collected data upon questions and developing hypotheses which were emerging from data analysis, the semi-structured interview schedule was adapted to include additional relevant questions and remove areas of discussion which felt less pertinent (Appendix 13). As before, the interview was audio recorded and transcribed, ensuring adherence to ethical considerations (see section 3.5). Data was analysed according to the iterative processes outlined in section 3.4 and the constant comparative method was applied to new and existing data to promote

researcher reflexivity. Full details of the results of data analysis across purposive and theoretical sampling stages is included in Chapter 4.

### 3.4.6 Memoing, Diagramming and Clustering

Memos are an informal reflection tool which researchers are encouraged to engage with from the beginning to completion of their study (Birks & Mills, 2015). The act of memoing is considered pivotal to GT studies and vital in enabling researchers to become “actively engaged” (Charmaz, 2014, p. 162) with their data. Memos may be long and detailed or short and brief, and may be used immediately or reflected upon and added to at a later time, but all enable the construction of an analytical diary which captures a researcher’s ideas, suppositions, reflections, and dilemmas across their research journey (Kenny & Fourie, 2015). Memos written “continuously and copiously” (Birks & Mills, 2015, p. 11) directly influence theory development and support the construction of categories with a high level of abstraction (Clarke, 2005). Figure 3.4 provides an example of my reflections upon an in-vivo code written during initial coding. Additional memos are included in Appendix 14.

<p><b>Memo: ‘One size does not fit all’/ subjective nature of trauma</b></p> <p>Participants in all focus groups and theoretical sampling interview reflected that trauma is subjective, both in their perceptions of what constitutes a traumatic event but also how they respond to it. As a result, participants discussed that when it comes to approaches, ‘one size does not fit all’ and therefore staff must get to know young people well, develop an understanding of how trauma has impacted on them individually and what support they respond well to.</p> <p>These reflections overlap with several other codes including ‘getting to know children and young people’ and ‘developing a holistic understanding’, suggesting this code is analytical relevant and important in answering my research questions. It is also interesting that it aligns with a constructivist epistemology and subjective ontology.</p>	<p><b>20.03.23</b></p>
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**Figure 3.4 - Example of a memo written during the data analysis process, which reflects upon the in-vivo code 'one size does not fit all'**

In addition to memoing, a key tenet of the constructivist GT method is the use of diagramming and clustering to visually represent codes, categories, and their relationships (Charmaz, 2014). Charmaz (2014) asserts that concrete images of developing ideas foreground the “relative power, scope, and direction” (p. 218) of emerging categories and highlights the connections between them. Appendix 15

provides examples of how diagramming was applied in tentative formulation of categories.

### **3.5 Ethical Considerations**

In line with The University of Nottingham's *Code of Research Conduct and Research Ethics* (2019), ethical approval was sought and gained from the Ethics Committee in May 2022, before participant recruitment began (Appendix 1). In consideration of the *BPS Code of Human Research Ethics* (2021), efforts were made to carefully consider ethical issues, ensuring participants safety and wellbeing was prioritised. As I maintained the role of TEP within the LA where the research was conducted, care was also taken to ensure I adhered to professional codes of conduct, including the *HCPC Standards of Conduct, Performance and Ethics* (2016), and *BPS Code of Conduct and Ethics* (2021). Ethical issues considered throughout the process of this research are discussed and reviewed in the following sections.

#### **3.5.1 Respect for Participants' Autonomy and Dignity**

It was important that participants felt individually valued and respected throughout the research process, were aware of their rights, and felt safe to share their views during the data collection process. To encourage an egalitarian relationship and minimise an imbalance of power between myself and participants (Birks & Mills, 2015; Robson, 2011), measures were taken to build rapport with staff members prior to and during the focus groups and interview and demonstrate active listening and empathy skills. Efforts were made for focus groups to take place at a time and place which was convenient to the group, and within participants' typical working hours.

#### **3.5.2 Informed Consent**

As outlined in section 3.3.2.1, informed consent was gained from Headteachers and individual participants before focus groups took place, facilitated through the sharing of recruitment letters and information sheets (Appendix 2 and 3). At the start of each focus group, participants were given a hard copy of the information sheet, reminded their participation was entirely voluntary, of their right to withdraw, and given opportunity to ask questions or clarify concerns.

As Headteachers acted as gatekeepers for initial access to staff members, it was important to ensure free consent was not undermined. To address this, I clarified

with Headteacher's during initial discussions that participation in the research was entirely voluntary, and staff members should not be offered incentives to take part. I also strove to develop a positive relationship with Headteachers, to facilitate open conversations and to enable relevant information to be shared when needed.

### **3.5.3 Confidentiality**

Participants anonymity and right to privacy was respected by ensuring participants names, employing school, and locality of work were not included within the thesis, transcriptions, or data analysis. Furthermore, the LA in which this research was conducted was not disclosed. All focus groups took place within an appropriate private room within the participants' school, and the interview was conducted via Microsoft Teams, where both the participant and I were able to join from a private space of our choosing. In line with the Data Protection Act (DfDCMS, 2018), audio recordings and transcripts were securely stored on a password protected device and audio recordings were deleted upon the completion of the transcription and analysis process. To further ensure anonymity, identifiable references made to individual CYP or participants' place of work were removed or anonymised.

### **3.5.4 Minimising Harm**

Given the sensitive nature of the research topic, it was important that participant wellbeing was prioritised, and efforts were made to minimise harm wherever possible. Reflecting the relational underpinnings of TIP itself (Billington, 2022), and the nature of constructivist GT, rapport was established between myself and participants by adopting a conversational approach to discussions and demonstrating UPR. The topic of discussion was focused upon current professional practice and understanding in a neutral manner, avoiding questions on personal experiences or circumstances. To ensure participants felt safe to share their views, ground-rules were co-constructed before each focus group began. During focus groups or interviews, I monitored participants for signs of distress and prepared to respond to these by offering comfort breaks, reminding participants of their rights, and ask privately if they felt emotionally able to continue. No participant demonstrated or expressed distress throughout the data collection process.

At the end of focus groups, participants were given opportunity to share any final reflections, concerns, and questions, and signposted to relevant support outlets

should individuals wish to use them. Participants were reminded that their Headteacher was aware of their participation in this research project and could be contacted for support if needed.

### 3.5.5 Debriefing

Upon the conclusion of their focus group or interview, participants were verbally debriefed regarding their participation, the next steps in data collection and analysis, and reminded of their right to withdraw. Participants were given a Debrief Statement (Appendix 16) which contained my own and my research supervisors' contact details, as well as external support services which could be utilised if needed. Upon completion of this study, I intend to provide written feedback containing the broad findings of the study to participating schools and staff members.

### 3.6 Methodological evaluation – Part 1

Before concluding this Chapter, considerations of the current study's methodological quality will be discussed. The relevance of evaluating research validity and reliability in qualitative research studies is debated by academics due to their development within subjectivist research paradigms (Cohen et al, 2013; Noble & Smith, 2015; Willig, 2013). However, qualitative researchers can take precautions to increase the reliability and validity of their study, including applying evaluation tools specific to their research method (Kolb, 2012; Madill et al, 2000).

Charmaz (2014) outlines an evaluation criterion which should be applied to constructivist GT studies to enhance their quality. These criteria have been applied to the current study, as detailed in Table 3.4. Further considerations upon these criteria, as well additional evaluative comment, is presented in Chapter 6.

<b><u>Evaluation Criteria</u></b>	<b><u>Measures taken by the researcher</u></b>
Credibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Carrying out this research project within the LA where I was on placement as a TEP ensured I was able to gain familiarity with the setting in which it was conducted. Speaking directly with the EPS Principal EP and main grade EPs</li> </ul>



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regarding the context of TIP in the LA enhanced this further.

- I was able to gain familiarity with the research topic by immersing myself in relevant literature prior to embarking on this project. In addition, activities such as accessing training, completing casework, and developing resources for schools within my capacity as a TEP and doctoral student further developed my familiarity with the topic of TIP in schools.
- Participants were recruited from a range of educational settings across the LA, with a diversity of job roles reflecting the structure of a mainstream secondary school. This ensured a wealth of data representative of a range of perspectives.
- Focus groups and interviews conducted lasted for durations between 29 and 62 minutes, allowing for in-depth discussions and a wealth of data.
- To aid transparency, examples of coding practices from all stages of analysis have been presented in the main body of this thesis, as well as in Tables, Figures, and Appendices. Relevant memos have also been included throughout.

Originality

Resonance

See Chapter 6 (Discussion)

Usefulness

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**Table 3.4 - Table indicating measures taken to improve the quality of the current study, informed by Charmaz's (2014) evaluation criteria.**

In addition, GT researchers are encouraged to practice reflexivity throughout their research process to maintain awareness of their own interactions with the data

collection and analysis processes, and their potential influence upon them (Kolb, 2012). By employing constructivist GT practices such as memoing, diagramming and clustering, I was able to acknowledge my own pre-conceptions, knowledge, and emerging assumptions, and actively respond to them (Charmaz, 2014). Applying reflexivity and critical thinking in this way offers a key means of improving the validity of a GT study.

### **3.7 Chapter Summary**

Chapter 3 offered a comprehensive overview of methodological considerations relevant to the current study. It began with a critical discussion of epistemological and ontological considerations, identifying my own alignment with the social constructionist paradigm. Following this, qualitative research methods were outlined and reviewed before a rationale for adopting a constructivist GT methodology was presented. A detailed account of how this methodology was applied in the current study was provided, including clarification of participant sampling, data collection and data analysis methods used. Adherence to constructivist GT reflexivity tools, including memos, diagramming, and clustering, was outlined, before a discussion of ethical considerations and the steps taken to ensure these. This chapter concluded with a brief evaluation of the methodological quality of the current study.

## 4.0 Findings

### 4.1 Introduction

The current research study seeks to develop a theoretical understanding of school staff's understanding and implementation of TIP, through the exploration of two research questions:

1. What are secondary school staff's understandings of trauma-informed practice and its implications for their role?
2. What are the barriers to implementing trauma-informed approaches at a whole-school level, according to school staff's perspectives?

This chapter presents the final analysis of data developed through a constructivist GT process as detailed in Chapter 3 (Charmaz, 2014). Seven conceptual categories will be presented and examined in the following sections. Findings reflect the experiential accounts of participants gathered through four focus groups at the stage of purposive sampling, and one interview with a participant recruited through theoretical sampling. Following theoretical sensitisation through a review of relevant literature, the conceptual categories outlined in this chapter directly informed the development of the study's GT, which will be presented in subsequent chapters.

Table 4.1 outlines the conceptual categories developed during the data analysis process, and in response to each research question. Following completion of focused coding, seven conceptual categories were developed directly from codes selected as having higher analytical value; these codes demonstrated greater analytical salience and significance and enabled several focused codes to be incorporated into more abstract, theoretical constructs. Appendix 12 includes a tabularised presentation of the development of focused codes into finalised focused codes and constructed categories. I considered that the categories established within this study were most relevant and facilitative in exploring both individual and group social processes which influence individual staff and whole-school roles in support of children and young people (CYP) who have experienced trauma.

<b>Research Question</b>	<b>Category number</b>	<b>Conceptual Category</b>

1. What are secondary school staff's understandings of trauma-informed practice and its implications for their role?	Category 1	Understanding complex trauma
	Category 2	Fostering a sense of safety and belonging
	Category 3	Promoting positive relationships
	Category 4	Safeguarding physical and emotional wellbeing
	Category 5	Cultural and systemic implications
2. What are the barriers to implementing trauma-informed approaches at a whole-school level, according to school staff's perspectives?	Category 6	Organisational Factors
	Category 7	Staff wellbeing, confidence, and competence

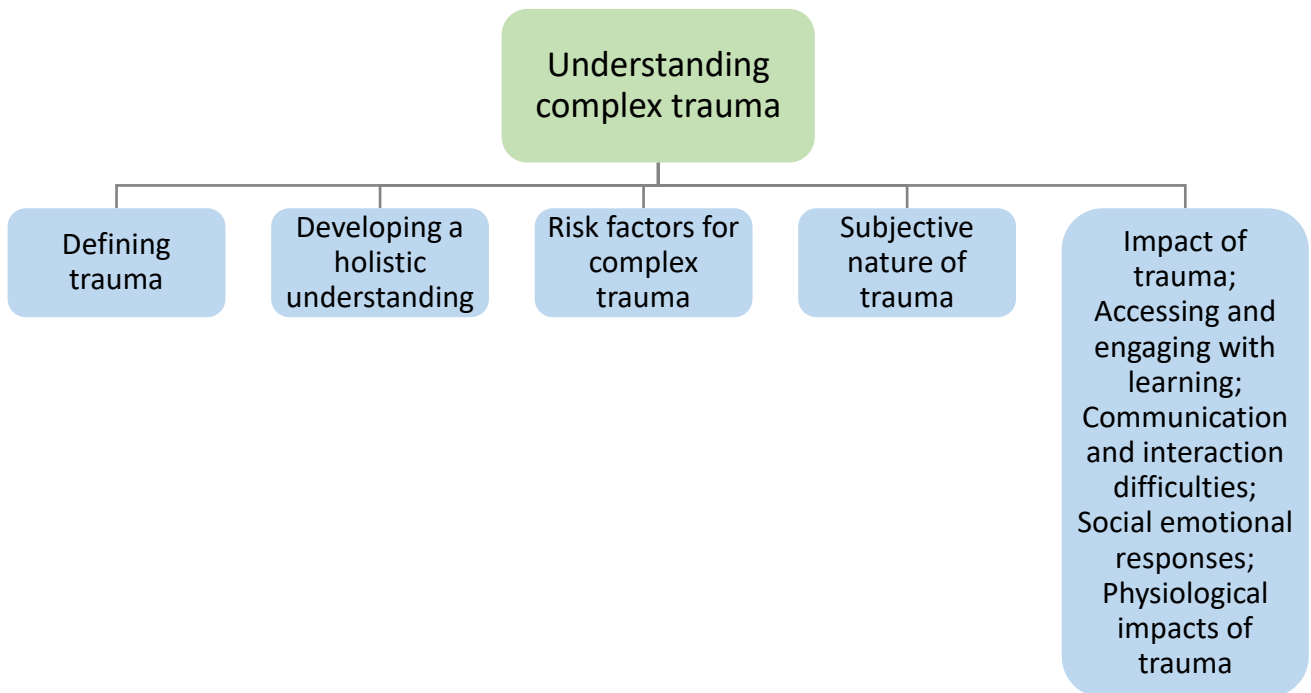
**Table 4.1 - A table showing the seven overall conceptual categories identified during data analysis, in response to each research question.**

Each category is presented in detail throughout this chapter, separated into subsections describing the focused codes upon which it was constructed. To aid transparency and offer a rich picture of each category, examples of direct quotations from transcripts are included. In addition, it is hoped that this will in turn facilitate an account of this study's emergent GT. To ensure anonymity, participants are identified using an assigned number (e.g. *P1*), and full transcripts are not included.

Although the seven categories are presented distinctly and in turn, constructivist GT acknowledges that categories should not be viewed in isolation but rather considered and understood as overlapping, interlinked and interactional (Birks & Mills, 2015, Charmaz, 2014). Whilst each category reflects upon different staff constructs or practices, they do not have distinct boundaries and must be considered as a whole when answering the research questions, as they were developed through an interactive, iterative process during data analysis. As a result, where it is meaningful to interpretation of the findings, I will refer to other categories as appropriate.

## 4.2 Category 1: Understanding complex trauma.

This category reflects participants' current understanding of the concept of complex trauma and how it may impact upon CYP in a mainstream school setting. Figure 4.1 provides a visual representation of the focused codes which construct this category.



**Figure 4.1 - Category 1: Understanding complex trauma.**

### 4.2.1 Focused Code: Defining trauma

To determine how participants defined and understood the term 'trauma', they were asked to explain what the concept meant to them. Whilst participants acknowledged the term was difficult to define, overall participants discussed that trauma was a significant, negative event, or series of events, which resulted in either physical or emotional harm, or both, as demonstrated in these excerpts.

*Trauma is an incident or, uh, something happening to a person that has, um, either a short term or a long-term effect on their mental health. [...] It could be emotional, it could be physical, um, but it's, it all always links back to one or two or a series of incidents. (FG 4, P3, p. 1, 5-8)*

*Anything that's caused any emotional or physical harm to you, um, as a person, whether you're a child, or an adult, anything that causes harm to you. And it doesn't have to be physical harm, it can be emotional. (FG 3, P1, p. 1, 6-8)*

Participants highlighted the subjective nature of trauma (see section 4.2.2), emphasising that its definition is equally concerned with the impacts of an event as well as the event itself. Furthermore, participants demonstrated an understanding that complex trauma is likely to incur long-lasting impacts on the individual.

*Ultimately it's the impact it has on them. It could be something we think small, but actually how it manifests and if it goes unsupported and un- you know, they, they don't acknowledge it, then obviously it manifests over a period of time. (FG 4, P4, p. 2, 50-52)*

*To me, it's something that's potentially life changing. An event which is potentially life changing to the whoever's involved. (FG 3, P2, p. 1, 19-20)*

#### **4.2.2 Focused Code: Subjective nature of trauma**

The focused code 'Subjective nature of trauma' acknowledges participant recognition that trauma is a personal construct which has a different meaning to different individuals. This was a salient concept within the data, with 38 references across all focus groups and interview. Excerpts within this focused code reflect that individuals are likely to have differing perceptions of incidents which constitute a traumatic event and are also likely to respond in different ways.

*Trauma's different to different people. One person could find something a trauma, find an experience traumatic, and another person may not. (FG1, P1, p. 2, 67-68)*

*I think it is different to everybody. How people react to trauma is different to everyone. People have different coping mechanisms. (FG3, P2, p. 1, 24-25)*

As a result, when considering support and intervention, participants recognised that 'it's definitely not one size fits all' (FG2, P1, p. 4, 147) and approaches must be differentiated to individuals and their experiences and responses.

*It's individualized to each student and it's not a one size fits all because like we've said, trauma is very individual to those people. (FG4, P3, p. 6, 217-218)*

This focused code also recognises that the impacts of trauma are not static, but likely to change as the young person grows and develops, as exemplified here.

*I think it changes as well when students, say they've had a traumatic experience when they were younger, um, they can possibly put that to the back of their mind. But obviously when they, they become a certain age where hormones click in and everything else, then [...] what happens is the behaviour will change. (FG1, P3, p. 3, 122-125)*

#### **4.2.3 Focused Code: Risk factors for complex trauma**

Whilst participants recognised the subjective nature of trauma, they did consider that 'there's certain things that everybody will class as trauma' (FG4, P4, p. 1, 27-30), or rather, events and circumstances which pose as 'Risk factors for complex trauma'. Participants discussed several ACEs which may be more likely to result in complex trauma for the individual who has experienced them. Examples participants gave included experiencing bereavement, being care experienced or a child looked after child (CLA), experiencing parental divorce or separation, and experiencing a significant health condition or physical injury. Excerpts of data coded under 'Risk factors for complex trauma' are illustrated below.

*I think we see it most like with stuff that's happened younger and especially like family wise and like if, I don't know, they're in the foster or adoption system or if they've experienced some kind of loss. (FG2, P5, p. 1, 4-6)*

*If they're looked after children as well. Anything really can cause trauma, an accident can totally change their life, bereavement, a divorce. (FG1, P3, p. 2, 47-48)*

#### **4.2.4 Focused Code: Developing a holistic understanding**

This focused code encompasses participant reflections that it is important to develop a holistic understanding of CYP's experiences, individual strengths, and needs. This includes knowledge of the young person's 'story' and context, how complex trauma may have affected them personally, and what support and mediation is helpful in different situations. Participants recognised that developing a holistic understanding enables them to better empathise with a young person, recognise behaviour as a

communication of need, and take a step back before responding to challenging behaviour. Examples of transcript coded within this focused code are included below.

*It's very much looking about the whole person and what's under, underlying the behaviours that we might see in school and how can we support them to, um, to be able to express what they're feeling, but also to be able to access what we're doing in school. (FG4, P2, p. 15, 560-562)*

*So not, not reacting to it too quickly, but thinking, oh, hang on we need to address that in part of the bigger picture. (FG2, P1, p. 21, 981-982)*

With reference to sharing sensitive information about CYP and their families, participants recognised the importance of data protection and rights to privacy, highlighting that it is vital to consider with whom information is shared, and what details are given. Systems should be in place to ensure that sharing sensitive information is done securely and professionally. Participants highlighted the need to ensure parents and carers are consulted when sharing information and regular, positive communication takes place (this will be discussed in more detail in section 4.3.4).

*All the individuals in the school are very professional and we have, we choose to share different information. If I think about safeguarding information, we share what we feel is needed, but you wouldn't share the nitty gritty about situation. (FG4, P4, p. 14, 501-504)*

Finally, participants recognised whilst developing a holistic understanding and being aware of CYP contexts is valuable, they also highlighted the importance of not forming assumptions or deterministic constructs about individuals.

*But it's hard because at the same time you also need to be careful not to make assumptions and, like, assume that they're not managing cos they could be, they are resilient too. (FG2, P4, p. 8, 364-365)*

#### **4.2.5 Focused Code: Impact of trauma**

The overarching focused code 'Impact of trauma' demonstrates participants understandings of how complex trauma can impact on CYP's development and how this presents in their school environment. The frequency with which this focused code was referenced demonstrates the importance of this construct to participants,



with 157 total references across all transcripts. As noted in section 4.2.2, young people are likely to be affected by trauma in different ways; participants acknowledged that trauma could have an impact across all areas of development and recognised that these are not distinct, but often overlapping and likely to affect CYP in several ways.

*And I think trauma's so big as well, isn't it? It does impact on all those areas. (FG2, P3, p. 11, 515)*

*I think developmentally it can be huge, you know, it's whether or not it has an impact on their level of concentration, whether it has an impact on their ability to socialize in groups, are they learning, you know, are they able to trust people, and so on. (FG4, P4, p. 3, 80-82)*

With 108 references, 'Social emotional responses' was the most frequently discussed area of impact, where participants referred to a wide range of possible influences and presentations among CYP. Among others, these included mental health difficulties, emotionally based school avoidance (EBSA), challenging behaviour, varying levels of self-esteem and resilience, emotional literacy and regulation difficulties, disordered eating, risk taking behaviours such as drug and alcohol misuse, and self-harm and suicide.

*They can be withdrawn. [...] If there's any conflict they can step back or you might see more aggression. Um, more conflict, more fighting, um, inappropriate language. Um, self-harming, um, lots of illness, anxiety. They might be a bit smelly and unhygienic. [...] Or they might not feel like they've got the self-worth to look after themselves, take care of themselves after so it can present really differently again, depending on the person. (FG3, P1, p. 2, 58-65)*

*Suicide. That's your ultimate, isn't it? (FG2, P4, p. 6, 245-246)*

Within this focused code, there was some evidence of misconceptions among staff regarding the impact of trauma and how this can influence behaviour, illustrated in the following excerpt.

*You need to be aware that sometimes the behaviours are an excuse as well. That they're not totally, you know, they've figured out that they've been through this trauma and they've figured out that actually there's certain behaviour I can*

*get certain things what I want if I do this certain behaviour coz they're not stupid.  
(FG1, P3, p. 4, 184-187)*

The focused codes 'Accessing and engaging with learning', 'Communication and interaction difficulties', and 'Physiological impacts of trauma', refer to participants reflection upon how complex trauma can affect young people in other areas of development. Aspects of these codes are demonstrated in the following transcript quotes. This includes recognition that experiencing trauma and its impact on CYP can present as a significant barrier to learning and education.

*It's the Maslow's hierarchy, isn't it? You can't learn if you haven't met your basic needs and if you're suffering trauma, then you're not, are you? (FG3, P1, p. 17, 622-623)*

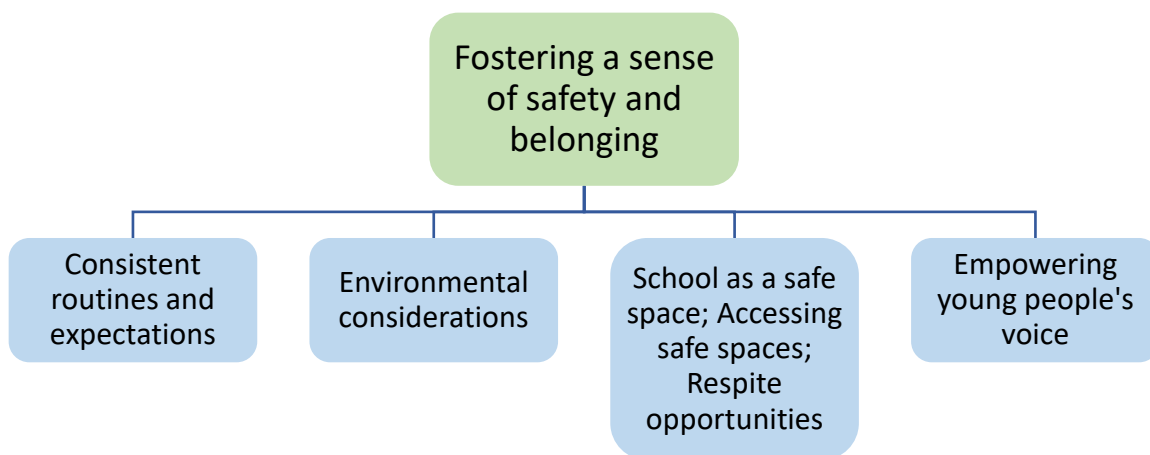
*I think another thing is like forming relationships with people. [...] Like people don't know how to interact or don't interact in the way that we deem as like acceptable or positive (FG 2, P5, p. 6, 283-287)*

*If they've had a, um, a traumatic experience in, in early childhood, um, that obviously affects their, um, their actual brain makeup, doesn't it? And, and how they react to things, um, and how they think about things and their behaviour, et cetera. (FG3, P3, pp. 2-3, 74-76)*

*It can be a massive barrier. And, and for, for students that are popping into my head at the moment, it is the single biggest barrier that they've got. (FG4, P2, p. 8, 292-293)*

#### **4.3 Category 2: Fostering a sense of safety and belonging.**

The second constructed category refers to the value of 'Fostering a sense of safety and belonging' when supporting CYP who have experienced trauma and is comprised of the focused codes demonstrated in Figure 4.2.



**Figure 4.2 - Category 2: Fostering a sense of safety and belonging.**

#### **4.3.1 Focused Code: Consistent routines and expectations**

The first focused code within this category refers to the importance of establishing and maintaining 'Consistent routines and expectations' within a school setting. Participants highlighted that all people are likely to feel insecure when facing change or unexpected events and recognised that consistency in routine and expectations supports a sense of safety among young people.

*Having the same classroom routines, week on week, so children know what to expect and then know that it's a safe environment and a calm environment. (FG3, P2, p. 17, 601-602)*

*The routines are really important and then we don't, none of us like that, do we, if we come in and all of a sudden something's, someone throws something different your way. (FG3, P3, p. 17, 612-613)*

Similarly, when reflecting upon the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic (discussed in section 4.6.3), participants noted the motivation this gave some students upon returning to school, where established routines and expectations enabled them to succeed.

*Actually it's been a success because not being in school and having that routine, they realized that they needed to be in school. [...] It's given them that time to reflect and realize actually this is what I need (FG4, P4, p. 10, 362-365)*

### **4.3.2 Focused Code: Environmental considerations**

This focused code reflects participants' discussions of how the school environment may be adapted to meet students' needs, enabling them to feel safe and connected to the setting. Transcript excerpts coded to this focused code refer to responding to students' sensory needs, physical needs, or drawing upon an established holistic understanding (see section 4.2.4) to make changes to an environment.

*Everything that we do is, is based on that whole, even the way I've set up, set up my department. It, it's all based on, you know, coming in and it being a calm environment and looking at where things are placed (FG3, P3, p. 16, 578-580)*

*Like it even smells nice. When you walk in, you've got music on too. Yeah. (FG3, P1, p. 16, 587)*

As well as ensuring the school environment is adapted to meet student sensory or physical needs, this focused code also referenced environmental considerations to meet students' emotional needs, such as ensuring there are accessing private spaces to have sensitive conversations, illustrated in the quotation below.

*Be mindful of your positioning as well. Obviously you wouldn't have the conversation in front of other people. Maybe step out to the sensory room or somewhere really quiet to have that one-to-one chat. (FG2, P2, p. 9, 403-405)*

### **4.3.3 Focused Code: School as a safe space**

Fostering a sense of safety and belonging can support CYP to better access a classroom environment and employ the necessary cognitive skills required for learning. Reflected in the focused code of 'school as a safe place', participants acknowledged that young people need to feel psychologically safe in the school environment to learn, exemplified in the following quotations.

*Cause fundamentally they need to feel safe. And if you've got this kind of internal dialogue all the time about being hypervigilant and, um, not quite feeling safe in your surroundings, you're not going to learn, right? (Interview, HT, p. 3, 112-114)*

*It needs to be a safe and secure environment that they can come into and feel happy, um, to work with adults within the school. (FG2, P1, p. 14, 649-651)*

#### 4.3.4 Focused Code: Empowering young people's voice

The final focused code in this category, 'Empowering young people's voice', was not reflected in transcripts from the purposive sampling stage of data collection but was analytically prevalent and emphasised as highly important by the Headteacher interviewed at the stage of theoretical sampling. It was thus identified as a focused code significant to this category as it refers to ensuring CYP feel they are valued members of their school community by ensuring their views are heard, respected, and responded to.

*I suppose, the principle of empowerment and, um, making young people feel like they're part of that solution, um, to making their, to helping their behaviours improve as opposed to feeling done to. (Interview, HT, p. 5, 174-176)*

*I feel I really, I strongly feel it's really important that children have a voice. (Interview, HT, p. 9, 349)*

#### 4.4 Category 3: Promoting positive relationships

The third category, 'Promoting positive relationships', indicates the value staff place on relational aspects of their role and encompasses meaningful student-teacher relationships, relationships between adults, and relationships between students. Figure 4.3 provides a visual representation of the focused codes after analysis which construct this category.

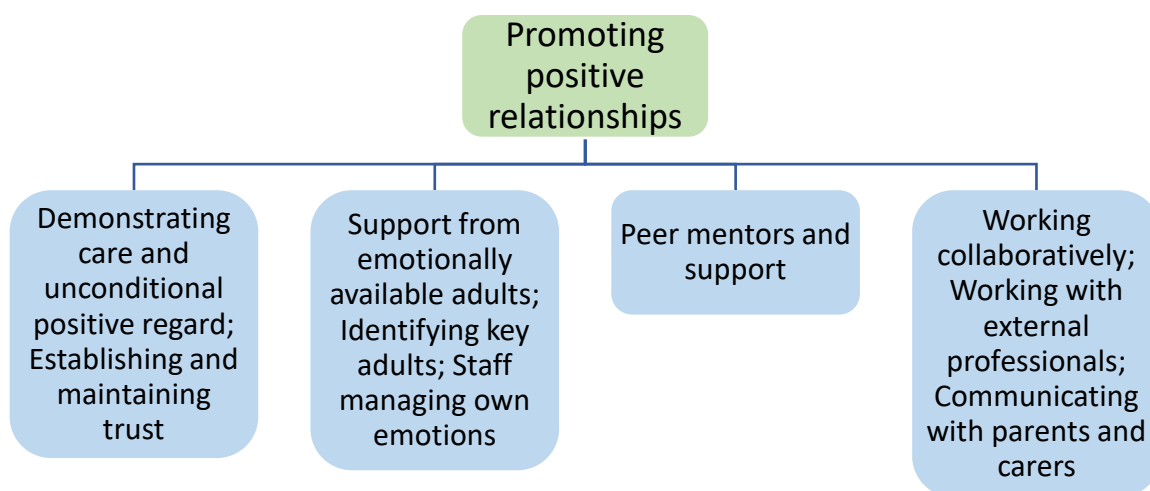


Figure 4.3 - Category 3: Promoting positive relationships.

#### **4.4.1 Focused Code: Demonstrating care and unconditional positive regard**

This overarching focused code was prevalent across all focus groups and refers to participant reflections on showing young people that they are cared for within the school setting. Participants placed a particular emphasis on the word 'genuine', and recognised this was a significant part of their role in working with young people who have experienced trauma. Furthermore, participants reflected that to show genuine care, they must also demonstrate UPR and seek to get to know young people's interests and hobbies outside of school.

*I think actually caring how they are and then if, if they're not follow it up, say, what did you do last night? Did you do anything nice, what you doing at the weekend? (FG3, P1, p. 15, 542-544)*

*It's to make them feel that we care [...] We're genuinely there for them. [...] And that applies for when there's been a behaviour incident too, you know, they might have done something wrong but we still need to show them we still care about them and want to help. (FG2, P5, p. 8, 373-379)*

Also within this focused code was the recognition that the relationship a young person has with a staff member may have a direct impact on their emotional wellbeing and internal working model. This highlights the need to identify key, emotionally available adults (explored in section 4.4.2) who young people can talk to, feel grounded, and reassured by. This is illustrated in the following excerpts.

*If a kid comes and speaks to me one-to-one in person, based on my reaction, based on how quickly we get something in place, can have a massive impact on how they, how supported they feel, how they feel cared for, whether they feel as though their sort of trauma has been validated by us. (FG4, P1, p. 11, 406-409)*

*They know if you're real or not. They're not, they know if you care or if you don't and if you don't, they're not gonna tell you nothing. (FG2, P4, p. 2, 66-67)*

Participants described that showing empathy is an important part of demonstrating care and UPR, as well as 'Establishing and maintaining trust'. Developing trusting relationships enables young people to feel safe to talk about their feelings and experiences, but also engage in learning tasks. One participant also spoke about the

importance of adults recognising and apologising for their own mistakes to maintain trust.

*The trust is a massive thing. To help you know, speak about trauma. (FG2, P3, p. 16, 726)*

*I would be able to simply sit with him and repeat almost back from exactly what the teacher said because he didn't trust the teacher, but trusted me. He would say, oh, right, yeah. In that case, yeah. And then complete the task. (FG4, P1, p. 4, 122-124)*

*Making sure that there's an element of trust, trust in the sense that, um, we can get it wrong, the adults can get it wrong. Um, that we sometimes might have to apologize for that. (Interview, HT, p. 4, 148-150)*

#### **4.4.2 Focused Code: Support from emotionally available adults**

The overarching focused code 'Support from emotionally available adults' was a salient concept with a total 36 references across all transcripts. This focused code highlights the concept of emotionally available adults; an adult who is mentally and emotionally present and responsive, allowing them to connect with a young person on an emotional level. This is encapsulated by P3 in FG4:

*If you've built that relationship with that person, just then knowing that, I know that I've got that person that if I am having a bad day or I just need a bit of space, I know that that person can be there. And I've had times with students where I haven't even said anything to them, but being in the room with them was enough for them just to know that somebody that they trusted was there. (p. 4, 145-149)*

The focused code 'Identifying key adults' refers to the notion that key members of school staff should be identified with whom CYP could develop positive attachments. Participants acknowledged that young people are naturally likely to develop better relationships with some staff members than others, and it is important to identify who 'the right person' (FG 4, P1, p. 10, 415) is to support in different situations, sometimes giving this choice to the student. Participants acknowledged that schools should enable positive relationships to be built with several key staff members, to

ensure availability of emotionally available adults but also to reduce pressure and demand on individuals.

*They've got to know that they can reach out to someone, they might not like and have that relationship with everyone in the school, but they need to have someone in the school that they feel like that with. (FG3, P1, p. 8, 259-261)*

*If we can see that they're experiencing trauma or some kind of difficulty, you will identify a safe staff member for them to go to so that they know who to go to if they are in crisis. And it's, it's often more than one. So, you're not putting the pressure on one person. (FG2, P1, p. 15, 680-683)*

Participants recognised that to be emotionally available for young people, adults must be aware of and able to manage their own emotions, particularly during heightened situations. This is referenced in the focused code 'Staff managing their own emotions' and illustrated in the following excerpts.

*Everybody just needs to take a step back. Actually, am I getting a bit excited about this? Are my emotions now taking, you know, are my emotions taking over? (Interview, HT, p. 6, 235-237)*

*I think as with any situation, some people are exceptional at it naturally, and some people find it much more challenging because within all these situations you have got to keep such a cool head and you've got to be calm no matter how you feel inside. (FG4, P4, p. 17, 660-662)*

#### **4.4.3 Focused Code: Peer mentors and support**

Participants highlighted the importance of facilitating meaningful relationships between students. This focused code refers to peer friendships as well as more formalised peer mentoring schemes. Participants noted that like student-teacher relationships, peer relationships may take some time to establish and are built upon pillars of trust and commonalities. Participants also recognised the importance of peer relationships in facilitating a sense of belonging.

Perhaps due to communication and interaction difficulties (see section 4.2.5), participants recognised that young people who have experienced trauma often struggle with forming and maintaining friendships, and established peer relationships may often be fractious, which may require intervention support (examples of which



will be presented in section 4.5.4). These concepts are illustrated in the references below.

*It's building that support network up again. [...] And again it's the trust thing with the peers just as well as it is for us. (FG2, P5, p. 16, 718-720)*

*We've got a couple of students that I would class as both of having several traumatic events and they've got huge similarities between them and genuine interests. And then one minute they can be really good friends and the next minute they can be saying the most horrendous things to each other. (FG4, P4, p. 5, 172-175)*

*Also looking at sort of building upon those skills of how you make friendships. You know, even the basic, how you start conversation, how you show empathy or how you show that you're listening or you compromise, and all sorts of things. (FG4, P4, p. 6, 200-202)*

Participants referred to formalised peer mentor systems which enable young people to connect with and support one another. As illustrated in the excerpt below, staff shared the importance of ensuring peer mentors are supported by adults and understand how to respond to and report safeguarding concerns.

*We've got a peer mentor system that's up and running with current year 10 and we're just starting to train up year nines. And they particularly pick up some of the more vulnerable students [...] so that they know there's a kind of a trusted older role model within school that they can talk to and things. [...] And again, they're all trained up so if they get disclosures they know exactly what to do. (FG2, P1, p. 16, 746-752)*

#### **4.4.4 Focused Code: Working collaboratively**

The final focused code in this category refers to 'Working collaboratively'.

Participants highlighted the importance of positive relationships between adults as well as young people. Data analysis identified 45 references of this focused code, demonstrating the value participants placed upon their professional working relationships. Members of staff discussed the importance of working collaboratively to problem-solve and learn from one-another, but also as a protective factor for their own wellbeing, as illustrated in the excerpts below.

*Sharing ideas as well, isn't it? You know, have you tried this approach with this person? Oh no. Okay, well I tried this and that didn't work, but what about this kind of thing? (FG4, P3, p. 16, 627-628)*

*You do need a good team. If you don't have anyone to talk to about stuff, then you feel like it's your problem and it's all on your own. So if you share the problem it helps (FG3, P1, p. 11, 400-401)*

In addition, participants noted the importance of working collaboratively to safeguard CYP to ensure that important information is shared with key adults and allow one another time to report disclosures when needed.

*If I need to report something quite quickly. Just saying to one of your team can you just do 10 minutes here while I just go and have 10 minutes? (FG2, P1, p. 17, 784-785)*

*So we're a team. So, um, we're a designated safeguarding team. And we all work together to do that, to make sure they're safe and to, to make sure the right people are kept in the loop (Interview, HT, p. 7, 276-278)*

The focused codes 'Working with external professionals' and 'Communicating with parents and carers' refer to multi-agency working and promoting positive relationships with parents and carers. As noted in section 4.2.4, participants shared that this facilitates a holistic understanding of CYP and allows provision to be collaboratively agreed upon.

*Um, collaboration is another principle. I think it's important that we are, open to [...] working with a range of agencies and also trying to collaborate with parents no matter how hard it might be. (Interview, HT, p. 4-5, 165-168)*

With reference to external professionals, participants discussed working with a range of services including police, child and adolescent mental health services (CAMHS), charities including Mind and Bernardo's, counselling services, social services, EPSs, and primary school settings. Participants in senior leadership positions shared that a significant part of their role involved liaison with external services. Whilst barriers will be addressed in response to research question 2 in sections 4.7 and 4.8, participants noted that working with external agencies can be challenging due to lack

of access to services and extended wait times. Transcript excerpts illustrating these points are included below.

*Really close working relationships with outside agencies. Like educational psychologists, social workers, um, charities like Bernardo's, um, because it was the bread and butter of what we were doing. (FG3, P3, p. 8, 276-278)*

*For new starters, the transition from primary schools, it's good to have open communication with them too. Primary schools can feed us information that we need to know. (FG2, P1, p. 10, 469-470)*

*Unfortunately trying to refer things through, um, through early help to get youth family support and mental health. Our minimum waiting time is 12 weeks. The reality is at least 16 weeks. Um, and if anything goes through CAMHS, unless it is up to crisis point, we've got weeks and weeks of waiting. (FG4, P4, p. 7, 263-266)*

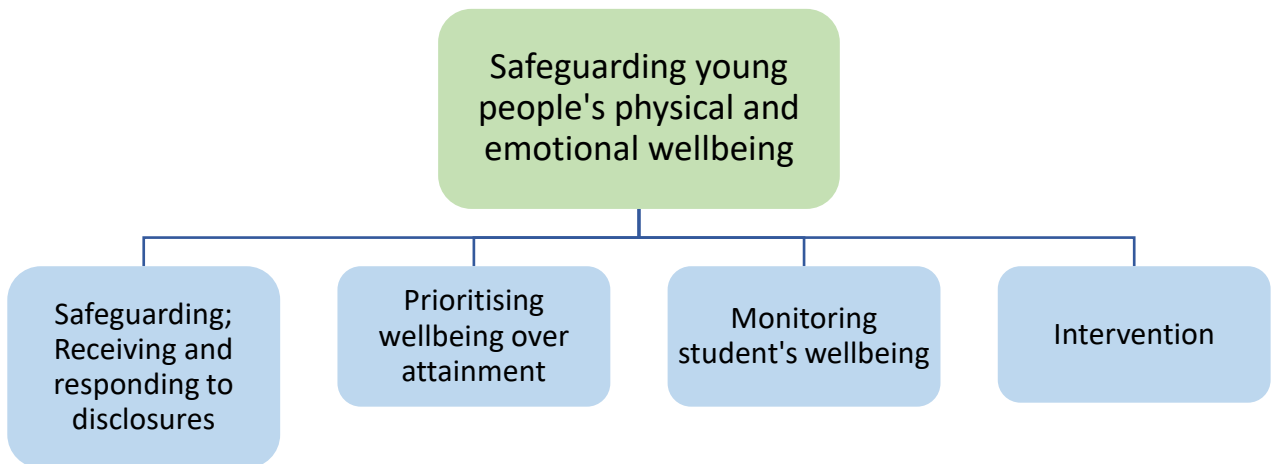
When working collaboratively with parents and carers, participants highlighted that staff in different positions had differing roles in engaging with parents, yet a significant role involved increasing parental engagement. Typically, participants shared that collaborating with parents and carers allows school staff to gain information of the child's context and experiences, discuss progress students are making, and gain feedback on intervention support.

*All our SEN kids and care students are all allocated key workers. And the key workers also contact parents and carers. Constantly, you know, so we're on top of everything. (FG2, P2, p. 10, 473-474)*

*Parental feedback seems very positive, when people have gone home and reflected. So I think that's really important. (FG4, P2, p. 6, 227-228)*

#### 4.5 Category 4: Safeguarding young people's physical and emotional wellbeing.

A further category which addresses research question 1 refers to school staff's role and responsibilities in 'Safeguarding young people's physical and emotional wellbeing', which is constructed of four focused codes as demonstrated in Figure 4.4.



**Figure 4.4 - Category 4: Safeguarding young people's physical and emotional wellbeing.**

##### 4.5.1 Focused Code: Safeguarding

Participants highlighted that 'Safeguarding' is a vital and significant part of their role when supporting young people who have experienced trauma. This overarching focused code refers to schools' responsibilities to keep CYP safe from harm. As some participants worked in positions as Designated Safeguarding Leads, discussions reflected individuals' differing roles, however agreed that all staff 'have a duty of care' (FG1, P2, p. 6, 272). During the final interview, when asked 'what do you see as your role when working with CYP who've experienced trauma?' HT responded:

*I suppose first of all, its safeguarding them in the moment and in the future. So I can't necessarily change what's happened in the past, but I can certainly try and safeguard their emotional wellbeing in the current setting and try and give them the skills to be able to process and move on. (Interview, HT, p. 7, 260-262)*

This demonstrates that, for this participant, the concept of safeguarding not only includes protecting a young person from harm, but also teaching them skills and strategies to manage their wellbeing in the future.

Participants described the systems within their settings which facilitate safeguarding. This included use of technological systems, working collaboratively as a team, reporting concerns to appropriate colleagues, and clear policies which must be followed.

*We do have safeguarding members of staff as well. So any issues, even though we're there for them, we pass, we do literally pass it on. (FG1, P4, p. 7, 306-307)*

*It's the CPOMs, it's the safeguarding, it's fixed. The absolutely key, the major things, they're all fixed and instilled. We can't deviate from that. (FG2, P3, p. 18, 830-831)*

An important role in safeguarding discussed by participants was 'Receiving and responding to disclosures'. Participants discussed protocols which they would need to follow after receiving a disclosure, and how to respond to a student, as illustrated in the example below.

*Being open with them about if they tell us anything that we do have to report, like safeguarding we have to keep them safe, not promising them that we will keep that information cause that's not fair to them. (FG2, P2, p. 9, 389-391)*

#### **4.5.2 Focused Code: Prioritising wellbeing over attainment**

The focused code 'Prioritising wellbeing over attainment' refers to participants explicit references to needing to support and protect young people's emotional wellbeing above their academic progress, illustrated below.

*Giving them permission from the top down like I said that its okay sometimes to prioritise wellbeing and mental health over attainment and grades when you need too, and be flexible with policies and all that. (Interview, HT, p. 10, 416-418)*

One participant described that despite the academic pressures of secondary education, if wellbeing was not prioritised, students were less likely to achieve

academically and more likely to experience further difficulties in the school environment.

*I know we are a secondary school setting and it's all about them sitting exams and what have you, but it's not, is it, it's all about the child, making sure that the child is alright cause she could be in a situation where we get a significant issue within school if we don't offer that support (FG2, P1, p. 14, 646-649)*

#### **4.5.3 Focused Code: Monitoring students wellbeing**

The focused code 'Monitoring students wellbeing' refers to staff member's responsibilities to monitor, recognise and respond to student wellbeing.

*Just like keeping an eye out. So just like for everyone. [...] And then just making sure that everyone's alright. (FG1, P1, p. 6, 255/261)*

This focused code reiterates that students mental and physical wellbeing is everyone's responsibility, and clarifies that this may not require direct involvement, but an observatory role to identify students who may need support.

*I think everybody in school has a role and it isn't necessarily on a one-to-one basis with a student. [...] It's about everybody keeping an eye out, isn't it? And noticing there's something not quite right with that student. (FG4, P3, p. 11, 419-423)*

One participant recognised the potential impact this can have on staff wellbeing, which will be explored in Category 7, commenting:

*Yeah. Because you are kind of on high alert all the time and looking for things all the time for things that have gone wrong. (FG3, P3, p. 9, 328-329)*

#### **4.5.4 Focused Code: Intervention**

This focused code refers to how, through use of 'Intervention', staff safeguard CYP's physical and emotional wellbeing by teaching them new skills and strategies.

Intervention offers a significant way in which staff directly support young people who have experienced trauma, demonstrated by the salience of this focused code with 31 total references. Staff referred to a wide variety of interventions which target difficulties with cognition and learning, communication and interaction, and SEMH.

Specific examples of intervention included support from an Emotional Literacy

Support Assistant (ELSA), art therapy, Lego therapy, Precision Teaching, Circle of Friends, and Talk About for Teenagers. Intervention work was also offered by external services for students with a higher level of need, including the charity Mind and the Social Mediation and Self Help (SMASH) programme. Examples of references in this focused code are included below.

*You do some of the art for year 11, don't you? [...] Art Therapy. (FG3, P3, p. 9, 303)*

*We have Mind and we have SMASH as well and I do SEMH groups and I do ELSA. (FG1, P3, p. 9, 401)*

*I do English and Maths intervention. (FG1, P3, p. 17, 837)*

*Talk about for teenagers book. Yeah. Um, so we've, we've split that into two different interventions, haven't we? [...] You've got a friendship one and a more of a sort of a social skills interacting in school with adults. (FG4, P2, p. 8, 282-284)*

Participants shared that interventions could be delivered at a one-to-one level or within a group, depending on the needs of the young person. Where group intervention is delivered, participants shared that small groups facilitate positive relationships between peers as well as supporting them to develop skills.

*They build up the relationship because there's just such a small group. They trust each other. (FG1, P1, p. 15, 750)*

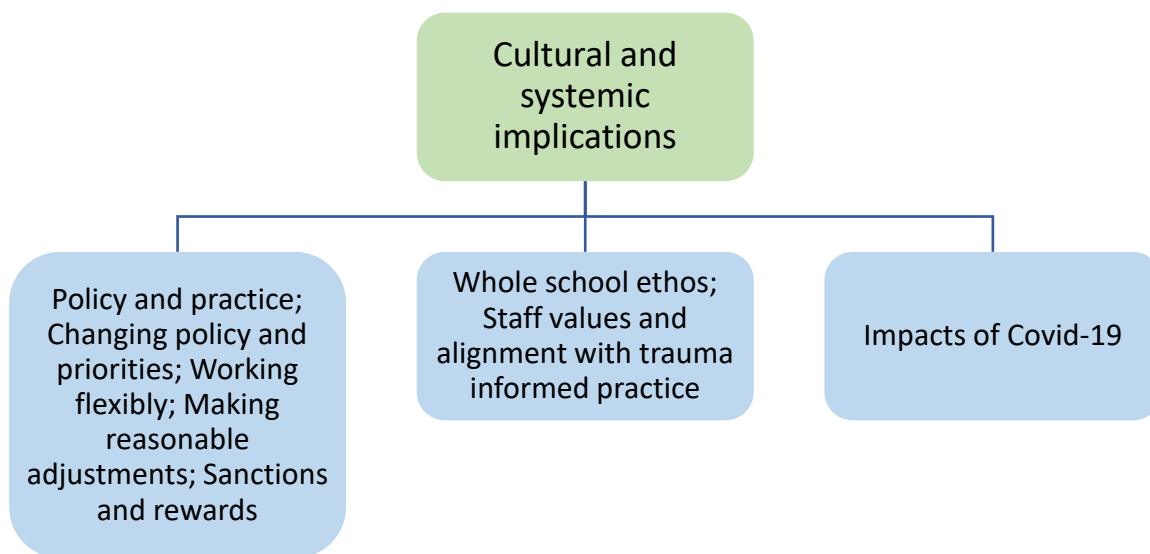
*And those groups as well are good for like social skills as well as learning. (FG1, P2, p. 18, 876)*

To ensure their effectiveness, young people's progress and the interventions offered should be monitored and reviewed.

*I obviously have responsibility for sort of looking at, um, interventions that we do and making sure that, um, that we're putting as much in as, as we need to be doing. And I think, um, I think what we have is good and is effective. (FG4, P2, p. 11, 426-428)*

## 4.6 Category 5: Cultural and systemic implications.

Category 5, 'Cultural and systemic implications', refers to school staff understanding of how TIP can be represented and implemented in cultural and systemic practices within a school. This category also refers to the influence of cultural and systemic implications on staff perceptions. Figure 4.5 illustrates the focused codes which construct this category.



**Figure 4.5 - Category 5: Cultural and systemic implications.**

### 4.6.1 Focused Code: Policy and practice

This focused code refers to how TIP is embedded in a school's policy documents and the extent to which policies reflect current practice. Staff shared that policy documents help make practice '*tangible*' (FG2, P2, p. 20, 937) and offer a form of protection for staff and students. However overall, participants shared their practice in support of CYP who have experienced trauma is not currently reflected in their school policy documents. Participants described the need to rewrite and adapt behaviour policies to reflect changing priorities and as new practice becomes embedded. These constructs are illustrated in the below excerpts.

*So in terms of protecting the staff and the students, that's what the policies are there for. (FG2, P1, p. 18, 834)*

*I don't think, um, 10% of what we do is in the policies is it? (FG2, P3, p. 17, 810)*



*I think behaviour policies, I think they always need looking at and readjusting (FG1, P4, p. 9, 440-441)*

*The priorities change, don't they? So, when we were doing the Nurture UK, I was gathering all the information for that. That was a massive priority, but then however long later something else comes along, that's a huge priority. (FG3, P3, p. 19, 670-673)*

The focused codes 'Making reasonable adjustments' and 'Sanctions and rewards' refer to the recognition made by participants that their behaviour policies are grounded in behaviourist principles of sanctions and rewards. Participants shared concerns that a behaviourist approach was not effective for all young people, particularly vulnerable children who have experienced trauma. For these individuals, reasonable adjustments are made following behavioural incidents to account for differing needs and circumstances.

*My natural, um, being knows, that sanctions and reward doesn't work for most people. Or it doesn't work for any length of time. Um, it can work for some, um, I'm more about the intrinsic rewards, than extrinsic. (FG3, P3, pp. 19-20, 697-699)*

*We already have um, reasonable arrangements for students that have got certain difficulties (FG1, P3, p. 8, 375)*

Whilst participants noted that some aspects of policy, such as safeguarding procedures, must be strictly adhered to, the application of school behaviour policies should be applied with more flexibility to support CYP who may be lacking skills or affected by complex trauma, which is reflected in the focused code 'Working flexibly'. During her interview, HT used an analogy of an oak tree to explain this:

*We're a bit like a good oak tree where we've got really strong roots and strong foundations and a strong, you know, strong set of core values. But actually we need to sway in the wind because these kids bring the wind all the time. And we need to be able to show a bit of flexibility. We'll stay strong to all of our core principles and how we should treat each other, how we should speak to each other, how we should interact. But actually we might have to be a bit flexible*

*about how we, how we respond to those incidents with every, every individual child. (pp. 3-4, 122-128)*

#### **4.6.2 Focused Code: Whole-school ethos**

The focused code 'Whole-school ethos' refers to discussions centring upon the values, aspirations, attitudes, and character which underpin a school's culture, organisation, and practice. When discussing the implementation of TIP, participants considered the school ethos to be more important than policy documents in guiding their approaches, as illustrated by participants in FG4:

*P3*

*It's about the ethos really isn't it rather than the policy? (p. 19, 728)*

*P1*

*Yeah. The ethos. [...] I think that's the best way of putting it, that in the school ethos is, is how we, how we deal with this sort of thing. (p. 19, 730-732)*

Within this focused code, participants referred to the values and approaches which underpinned their pedagogy and ultimately their school's ethos. Examples included prioritising positive relationships, adopting a person-centred or child-led approach, embedding nurture principles, adopting a solution-focused approach, and drawing upon restorative practice. These discussions are exemplified in the below transcript excerpts.

*I think actually as a, as a school and as a staff, we, we very much look for solutions, not problems. (FG4, P2, p. 19, 738-739)*

*Absolutely, building the relationship. I think it's like a child-led approach isn't it? (FG2, P3, p. 9, 381)*

*It's all those nurture principles, isn't it that we have. I don't know if you've seen our big posters, but we have, we have those everywhere, don't we? (FG3, P3, p. 17, 605-606)*

Although barriers to implementing practice are discussed explicitly in Category 6 and 7, when asked what she considered the barriers to implementing TIP to be, one participant noted that staff values and alignment with TIP was a significant factor, stating:

*I think the biggest barrier is probably at the top. [...] It's about a person at the top and how, how much they believe in that child-centred approach around trauma. (Interview, HT, p. 10, 393-396)*

#### **4.6.3 Focused Code: Impacts of Covid-19**

The final focused code which contributed to the construction of this category includes references made by participants to the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on their understanding of TIP and its implications for their role. Participants shared that the pandemic was a traumatic experience for many young people and their families. Staff have noted an increased level of need and an increased number of children and families living in adverse conditions following the pandemic.

*I think Covid has been a trauma as well. And I know speaking to our Educational Psychologist when she's talked about that, the impact that that's having on students is huge. (FG4, P2, p. 8, 306-308)*

*The impact of Covid is more and more families are struggling, struggling to make ends meet. There's more and more drugs, more and more alcohol in their homes, more and more domestic violence. (Interview, HT, p. 10, 409-411)*

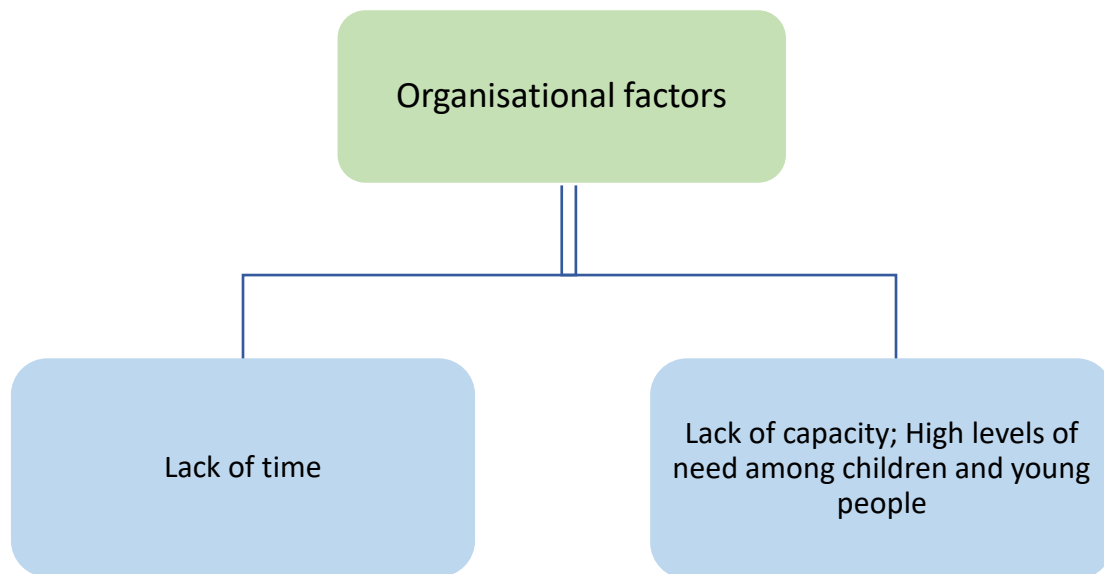
As many participants were required to teach remotely during lockdowns and felt 'isolated' (FG3, P2, p. 13, 458), participants placed an increased importance on having positive professional relationships.

*It made me really, really appreciate the job that I had. Um, under sort of normal circumstances obviously. I mean, when you can have relationships with students in classes and um, yeah. Not just the teaching, but the kind of chat that goes on in the lesson. It's, um, really important. (FG3, P2, p. 13, 462-465)*

*Like you say, it kind of makes you appreciate those, the impact of relationships in the workplace, doesn't it? (FG3, P3, p. 14, 494-495)*

#### **4.7 Category 6: Organisational Factors.**

The first category constructed in response to research question 2, is 'Organisational Factors' and refers to barriers to implementing TIP which exist within a schools' organisational or systemic functioning. This encompasses two focused codes as demonstrated in Figure 4.6; 'Lack of time' and 'Lack of capacity'.



**Figure 4.6 - Category 6: Organisational factors.**

#### **4.7.1 Focused Code: Lack of time**

When asked what the barriers to implementing TIP were, the most frequent response was a 'Lack of time'. Participants felt there was both a lack of time during the school day to implement strategies such as interventions, but also to dedicate to staff CPD to upskill professionals in using the approach. Participants also expressed concern that they were not fulfilling their safeguarding responsibilities due to lack of time.

*It's a time issue isn't it coz I, I do ELSA but I haven't been allowed any time to do it. (FG1, P3, p. 7, 347)*

*Yes, time. And I think uh, CPD time, time on staff as well. Um, so it would be really nice to put a lot of these sessions in cause they're really, really interesting but we have so much kind of dictated time. (FG2, P1, p. 16, 760-761)*

*When I get home I'm gonna be doing some CPOMs, but like that happened period two or three and I generally have been like back to back to back and then that kid's gone home and I haven't told anybody and I know that, you know, I'm supposed to do it immediately. (FG2, P5, p. 13, 584-587)*

During the interview with a HT as part of theoretical sampling, I asked the participant to share her thoughts on lack of time as a significant barrier to implementing TIP at a whole-school level, she responded:

*I don't disagree with them, I think, yeah, we're all trying to fit more and more in, aren't we? [...] There's never enough time. [...] But actually this is something that myself, and my head of school, we spoke to the Vulnerable Children's Education Team about work in this area. We both believe that actually we need to find time. We need to find time to, to invest in our staff because this is only, as I said before, this is only gonna become a bigger problem for society in our community. (p. 10, 402-402)*

#### **4.7.2 Focused Code: Lack of capacity**

An additional barrier shared by staff was a lack of capacity to implement TIP within the remit of their role. Differing from a lack of time, this focused code refers to the highly demanding nature of staff's day to day responsibilities, coupled with the increasing levels of students requiring support, represented in the focused code 'High levels of need among children and young people'. As illustrated in the excerpts below, participants shared that they are not able to implement support at a rate that meets students' needs.

*I think it's a capacity thing. I think we've got some incredibly strong, you know, staff that are amazing working with young people. Um, but the, the more we put in the support there seems to be more popping up and sometimes it's a bit like whackamole, isn't it? (FG4, P2, p. 17, 670-673)*

*I mean there's more mental health needs now with students than we've had for years (FG1, P3, p. 9, 448)*

Despite challenges of staff capacity, one participant recognised that the high levels of need among students demonstrated the importance for implementation of TIP in schools:

*But actually, you know, in, certainly in my context, here in XXX, too many young people are experiencing deeply, deeply traumatic, um, living conditions and experiences that if we don't fix now, the NHS is gonna be picking up for the next 50 years. Um, because they'll just repeat the cycle. (Interview, HT, p. 7, 265-268)*

#### 4.8 Category 7: Staff wellbeing, confidence, and competence.

The final category in response to research question 2 is 'Staff wellbeing, confidence, and competence'. This category refers to barriers to implementing TIP due to staff professional capabilities, including their wellbeing, levels of confidence, professional development, access to supervision opportunities, and the levels of consistency with which TIP is implemented. Figure 4.7 provides a visual representation of the focused codes which have constructed this category.



**Figure 4.7 - Category 7: Staff wellbeing, confidence, and competence.**

##### 4.8.1 Focused Code: Staff Wellbeing

The first focused code, 'Staff wellbeing', refers to the potential influence working with complex trauma may have on staff members' emotional wellbeing. This focused code was referenced 31 times across the data collected, demonstrating that protecting their own wellbeing is a considerable concern for participants when working with young people who have experienced trauma. Participants shared that implementing TIP had a negative impact on their wellbeing due to anxieties regarding CYP's welfare and wellbeing, and feeling unable to '*solve everything*' (FG4, P2, p. 19, 740).

*The worst bits, like I say are, are watching, watching people sink, I suppose. Um, and the impact that has on you, the sleepless nights, the worry, um, the constant feeling of something's about to go wrong um, yeah. (FG3, P3, p. 10, 359-361)*

In addition, staff shared the emotional impact of working with young people who had or are currently experiencing traumatic events or circumstances. They described experiencing similar stress responses through learning about, listening to, or even observing the trauma of their students.

*It's hard, this kind of work [...] My experience of the world isn't the same as a lot of people's, you know, it felt like or it looks like one disaster after another. Um, and that's, you know, inside you, it's like you're facing one problem after another. (FG3, P3, p. 9, 321-324)*

One setting had experienced the death of a pupil by suicide, which was traumatic for members of staff, as detailed by P4:

*A student took their life so we've had to deal with that as well at this school. Unfortunately, you know, that was awful. That was horrible. The worst thing I've experienced. (FG2, P4, p. 6, 245-247)*

Finally, due a lack of time to fulfil their duties during the school day, participants described feeling the need to complete work at home thus reducing a healthy work-life balance, as illustrated during FG2:

*P1*

*I need to go back and do that coz actually I can't eat tea until I've done this. But, what happens is, it impacts then at home. (p. 17, 769-770)*

*P2*

*Yeah. And for you as well. Cause then you are spending your evening putting things on. So all the things that you had at 10 o'clock this morning you are rehashing. (p. 17, 772-773)*

Whilst participants shared their employing schools did offer staff means of emotional support, participants stated this was often difficult to access and felt there remains a

stigma around mental health and a pressure to perform at work, as demonstrated in this excerpt.

*I just like think I can't show anybody. I've got to, I've gotta be completely strong all the time and just talk to people outside of here and pretend everything's all right. (FG3, P3, p. 13, 440-442)*

#### **4.8.2 Focused Code: Staff confidence in practice**

The second focused code in this category refers to the confidence levels of staff in their abilities to implement TIP, and to effectively support young people who have experienced trauma. While the levels of confidence among participants varied, with some staff who *'feel very confident supporting people with trauma'* (FG4, P1, p. 16, 634), and others who stated, *'I do not know what to do'* (FG2, P3, p. 20, 931), transcripts demonstrated that a large proportion of participants did not feel confident in practice and feared causing additional harm or upset to students.

*I'm very worried that I say the wrong thing. Um, cause I haven't had really any training and I can't share um, like my childhood wasn't very traumatic, so I don't feel like I've got any sort of experience myself. Um, so it makes it quite difficult. (FG3, P2, p. 15, 516-519)*

Where participants did feel confident, personal and professional experience with complex trauma was a facilitator to this, as well as opportunities to access training, illustrated in the transcript excerpts below.

*I've been very fortunate in that I've done a lot of research, a lot of reading, a lot of, um, been in a lot of training, which has massively helped my confidence. (FG3, P3, p. 8, 278-280)*

*I do rely on both my work experience, my professional experience, um, as well as my own personal experience with my two children. Um, not everybody is, has that level of exposure to trauma and understanding about where trauma comes from. (Interview, HT, p. 9, 357-359)*

#### **4.8.3 Focused Code: Ongoing continuous professional development**

This focused code refers to a lack of, or inconsistency of, opportunities for ongoing CPD as a barrier to implementing TIP at a whole-school level. Across the data



collected, participants had accessed varying amounts of training on this topic, and as noted above, this was a significant contributor to staff confidence. Participants who had accessed training opportunities acknowledged increased knowledge of the impact of trauma on young people following engagement with training. Gaining this knowledge supported participants to demonstrate empathy and increased their ability to respond to heightened situations in a sensitive way, as illustrated in the below excerpt.

*The better for knowing the information. If you can't sympathize with why a child is behaving the way they are, um, it makes you more understanding, more tolerant to what's going on. Um, I think it definitely helps. (FG3, P2, p. 7, 241-243)*

Participants felt that CPD opportunities, such as 'Accessing training', should be offered more frequently and followed up on, ensuring that new developments in research can be shared.

*I think training is a big one. I think certainly like whole-school awareness training is very, very useful. And, it not being a one off, like you're never gonna see you again kind of thing. You know, a regular slot maybe. (FG3, P2, p. 22, 779-781)*

*And as I say, if new things are added, you know, or things have changed, we can keep learning. So ongoing training. (FG1, P4, p. 10, 470-471)*

The focused codes 'Guidance for staff on responding to events' and 'Learning through experience' refer to examples of helpful learning opportunities. Whilst participants requested more explicit advice on responding to challenging incidents, such as self-harm, some participants stated that the most helpful way of learning has been through direct experience. Examples of transcripts coded within these focused codes are included below.

*I think a lot of it's, it's experience, isn't it? Like you were saying, it's the experience of being with people who've been through trauma or you yourself going through trauma and knowing there's things that you did and the things that helped you. (FG3, P1, p. 9, 311-314)*

*Like self-harm for the students, I don't always know what to do. [...] Like I would just like a bit of help. (FG2, P3, p. 12, 558-564)*

#### 4.8.4 Focused Code: Accessing supervision

Participants noted that 'Accessing supervision' could serve two functions: to provide emotional support and containment, and to upskill and educate staff. The importance of such opportunities to discuss challenging incidents and seek advice from colleagues was recognised across all transcripts, and participants particularly valued the opportunity to 'debrief' and share their thoughts and feelings with their team.

*I would say what gets us through is actually, discussing it with each other. (FG4, P4, p. 19, 752)*

*Talking about it afterwards as a group as well, we have a daily debrief. Which does help. (FG3, P3, p. 11, 397-398)*

*It's like time for people to reflect on things as well, isn't it? So I had a conversation with somebody last week and started off with, well I know that it worked really well when they have something of mine in the lesson, so when I lent them a pen. So I'm wondering what I could do, you know, how, how can I replicate that this year? (FG4, P2, p. 16, 621-624)*

However, participants raised a lack of opportunity to access supervision as a barrier to implementing TIP, as supervision tends to take place inconsistently and incidentally.

*I think supervision as well. I mean, I've been here over a year, I've not had, um, a one-to-one supervision. (FG1, P2, p. 10, 480-481)*

*That's the time thing and we can talk to higher members of staff, yeah, but it's all in, it's very much all in passing (FG1, P3, p. 10, 497-498)*

Whilst participants appreciated the potential value of a formalised supervision programme, they remained concerned that this would not be realistic within their current capacity and responsibilities, as illustrated in the excerpt below.

*I think that would be a lovely idyllic situation. But the reality, its time and managing it, isn't it? (FG3, P3, p. 22, 788)*

#### **4.8.5 Focused Code: Consistency of approaches**

Finally, an additional barrier to implementing TIP at a whole-school level, was the inconsistency with which it was adopted and applied across their school setting. Participants described a lack of consistency across their school in relation to the extent to which information was shared about CYP's experiences, their access to supervision and training, and the quality of practice. Participants postulated that this may be due to a difference in staff levels of confidence (section 4.8.2), and professional competence in this area of work (section 4.8.3). Examples of these constructs are illustrated through the excerpts below.

*See, but as P2 said, we don't always have that information. Do we? (FG1, P3, p. 13, 652)*

*When you're speaking to somebody who's worked at a different school or hasn't worked here too long, that's like, oh I'd not thought of constantly using their name so that they've got that sense of belonging. I'd not thought of, you know. [...] And it's just because they've not had that experience or that training (FG4, P1, pp. 15-16, 594-598)*

#### **4.9 Chapter Summary**

This chapter has presented the final analysis and findings of the current study, established through a GT data analysis process as described in Chapter 3. Seven conceptual categories which were considered as most analytically relevant in exploring the study's research questions have been examined, alongside presentation of the focused codes upon which they were constructed. The next chapter will include a second review of literature, which will seek to ground these findings within existing academic research to facilitate theoretical sensitisation and inform the development of this study's GT.

## **5.0 Literature Review (Part 2)**

### **5.1 Introduction**

An initial, purposely broad literature review was presented in Chapter 2 of this study to provide context and rationale. Following the development of conceptual categories, a second literature review was conducted to develop my theoretical sensitisation as a researcher and ground the findings of this study within existing research and literature. This process facilitates the development of this study's GT, which will be presented in Chapter 6 alongside an examination of its connections to research literature. Content reviewed in this chapter will be pertinent to a selection of the categories and focused codes which I considered to be most analytically relevant towards the interpretation of data and construction of the GT. These categories and focused codes include:

- Understanding complex trauma
- Fostering a sense of safety and belonging
- Promoting positive relationships
- Cultural and systemic implications
- Staff wellbeing, confidence, and competence

Where literature relevant to focused codes and categories was presented and discussed in Chapter 2, references to this will be made and expanded upon within this chapter. As constructed categories outlined in Chapter 5 are interactive and overlapping by nature, they will be discussed in relation to their links with various areas of research and theory. In addition, although literature presented here focused upon the categories and focused codes identified above, links between the literature and remaining categories are considered when appropriate and relevant towards the overall theoretical sensitisation.

### **5.2 Understanding Complex Trauma**

#### **5.2.1 What is a holistic understanding?**

The constructed focused code of '*Developing a holistic understanding*' was highlighted as a salient concept emerging from the data collected in the current study. To facilitate a theoretical sensitisation of this notion to inform the construction

of this study's GT, it is important to develop a critical understanding of its meaning, psychological application, and relevance to TIP in school settings.

The construct of holism originates from health care discourse and practice, where treatment considers a person as a whole, including mental health and environmental factors as well as physical symptoms, and is defined as “an overall approach to health in a framework of dynamic equilibria” (Patel, 1987, p. 169). In educational psychology, similar principles apply, and the concept of holism is described as a paradigm concerned with ‘wholeness’, where all areas of a young person’s development, and the interacting systems of which they are central to, are considered in assessment (Mahmoudi et al, 2012). Their positionality and level of training makes EPs well placed to conduct holistic assessments, and this is highlighted as one of the unique and valuable contributions of their role (Ashton & Roberts, 2006). Tools such as the Interactive Factors Framework (Frederickson & Cline, 2015) and Woolfson et al’s (2003) Integrated Framework are applied to encourage EPs to reflect upon hypotheses at a biological, cognitive, behavioural, and environmental level (Monsen & Frederickson, 2017).

Given the complex and diverse ways in which complex trauma can impact upon CYP’s development (see section 2.4), literature suggests it is important that school staff develop a holistic understanding of young people’s needs to implement targeted intervention and appropriate support strategies (Brown et al, 2022; Cook et al, 2017). In practice, special educational needs are frequently overlapping and interactive in nature, and children often have needs which “cut across all these areas and their needs may change over time” (DfE & DoH, 2015, p. 97). As a result, the SEND Code of Practice (DfE & DoH, 2015) as well as more specific trauma theory recommends detailed assessments which enable identification of a young person’s full range of strengths and needs, facilitating a comprehensive understanding (Diamanduros et al, 2018; Green & Myrick, 2014; Spence et al, 2021). Developing a holistic understanding ultimately enables a child-centred approach, with the needs of the young person at the heart of the process (Brooks, 2019; Shamblin et al, 2020).

### **5.2.3 Establishing a system to safely share information**

For participants of the current study, a key facilitator to developing an understanding of complex trauma and its impact was learning about the experiences, context, or

'story' of a young person, including the knowledge that they had experienced a traumatic event, and in most cases, the circumstances of this. However, literature on embedding TIP in schools does not seem to directly indicate that teachers need to be aware of individual pupils' traumatic experiences or circumstances to effectively implement support (Chafouleas et al, 2016). Given the argument that TIP is most effective when applied universally at a whole-school level, along with principles of GDPR and rights to privacy, an argument could be made to challenge this notion and question if teachers do need to be aware of such personal information to implement effective support (Holmes & Grandison, 2021; UNICEF, 1989). To ensure theoretical sensitisation towards the construction of this study's GT therefore, it was important to consult literature and theory on the importance of knowledge of CYP's experiences to enable effective TIP.

As detailed in section 2.6, frameworks for TIP are underpinned by five key principles to be embedded in practice and policy, namely Safety; Trustworthiness; Empowerment and Choice; Collaboration and Peer Support; and Cultural, Historical, and Gender Issues (Harris & Fallot, 2001; Elliot et al, 2005). The principles of Empowerment and Choice, and Cultural, Historical and Gender Issues promote that individuals' skills and experiences should be recognised and built upon, and historical trauma is recognised and responded to appropriately. This suggests that for teachers to embed these principles, it is important for them to be aware of the traumatic experiences CYP have been exposed to respond appropriately. The principle of safety foregrounds that children's actual and perceived safety should be ensured, including efforts to prevent re-traumatisation (Harris & Fallot, 2001; Elliot et al, 2005). Here, it may be necessary for teachers to understand the circumstances which have led to complex trauma to ensure they can consider and prepare for potential triggering events or experiences, and to protect children against possible ongoing safeguarding concerns. Research and guidance on embedding TIP which promotes the importance of compassion satisfaction has found that an awareness of pupil experiences facilitates increased levels of empathy, understanding, and demonstration of UPR (Brunzel et al, 2021; Cornelius-White, 2007; Downey, 2007). This notion was echoed by participants of the current study, who shared that gaining an awareness of the CYP who had experienced trauma changed their practice,

enabling them to respond to incidents with increased patience, understanding, and tolerance.

Despite recognition that knowledge of CYP's experiences is key in developing a holistic understanding of pupil's needs and thus implementing TIP, participants reflected that this was not done consistently in their school and often they were unaware of important information. Similarly, some participants demonstrated an awareness of processes and systems by which information could be shared securely, such as via email, staff briefings, or through technology systems such as CPOMs, where others did not. All participants did however recognise that to safeguard young people and act in accordance with data protection laws, it was important to consider what information was shared, whom it was shared with, and how it was shared. Legislation and national guidance recognise the value and significance of information sharing in multi-agency working and emphasises that fear of breaching data protection law should never inhibit professionals' ability to safeguard young people, nor prevent the development of a holistic, shared understanding between professionals (DfDCMS, 2018; HM Government, 2018a; HM Government, 2018b). Having said this, it also recognises the rights of CYP and their families to privacy where possible and recognises that sensitive information should be shared securely and only with key, appropriate adults (HM Government, 2018b; UNICEF, 1989). The SEND Code of Practice (DfE & DoH, 2015) notes that local authorities and schools should establish systems, protocols, and processes by which information can be shared effectively and securely; they also note that the child and their parents or carers should be informed and agree to their information being shared wherever appropriate. These principles should therefore be applied to TIP, and staff should be made aware of processes to follow.

### **5.3 Fostering a sense of safety and belonging**

Participants recognised that CYP need to feel a sense of safety and belonging to the school environment and community to be able to learn. The concept of belonging is well established in literature and its influence on student wellbeing and educational outcomes is widely recognised (Allen et al, 2021; Greenwood & Kelly, 2019; Jose et al, 2012). As literature on this topic is expansive, varying definitions are used and terms including belonging, connectedness, and relatedness appear to be used

interchangeably. In the current study, school belonging is defined as “the extent to which students feel personally accepted, respected, included, and supported by others in the school social environment” (Goodenow & Grady, 1993, p. 80). Within this, theoretical understandings of belonging recognise that individuals need to consider themselves worthy of acceptance and care from others to feel they belong (Greenwood & Kelly, 2019; Parker et al, 2016). The social implications of belonging are highlighted in this definition, as well as the socio-ecological interactions between members of the school community. Within the current study, participants recognised that their actions have a direct impact on students’ emotional wellbeing, and discussed the importance of empowering student voice to ensure their views were validated (see section 4.4.1 and 4.3.4), reflective of these concepts. In addition to Goodenow and Grady’s (1993) definition, literature acknowledges that belonging also includes a sense of connection with physical places (Allen, 2020; Hagerty et al, 1992), thus a child’s relationship with the school environment is significant. Participants of the current study similarly reflected upon the importance of ensuring CYP who had experienced trauma felt physically and psychologically safe and connected to their environment. This was discussed in relation to meeting students’ sensory needs, ensuring access to ‘safe spaces’, and making adaptations to the environment to meet student’s needs.

From a theoretical perspective, humanistic psychology and theories of attachment offer significant applications to the construct of school belonging (Allen et al, 2018). Humanistic paradigms conceptualise a sense of safety and belonging as basic psychological needs which must be fulfilled before being able to learn and reach one’s full potential (Maslow, 1954). Furthermore, Rogers’ (1959) principle of UPR describes accepting and valuing an individual’s character and worth without condition, in line with principles of belonging and TIP (Elliot et al, 2005; Goodenow & Grady, 1993). Theories of attachment and the internal working model (Bowlby, 1979) additionally emphasise the importance of relationships upon an individual’s sense of self, belonging, and interactions with others, and research has highlighted that children’s attachments with their teachers and school are significant in supporting young people to view themselves as worthy of care (Bergin & Bergin, 2009). Research tells us CYP with complex trauma may have maladapted internal working models (Parker et al, 2016), experience SEMH needs, and are at an increased risk



of school exclusion (Brooks, 2019). Along-side research which identifies that students with behavioural difficulties have a reduced sense of school belonging than their peers (Dimitrellou & Hurry, 2019), this highlights the importance of these factors in TIP to promote a sense of safety, belonging, and connectedness among CYP.

Overall, there is a considerable body of evidence which identifies that an increased sense of school belonging has a positive impact upon students' development and educational experience (Allen et al, 2021). Studies have identified school belonging as an important variable in academic attainment and motivation (Neel & Fuligni, 2013; Pittman & Richmond, 2007), increased levels of happiness and self-esteem (Jose et al, 2012; Law et al, 2013), and also reduced engagement with risk-taking or challenging behaviours (Wilson & Elliott, 2003). At a wider level, an increased sense of belonging within a school community contributes to the culture and social capital of the school, with improved relationships which promote trust, respect, and collaboration (Plagens, 2011; Roffey, 2012). However, literature recognises that as definitions and constructs of school belonging are not consistent across literature, it remains difficult to conceptualise or measure, and in turn, difficult to identify how one might go about increasing an individuals' sense of belonging in practice (Allen et al, 2021; Chapman et al, 2013).

## **5.4 Cultural and Systemic Implications**

### **5.4.1 The role of ethos and culture in implementing trauma-informed practice**

Guided by participants reference to ethos as an important factor towards successful implementation of TIP, I have focused attention on literature exploring the influence of ethos and culture in organisational functioning to facilitate the development and conceptualisation of this study's GT.

Whilst ethos is recognised as a central, influential factor towards the construction and operation of an organisation's agendas, practices, and policies, literature recognises the concept's ambiguity and subjectivity, making it difficult to define and measure (Solvason, 2005). Ethos is described as intrinsically linked with a system's collective values and beliefs and discussed interchangeably with concepts of organisational culture and climate (Glover & Coleman, 2005). Across literature, definitions for ethos are often contradictory and inconsistent (Donnelly, 2000), however McLaughlin's (2005) definition seems applicable to school settings and in

alignment with the discussions of participants in this study, stating ethos is “the prevalent or characteristic tone, spirit or sentiment informing an identifiable entity involving human life and interaction” (p. 311). In other words, an ethos describes the character or ‘feeling’ experienced within a school, which shapes and informs the beliefs, attitudes, perceptions, and dispositions of its community (McLaughlin, 2005; Solvason, 2005).

With reference to TIP, research and theory illustrate the importance of a shared ethos in underpinning successful whole-school adoption of the approach. Implementing TIP at a systemic level is described as requiring a “profound paradigm shift” (Holmes & Grandison, 2021, p. 11) of beliefs, perceptions, and practices of school staff in alignment with the key principles of TIP (Harris & Fallot, 2001; Elliot et al, 2005). Furthermore, literature reflects the overlapping nature of a trauma inclusive school ethos and environmental feelings of safety and belonging (Berger & Martin, 2021; Brown et al, 2022). To operationalise the school’s ethos and make it tangible in application of TIP, literature reflects that policies should be reflective of the school’s character and values (Green & Myrick, 2014; Harris & Fallot, 2001; Howard, 2019). Given the abstract nature of ethos however, this is very difficult in practice, illustrated by reports that there remains a lack of guidance or framework for school staff in implementing TIP (Berger & Martin, 2021; Graham et al, 2011). These findings reflect participants considerations of feeling led or directed by their school ethos when supporting CYP who have experienced trauma, perhaps more so than their school policies, which many reflected did not align with their TIP or values. Participants of the current study acknowledged that where the school ethos was not shared, particularly by more senior members of staff, this created a significant barrier to implementing TIP consistently, and echoes research which indicates a potential discrepancy between TIP and wider systemic or governmental agenda and policy, as discussed in section 2.3 (Chafouleas et al, 2016).

#### **5.4.2 The psychological underpinnings of behaviour policies**

As indicated above, literature advises that schools adopting TIP should embed their ethos and values within their policy documents. Despite this, research has identified that TIP is rarely reflected in existing education policy, nor well aligned with wider government agendas and guidance as outlined in section 2.3.2 (Berger, 2019;

Chafouleas et al, 2016). Literature has argued that this lack of policy reform has rendered teaching staff unable to “move beyond a traditional ‘behavioural management’ approach to a ‘behavioural understanding’ philosophy required in relation to the impact of childhood and adolescent trauma.” (Berger & Martin, 2021, p. 224). This was mirrored by participants of the current study, who acknowledged that their school policies did not reflect their practice or school ethos. Many participants requested increased recognition of and guidance upon supporting more vulnerable pupils in their policy documents. Furthermore, some participants demonstrated misconceptions in their understandings of CYP’s challenging behaviour, indicating a need for further training and facilitation of a “behavioural understanding philosophy” (Berger & Martin, 2021, p. 224).

Given the significant impact of complex trauma on CYP’s SEMH development (see section 2.4.3), a school’s responses to challenging behaviour and teaching of pro-social skills are very important. As outlined in section 2.6.2.1, the behaviourist paradigm strongly underpins educational systems in the UK and worldwide (Harold & Corcoran, 2013; Hart, 2010). Alternatively, research acknowledges that TIP moves away from traditional sanction and reward policies, and towards flexible, relational approaches to behaviour management (Green & Myrick, 2014; Howard, 2019). It is therefore important to further explore behaviourist applications to supporting SEMH in light of the findings of the current study, as well as consider alternative approaches to managing behaviour in schools.

#### **5.4.2.1 Behaviourist Approaches**

Building upon the discussion in Chapter 2, behaviourist approaches are underpinned by principles of positive and negative reinforcement, implementing various reward strategies to increase pro-social behaviours, and sanctions to decrease challenging behaviours (Hart, 2010). Despite their decline in popularity in other areas of teaching and learning practice (Payne, 2015), behaviourist approaches continue to underpin classroom management strategies and are widely endorsed in government policies (DfE, 2022a; Frederickson & Cline, 2015; Parker et al, 2016). With reference to Educational Psychology, behaviourist approaches have historically been popular among EP’s, with research identifying the most commonly recommended behavioural support strategies to fit within this paradigm (Hart, 2010; Miller, 1989).

This popularity was mirrored in the current study, with all participants acknowledging the dominant behaviourist, sanction and reward approaches adopted by their school in response to challenging student behaviour.

Despite its longstanding popularity, more recent research has debated the extent to which behaviourist approaches are effective and questioned the ethical implications of its principles. There is a consensus among research that behaviourist approaches are often helpful for many children but do not work for all, especially vulnerable young people including those who have experienced trauma (Harold & Corcoran, 2013; Parker et al, 2016; Shaughnessy, 2012). Rising rates of exclusion and student mental health needs may reinforce this assertion (Brooks, 2019; DfE, 2023; Timpson, 2019). When conducting research upon student perceptions of the use of rewards and sanctions, Payne (2015) found that extrinsically driven rewards were not perceived as effective by students, and many sanctions impacted upon pupils' abilities to engage cognitive thinking skills and were viewed as counter-productive in facilitating positive behaviour for learning. Interestingly, strategies which were perceived most positively by students were those with relational underpinnings, including positive feedback to parents and reward trips with peers and staff (Payne, 2015).

Critiques of behaviourist approaches typically centre around its reductionist nature, failing to consider the complex, interactive dynamics of contextual, socio-cultural, and genetic influences on behaviour and assuming a 'one size fits all' approach (Harold & Corcoran, 2013; Hart, 2010). Critiques argue that behaviourist approaches are exploitative of authoritarian power dynamics between students and staff, limiting young people's autonomy and empowerment in favour of encouraging "passivity, control, and obedience" (Parker et al, 2016, p. 441). Furthermore, literature suggests that focus upon sanctions and rewards place emphasis on extrinsic rather than intrinsic motivation and fails to teach young people emotional and self-regulation skills which they may be lacking (Wilkenfeld & McCarthy, 2020). The findings of the current study reflect these themes, as participants recognised that sanctions and rewards do not work for all students and many CYP are not motivated by the reward schemes their schools put in place. In addition, to take a holistic approach, participants reflected that adaptations to their behaviour policy need to be made in consideration of pupil's individual needs and circumstances.

#### **5.4.2.2 Psychodynamic Approaches**

An alternative approach which is gaining considerable traction in education and research is the psychodynamic paradigm. Psychodynamic strategies for supporting CYP's behaviour are primarily underpinned by Bowlby's (1979) attachment theory, prioritising positive and secure relationships as well as teaching emotional literacy, regulation, and expression (Frederickson & Cline, 2002; Hart, 2010). As outlined in section 5.3.2, attachment theory acknowledges the need for secure and trusting relationships with adults for children to safely explore and develop within their social environment (ARC, 2022; Brooks, 2019; Slonin, 2014). Offering an alternative to traditional behaviourist approaches, attachment-aware models for supporting behaviour place relationships at the centre of decision making, prioritising community based, multi-agency working and facilitating teaching and learning through reflective and restorative conversations (e.g. Bomber, 2007 and 2011; Cairns, 2006; Parker et al, 2016). Participants of the current study identified a significant part of their role involved establishing positive and trusting relationships with students and their parents. Participants highlighted the importance of this in enabling young people who had experienced trauma to feel safe and able to make progress, demonstrating an alignment with the psychodynamic paradigm. Examples of intervention which align within the psychodynamic paradigm, and which were also described by participants of the current study, include nurture groups and emotion coaching, which aim to promote social development and communication skills, emotional awareness and regulation, and foster positive, caring relationships (Boxall, 2002; Gilbert, 2013; Gus et al, 2015).

The use of attachment-aware frameworks for behaviour management are becoming increasingly embedded in school policies, therefore research studies evaluating their successes are emerging. Overall, results have identified positive outcomes in reducing instances of challenging behaviour and facilitating development of pro-social skills and interactions (Bergin & Bergin, 2009; Parker et al, 2016; Kennedy, 2008). Similarly, both nurture groups and emotion coaching interventions have an established body of evidence promoting their successes in supporting children's SEMH needs, but also increasing teacher's capacity for empathy and patience (Gus et al, 2015; O'Connor et al., 2012; Sanders, 2007; Scott & Lee, 2009). Having said this, Parker et al (2016) acknowledge that it is difficult to identify a causal relationship

between psychodynamic approaches and CYP's behaviour, given the "complex framework of relationships, emotions and possible alternative explanations" (p. 456). Furthermore, studies exploring the effectiveness of attachment-informed models typically adopt small scale, qualitative research methods, and therefore may not offer robust, generalisable findings. Research also warns against viewing paradigms as distinct and uncomplimentary, acknowledging the potential benefits of utilising integrative frameworks (see section 2.6.2.3) or a combination of perspectives (Kennedy & Kennedy, 2004).

#### **5.4.2.3 Humanistic Approaches**

Humanistic perspectives to supporting CYP's SEMH needs have been said to directly contrast behaviourist approaches due to their emphasis on person-centred practice, non-directive strategies, and facilitation of intrinsic motivation and self-determination (Hart, 2010). Applying Maslow's (1954) hierarchy of needs, humanistic approaches maintain the assumption that students' motivation and thus their behaviour is underpinned by and dependent upon the meeting of basic psychological needs, including connectedness and autonomy (Nie & Lau, 2009). Strategies to support behaviour therefore are concentrated upon empowerment of student choice and advocacy, and developing intrinsic motivation, for example through motivational interviewing (Rollnick et al, 2016). Alongside this, positive relationships are prioritised: school staff demonstrate UPR, genuineness, and empathy towards students to enable them to feel psychologically secure to employ higher order thinking and problem-solving skills (Cornelius-White, 2007). Given their alignment, these principles are often adopted and embedded within attachment-based approaches and fall within the umbrella of relational approaches (Parker et al, 2016). Participants of the current study described adopting several humanistic principles in support of CYP who have experienced trauma, where the identified focused codes of *'Demonstrating care and unconditional positive regard'*, *'Demonstrating empathy'* were prominent across the data.

Whilst few studies have been conducted exploring the application of humanistic approaches in schools, empirical research suggests that strategies such as co-operative learning and providing opportunities to make decisions can reduce instances of challenging behaviour, increase levels of self-esteem among students,

and increase positive and meaningful interactions between peers (Hart, 2010; Shogren et al, 2004; Slavin, 1987). However, it could be argued that humanistic approaches place too heavy an ownership on 'within-child' factors and fail to consider environmental or eco-systemic factors which may influence a young person's behaviour, and therefore a combination of principles adopted from different paradigms and in line with a schools and wider political agendas may be a helpful approach (Hart, 2010).

### **5.5 The cost of caring: staff wellbeing as a barrier to implementing trauma informed practice**

Teacher wellbeing is defined by Acton and Glasgow (2015) as “an individual sense of personal professional fulfilment, satisfaction, purposefulness and happiness, constructed in a collaborative process with colleagues and students” (p. 102). This definition recognises the relational, hedonic, and eudaemonic aspects which contribute to one's wellbeing (Brady & Wilson, 2021). Teacher wellbeing remains a prevalent and important topic in educational research globally. Due to rising difficulties of recruitment and retention of staff, coupled with increased concern regarding the mental health of teachers, it is important for researchers to explore the factors which influence staff wellbeing, including protective and risk factors, to improve support (Brady & Wilson, 2021; Health and Safety Executive, 2022). In addition, research has identified that staff wellbeing is bi-directional with young people's wellbeing as well as student-teacher relationships (Blum & Libbey, 2004; Roffey, 2012). Teachers with more positive emotional wellbeing are more able to implement effective support for students and are increasingly resilient to the demanding workload and emotional stressors of their role, improving student academic outcomes as well as encouraging pro-social behaviour (Turner & Theilking, 2019).

Research has identified that working with young people who have experienced trauma can have a negative effect on teacher wellbeing (Buchanan et al, 2013; Hill, 2011; Howard, 2019). Emerging themes identify that supporting trauma experienced CYP can affect teachers in three key ways; emotional burden, vicarious or secondary trauma, and finally professional 'burnout' (Alisic, 2012; Blitz et al, 2016; Hydon et al, 2015). The notion of professional burnout refers to work related exhaustion and low self-efficacy, which in turn may lead to absence or even attrition from one's role

(World Health Organisation (WHO), 2019), highlighting the importance of protecting staff wellbeing. Having said this, it is widely accepted that teachers experience some of the highest levels of work-related stress due to high and demanding workloads (Brady & Wilson, 2020; Health & Safety Executive, 2022; Kidger et al, 2016). It is therefore difficult to draw a direct conclusion or correlation between TIP and poor staff wellbeing, as this is likely to be influenced by a range of additional factors. Furthermore, where TIP is embedded at a whole-school level, research has established contrasting associated outcomes of increased job satisfaction, compassion for students, and reduced levels of teacher burnout (Christian-Brandt et al, 2020). There are also identified protective factors to ensure teacher wellbeing when working with vulnerable young people, including access to supervision and CPD opportunities (Caringi et al, 2015).

### **5.5.1 Secondary trauma: what is it and how might it affect school staff?**

The term secondary trauma, or vicarious trauma, refers to the notion that individuals who work closely with those who have been affected by trauma and hear about their experiences may suffer similar emotional consequences or stress reactions (Caringi et al, 2015). Despite originating in healthcare professions, secondary trauma has been recognised as a concern for educational professionals for many decades (Bloom, 1995). Also referred to in literature as ‘compassion fatigue’, secondary trauma reflects the stresses school staff may experience when repeatedly exposed to the emotional dysregulation of students, and when managing high levels of anxiety regarding their welfare and wellbeing (Bloom, 1995; Ormiston et al, 2022; Sinclair et al, 2017). Secondary trauma impacts upon teachers’ capacity to demonstrate empathy and resilience in their role and has been recognised as a contributing factor towards attrition (Christian-Brandt et al, 2020). In a systematic literature review exploring secondary traumatic stress and compassion fatigue in teachers, Ormiston et al (2022) found that rates of prevalence of teachers experiencing secondary trauma varied, with studies identifying 43-75% of staff reporting associated symptoms, with increased prevalence among staff working in areas of higher economic deprivation and racially marginalised groups. Interestingly, these are two groups, among others, which literature highlights as being at an increased risk of experiencing ACEs or childhood trauma (Blodgett & Lanigan, 2018).



Despite some concerning research which highlights the potential for secondary trauma among school staff, some emerging literature paints a more positive picture. For example, in a study exploring teacher reflections upon their own wellbeing after implementing TIP, Brunzel et al (2021) identified that adopting the approach had an overwhelmingly positive influence on staff wellbeing. Results highlighted three superordinate themes in relation to teacher wellbeing, which included “Increasing self-regulation; Increasing relational abilities; Increasing psychological resources” (Brunzel et al, 2021, p. 97). Within these areas, participants described an increased understanding of and ability to manage their own emotions, increased confidence and resilience in their role, improved professional and personal relationships, and an overall more positive and grateful outlook on their job (Brunzel et al, 2021). Whilst these results are promising, it is important to note that this was a small scale, qualitative study conducted in Australia, and therefore significantly more research on the impact of TIP on teacher wellbeing, particularly within the UK education system, is needed to further explore these concerns.

### **5.5.2 The place of supervision in secondary schools**

Often discussed in relation to clinical or healthcare professions, supervision broadly refers to a reflective, interactive process between two or more colleagues which facilitates the professional development of the supervisee (BPS, 2010). Milne (2007) defines clinical supervision as “the formal provision by senior/qualified health practitioners of an intensive, relationship-based education and training that is case-focused and which supports, directs and guides the work of colleagues (supervisees)” (p. 440). In Educational Psychology, the BPS (2010) guidance identifies three predominant functions of supervision; normative, where progress is formally monitored; formative, where challenges and ideas are shared between supervisee and supervisor; and restorative, which focuses upon the emotional wellbeing of the supervisee. Less research has been conducted upon the use of supervision in educational settings, however literature suggests similar principles apply, perhaps with a greater emphasis on restorative purposes, as demonstrated in the following definition of reflective supervision in education from Eggbeer et al (2007): “the process of examining, with someone else, the thoughts, feelings, actions, and reactions evoked in the course of working closely with young children and their families” (p. 5).

Given the emotional demands of working with trauma experienced CYP, engaging with supervision may offer a helpful way in which school staff can monitor their own wellbeing and seek support if they are experiencing associated stress responses (Ormiston et al, 2022). Qualitative studies exploring the effects of accessing supervision among teachers indicated it offered a significant protective factor against work-related stress, as well as reporting an increased sense of self-efficacy and job satisfaction (Brown, 2016; Lepore, 2016). Similarly, research has found that those who identified as having a strong professional support network with whom they could reflect upon their experiences reported less secondary traumatic stress responses than those who did not (Abraham-Cook, 2012). These reflections mirror the emphasis placed by participants on having a supportive team network and utilising opportunities to discuss their work and emotions with one another.

In addition to providing containment and support for staff emotional wellbeing, supervision in schools has also been highlighted as a means to increase capacity, upskill staff and provide follow up opportunities to reflect on prior training (Berger & Martin, 2021). For this to be successful and feasible in line with teachers likely demanding workload, research recognises the need to implement formalised supervision plans or policies, which identify specific goals, models and expectations for teachers when accessing supervision (Miller & Dollard, 2006).

## **5.6 Chapter Summary**

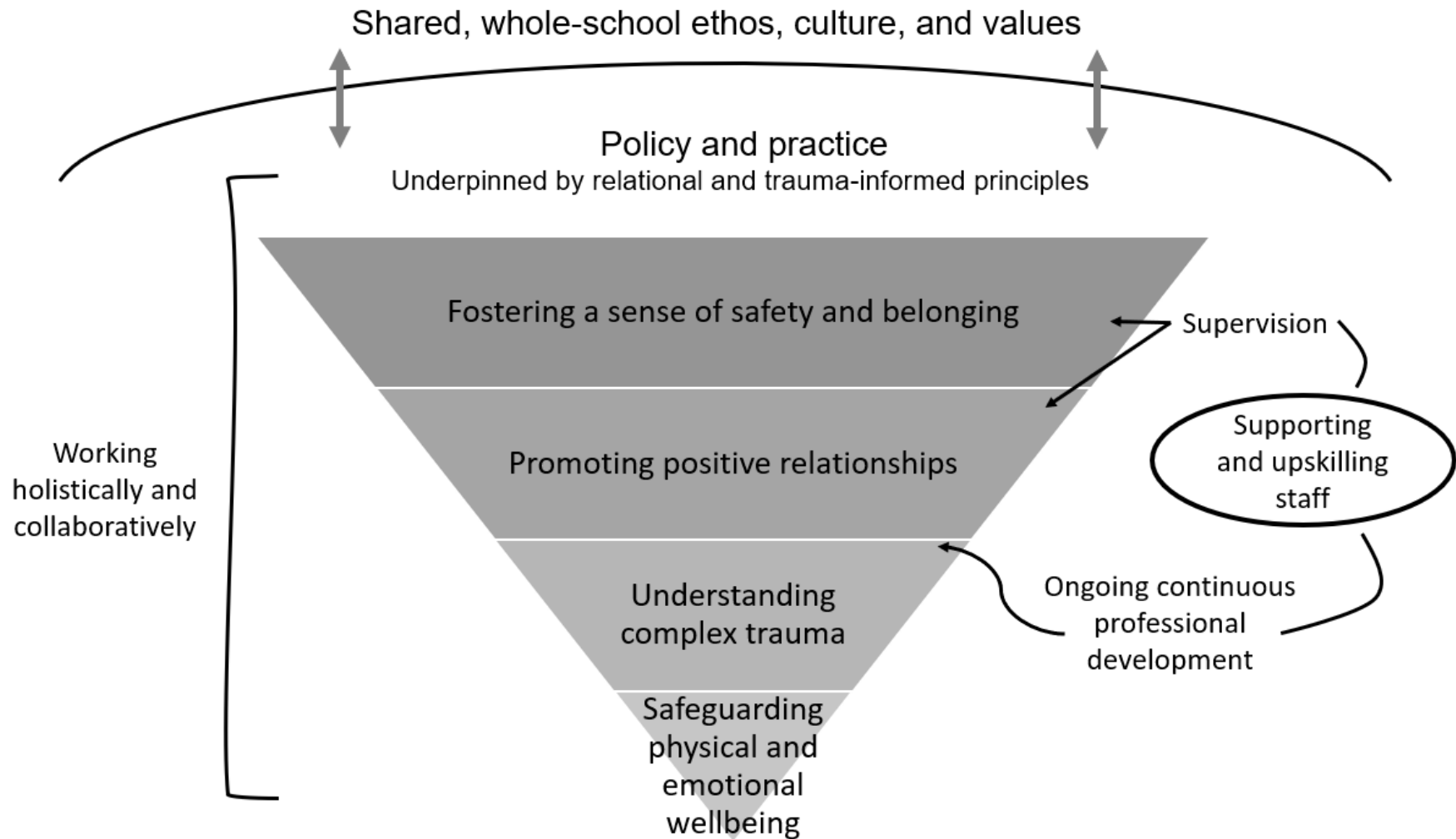
This chapter sought to contextualise and ground the findings of the current study within relevant existing research and theoretical literature. Following the development of conceptual categories as presented in Chapter 4, it was important to critically review related theoretical frameworks, models, and empirical studies to develop my knowledge and understanding, and facilitate my theoretical sensitisation towards the construction of this study's GT. Literature pertinent to the constructs of holism, attachment and belonging, ethos and culture, and staff wellbeing was presented, as well as psychological models for understanding challenging behaviour. Where appropriate, interactions within and between conceptual categories and the associated literature was illustrated and discussed. In the next chapter of this study, I will present the constructed GT, drawing upon the relevant literature and theoretical concepts examined here and in Chapter 2.

## 6.0 The Grounded Theory of the Study

### 6.1 Introduction

The constructed GT for the current study is presented in this chapter. The GT has been developed through a rigorous process of data analysis and reflexivity of related literature, where connections were drawn between the outcomes of data presented in Chapter 4 and literature reviewed in Chapters 2 and 5. In the current study, the GT offers a theoretically underpinned conceptualisation of the complex processes and interactions recognised across the seven identified conceptual categories. The GT was developed to reflect the categories and focused codes perceived as key in answering the research questions of the current study. This includes the categories of *'Promoting positive relationships'*, *'Fostering a sense of safety and belonging'*, *'Understanding complex trauma'*, *'Safeguarding children's physical and emotional wellbeing'*, *'Organisational Factors'*, and *'Staff wellbeing, confidence, and competence'*, and the focused codes *'Policy and Practice'* and *'Whole-school ethos'*. While the focused code *'Impact of Covid-19'* was facilitative in identifying how the contexts on complex trauma and staff perceptions had changed in light of the pandemic, I considered it less analytically relevant to the development of the GT as it was not directly linked to practice or policy. The GT reflects the understanding that each category should not be viewed as distinct, but interactive and complementary in nature.

The final GT of the current study offers a framework for understanding and implementing TIP at a whole-school level and is entitled *'Trauma-Informed Practice in Education: A Framework for Schools'*. A visual representation is presented in Figure 6.1.



**Figure 6.1 - A visual representation of the study's grounded theory: Trauma-Informed Practice in Education: A Framework for Schools**

## 6.2 The grounded theory of the study

The study's GT draws together school staff's current understanding of TIP and their perceptions of the barriers to implementing this with relevant literature and psychological theory, to offer a conceptualised framework for practice in the context of mainstream secondary schools. The resultant framework considers implementation across all levels of practice, including systemic, group, and individual ways of working.

Within the presented framework, the development of a shared, whole-school ethos, culture, and set of values is conceptualised as a significant underpinning towards the implementation of TIP at a whole-school level. A school's ethos and culture are reflective of the organisation's values, beliefs, aims, and dispositions, and therefore provides implicit guidance which drives actions, processes and interactions (McLaughlin, 2005; Solvason, 2005). It is conceptualised that to promote effective TIP, all members of the staff community should invest in an ethos which is aligned with the trauma-informed key principles of Safety, Trustworthiness, Empowerment and Choice, Collaboration and Peer Support, and Cultural, Historical and Gender Issues (Harris & Fallot, 2001; Elliot et al, 2005). While the development of this ethos is likely to take time and effort to embed, it is theorised that engagement with the GT framework in full will promote understanding and communication of guiding principles which staff are able to actively invest in. Furthermore, this should be established collaboratively and with transparency, among the whole-school community. Through operationalising and communicating culture, values, and aims through verbal, written and symbolic means, including classroom displays, policy documents, and relational behaviours, it is conceptualised that the schools' ethos will remain 'active' and offer a mobilisation of understanding through actions and behaviours (Green & Myrick, 2014; Harris & Fallot, 2001; Howard, 2019). Finally, it is considered that the investment in a trauma inclusive school ethos will inform and underpin practice in an interactive process. For example, a school culture which promotes the inclusion of student opinions in development of policy and practice leads to the empowerment of student voice, which, in turn, enables them to feel an increased sense of belonging.

It is recognised that the whole-school ethos, culture, and values should be reflected in policy documents to operationalise them for practice. The GT promotes that policy

and, in turn, practice, should be directly informed by and reflective of the principles of TIP alongside adoption of relational approaches. The GT prioritises approaches to supporting behaviour which are underpinned by a combination of psychological paradigms but emphasises psychodynamic theories of attachment and humanistic perspectives (Bowlby, 1979; Maslow, 1954). It is recognised that adoption of these paradigms supports staff to move beyond a behavioural management approach and towards a deeper understanding of behaviour as a communication (Berger & Martin, 2021). In addition, it is conceptualised that implementing behaviour policies with trauma-informed, relational principles will facilitate a pro-active approach to supporting young people's SEMH needs, resulting in development of secure relationships, pro-social skills, and emotional regulation, and in turn, a reduction of incidents of challenging behaviour and school exclusions (Cornelius-White, 2007; Hart, 2010; Parker et al, 2016). It is theorised that implementing relational approaches to supporting behaviour as part of whole-school TIP will have a positive influence on staff wellbeing as well as student wellbeing, increasing staff confidence and resilience in their role, and a greater understanding of their own emotional wellbeing (Brunzel et al, 2021).

The constructed framework promotes that trauma-informed approaches should be embedded at a systemic, group, and individual level within a school organisation; this is demonstrated in the visual representation of the GT using an inverted triangle at the center of the model (Figure 6.1). At a wider, systemic level, the GT considers that adults should endeavour to foster a sense of safety and belonging among the whole-school community, as well as promote positive relationships at the core of their practice. It is recognised that ensuring young people feel safe and connected to their environment enables them to employ higher order thinking skills to learn and self-regulate (Maslow, 1954). The school's physical environment should be carefully considered to promote feelings of psychological safety, including consideration of sensory elements and access to 'safe spaces' when pupils, or staff, need opportunities for regulation. It is conceptualised that this is particularly important for trauma affected CYP, who are likely to be in a state of hypervigilance and hyperarousal for much of the school day (Porges, 2009). Drawing upon the principles of attachment theory (Bowlby, 1979), the GT proposes that prioritising positive relationships between peers and staff will further support individuals' sense of safety

and belonging and facilitate a positive change in the internal working model of vulnerable young people (Bergin & Bergin, 2009). It is conceptualised that relational practices including (but not limited to) demonstration of genuine interest in a young person's skills and interests, UPR, daily emotional 'check-ins', and restorative conversations facilitate pro-social and emotional development, and enhance a schools' social capital (Bomber, 2011; Cairns, 2006; Gilbert, 2013). Investment in the social capital of the school will in turn promote expectations and interactions that facilitate trust, respect, value, and collaboration in line with the shared whole-school ethos (Plagens, 2011; Roffey, 2012). These constructs also apply to teachers, who will feel increased levels of professional confidence and resilience through a sense of belonging to their workplace community and engagement with a professional support network (Abraham-Cook, 2012).

At a group and individual level, the framework considers that to successfully embed TIP, all school staff should develop a thorough understanding of complex trauma. This should include key underpinning psychological theories, the impact of complex trauma, how this may affect students in school, and what their role is as educational professionals (Cook et al, 2017). This understanding will inform and underpin safeguarding of students' physical and emotional wellbeing, including through teaching of new skills and strategies through direct intervention. It is conceptualised that experiencing complex trauma may impact upon young people's development in complex and interacting ways, therefore adults should adopt a holistic approach to assessment to inform targeted intervention (DoE & DoH, 2015; Green & Myrick, 2014). To facilitate an understanding of individual students' strengths and needs and ensure their safety, it is recognised that key members of staff should have an awareness of their contexts and experiences, including if they have experienced trauma. Gaining this knowledge will additionally enable staff to demonstrate increased levels of empathy and understanding and avoid unintentional re-traumatization through triggering events or situations (Brunzel et al, 2021; Downey, 2007; Harris & Fallot, 2001). To do this safely, schools must develop systems, protocols, and processes to share information securely and in accordance with data protection and GDPR laws (DfDCMS, 2018; HM Government, 2018a; HM Government, 2018b).

Finally, the GT conceptualises that processes of supporting and upskilling staff, and prioritising holistic and collaborative ways of working, will underpin, embed, and facilitate successful TIP. Staff wellbeing is highlighted as a significant factor for consideration and recognised as interconnected with relationships and belonging, and bi-directional with student wellbeing (Brady & Wilson, 2021; Roffey, 2012). Opportunities for supervision and ongoing CPD are highlighted as important protective factors against experiences of secondary trauma and also teacher burnout, as they offer regular, protected opportunity for professional learning, emotional containment and restoration (BPS, 2010; Caringi et al, 2015). Given that teaching staff will need to be emotionally available and regulated to support young people who have experienced trauma, accessing opportunities to support their own wellbeing will facilitate improved practice and, in turn, improved student wellbeing and engagement (Berger & Martin, 2021). In light of the demanding nature of teaching roles (Health & Safety Executive, 2022), the framework recognises a need for a formalised supervision and CPD schedule or policy, to ensure they work to increase capacity and support wellbeing rather than reduce it.

Overall, reflective of research which demonstrates that embedding TIP can improve outcomes for CYP in terms of academic achievement, pro-social behaviour, and student mental health, the GT conceptualises that whilst the approach may require profound organisational change, thus time and commitment to embed, longer term outcomes aim to reduce demands on staff and increase capacity levels through interactive processes of preventative work, relational policy and practice, and additional support for staff (Bergin & Bergin, 2009; Dorado et al, 2016; Frankland, 2021; Weare, 2005).

### **6.3 Chapter Summary**

This chapter presented the final GT developed from the current research, following a complex, iterative process of data collection, analysis, and theoretical sensitisation. The final theory seeks to explain school staff's current understandings and perceptions of TIP and offers a framework for practice in the context of mainstream secondary schools towards its implementation, represented visually in Figure 6.1. The theory conceptualised that a shared, whole-school ethos which is aligned with the principles of TIP should underpin all policy and practice. TIP should be



embedded at systemic, group, and individual levels across the school organisation, and include efforts to foster a sense of safety and belonging, promote positive relationships, develop an understanding of complex trauma, and safeguard CYP's physical and emotional wellbeing. To facilitate this, the GT conceptualises that staff should be supported and upskilled through supervision and ongoing CPD, and encouraged to work holistically and collaboratively. Having outlined the final GT, the subsequent chapter will present a critical discussion of the current study.

## **7.0 Discussion**

### **7.1 Introduction**

Having outlined the GT for the current study, this chapter will discuss links between the developed theory and remaining literature reviewed in Chapter 2. Implications of the present study will then be considered, including its distinctive contribution, implications for practice, and a discussion of how I plan to disseminate the research findings. An evaluation of the research study's quality and validity will be presented, and strengths, limitations, and considerations for future research will be outlined.

This chapter will conclude with a presentation of my own reflections upon the professional and academic journey taken and reflexivity towards the completion of this study.

### **7.2 Connections drawn between the grounded theory with the literature review**

Chapter 2 offered a purposely broad review of relevant literature to set the context of TIP in mainstream educational settings across the UK and theoretically inform the rationale for the current study. Alarming rates of prevalence of trauma and adversity among young people are reported, with up to half of all children in the UK experiencing at least one traumatic event or ACE before they reach eighteen (Carlson et al, 2020; Torjesen, 2019; UK Trauma Council, 2020). There is a substantial body of research which has identified the potentially devastating and long-term impact of complex trauma on all areas of child development, including increased risk of exclusion and poorer academic outcomes (Brooks, 2019; Cook et al, 2017; Green & Myrick, 2014). This was reflected by participants of the current study, who expressed concern regarding high levels of need among students, identified a wide range of presentations in school settings, and recognised a need for preventative approaches. The GT of the study conceptualises that successful implementation of TIP requires staff to develop a thorough understanding of complex trauma, including key psychological theories, the impact of complex trauma, and how this may affect individual young people in education, which were discussed throughout Chapter 2 (Bowlby, 1979; Cook et al, 2017; Porges, 2009).

Despite national calls for the adoption of relational, trauma-informed approaches in educational practice and policy (ARC, 2021; NICE, 2022; Timpson, 2019), as well as emergent successes of the implementation of these (Bergin & Bergin, 2009; Dorado

et al, 2016; Frankland, 2021), research highlighted inconsistencies in approaches across schools and distinct lack of a clear framework for practice (Billington et al, 2022; Howard, 2019; Wall, 2020). Mirrored by the reflections of participants in the current study, themes of a lack of confidence, lack of knowledge, and requests for additional CPD opportunities among teachers were pertinent across research outcomes (Brunzell et al, 2019; Hill, 2011; Forber-Pratt et al, 2021; Koslouski & Stark, 2021). The GT of the current study offers a framework for whole-school practice in the context of mainstream secondary schools which prioritises supporting and upskilling school staff. Formalised processes or schedules of supervision and ongoing CPD are conceptualised to facilitate learning opportunities and emotional support, in turn improving perceptions of self-efficacy, wellbeing, and confidence (BPS, 2010; Caringi et al, 2015).

The principles of systems theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) and attribution theory (Miller, 1999) offer an understanding of the social and psychological processes which inform staff perceptions. Applications of ecological systems theory suggest that teacher perspectives of and investment in a TIP are likely to be influenced by their differing roles and positions of power within a school (Forber-Pratt et al, 2021). This includes their levels of involvement working directly with a student as well as communication with parents, carers, and other professionals. In addition, attribution theory identifies that school staff are more likely to offer support and intervention when they attribute difficulties to factors outside CYP's control, including circumstances of adversity and traumatic events (Reyna & Weiner, 2001). The GT of the current study conceptualises that a whole-school ethos which promotes the key principles of empowerment and collaboration must be established and invested in by all staff to ensure effective TIP (Harris & Fallot, 2001; Elliot et al, 2005). Within this, it is theorised that multi-agency working with parents and carers as well as professionals, and developing a holistic understanding of complex trauma and individual students' experiences, facilitates the investment of all staff in the culture and agendas of the school and perceptions of TIP as valuable and important.

## **7.3 Implications of the present study**

### **7.3.1 Distinctive contribution**

Despite national recommendations and guidance calling for the implementation of TIP in UK schools, very little research has been conducted exploring school staff's understandings and perceptions of the approach (Cohen & Baron, 2021; EIF, 2020; Maynard et al, 2019). The current study fills this gap in the literature and extends understanding of school staff perceptions of TIP, their role in this area, and the perceived barriers to implementing the approach systemically. Building upon research findings as explored in Chapters 2 and 5, the current study offers an inductive insight into school staff's actions, interactions, and cognitions in relation to working with complex trauma in mainstream secondary educational settings.

Reflecting outcomes of the current study which have been theoretically sensitised within previously conducted research, the GT considers the varied impact of complex trauma upon child development, and the importance of facilitating positive relationships, a sense of belonging, and teaching of new skills. In addition to this, the current study offers a distinct contribution in its exploration and theoretical conceptualisation of the importance of safeguarding and sharing information, as well as holistic practice, when working with CYP who have experienced trauma, which, as far as my literature search has identified, has not been discussed to this depth in other studies in this field of research.

As far as I am aware, no other research studies have explored the topic area of the current study, in mainstream secondary schools in the UK, through constructivist GT methodologies. Whilst one study was identified which adopted constructivist GT to explore the social phenomenon of school staff experiences working with complex childhood trauma in remote primary schools in Australia (Brown et al, 2022), the current study differs in its data collection methods, participant sample, education system, and phase of education studied. Furthermore, the current study offers a distinct contribution through the conceptualised GT, which explains the understandings and perspectives of school staff and proposes a framework for whole-school TIP. The adopted methodologies and participant sampling of the current study provide a unique positionality which allows the individual and differing viewpoints of a range of school staff to be shared within a rigorous, qualitative methodology (Charmaz, 2014; Guba & Lincoln, 1994). The participant sample

consisted of educational professionals in a range of roles, reflective of a secondary school staff population. The GT framework therefore encapsulates the varied yet interactional nature of staff roles, responsibilities, and constructed knowledge which exist within the overarching, shared school ethos, culture, and agendas.

### **7.3.2 Implications for practice**

#### **7.3.2.1 Implications for schools**

Literature has suggested that educational settings are best placed to offer early intervention and support for children who have experienced trauma due to the resources, systems, and services they have in place (Spence et al, 2021). The final GT of this study conceptualises school staff's current understanding of TIP and offers a framework for systemic practice, therefore there are direct implications for schools in its application. Two conceptual categories were identified in this study which explain the perceived barriers to implementing TIP, and which hold implications for schools. The first category is '*Organisational Factors*', where '*Lack of time*' and '*Lack of capacity*' were salient focused codes. The second is '*Staff wellbeing, confidence, and competence*'.

The implications of organisational factors are difficult for schools to address. Participants recognised that the demanding nature of their roles and therefore lack of time, coupled with the high levels of need among students and lack of capacity to implement support, was a significant barrier to TIP. Providing teachers with additional, protected time would require substantial organisational change within school systems. This is true at the level of individual schools, but also in relation to expectations to deliver the national curriculum and meet inspectorial (OFSTED) quality and standards. Whilst literature acknowledges that whole-school TIP is likely to require "a profound paradigm shift" (Homes & Grandison, 2021, p. 11) where initial time and effort result in longer term gain and increased capacity, schools are likely to require support from educational services, such as an EPS, to make these systemic changes successfully.

Implications around '*Staff wellbeing, confidence and competence*' may be easier for schools to action. Literature acknowledges that these constructs are interactive by nature, therefore working to address one area is likely to have a positive influence upon another (Turner & Theilking, 2019). As teacher wellbeing remains a cause for

concern nationally (Brady & Wilson, 2021), the Department for Education provides guidance and resources which may be accessed by schools to enhance staff wellbeing, including the Education Staff Wellbeing Charter (DfE, 2022d). To improve staff confidence and competence, schools can implement programs of CPD which meet the needs of their staff and are within their professional remits and capacity, in line with the *Standard for Teachers' Professional Development* (DfE, 2016). This may include accessing training or support from LA or other external services. The GT of the current study conceptualises that by implementing formalised programs for supervision alongside CPD, schools can work to support and upskill staff, in turn increasing capacity and professional resilience.

### **7.3.2.2 Implications for Educational Psychology**

As discussed in section 2.5.2, EPs are well placed to apply their skills at a systemic, group, and individual level in advocacy of CYP who have experienced trauma (Boyle & Lauchlan, 2009; Fallon et al, 2010; Kelly, 2017). The final GT of the current study promotes that TIP is most effective if implemented at a whole-school level and discusses the implications of this across different levels of a school system. This research therefore has several implications for EPs and their role in working with complex trauma in school settings, where the outcomes of this research can directly inform the areas of systemic change to target.

A significant implication for EP practice drawn from the present study therefore relates to their role in facilitating organisational change in schools. As scientist practitioners, EPs can apply psychological knowledge and skills to promote development, learning, and in turn, enable change at a systems level (Birch et al, 2015). This could include through the application of strategic change tools such as Appreciative Inquiry (Cooperrinder et al, 2008), Force Field Analysis (Lewin, 1951), or PATHs (Planning Alternative Tomorrows with Hope) (Pearpoint et al, 1993). Using these tools, EPs can support staff to identify ambitions for change and break these down into achievable steps. In addition, EPs have a unique role utilising knowledge and process skills to upskill staff through consultation and supervision (Hawkins & Shohet, 1989; West & Idol, 1987). Through these processes, EPs can guide staff to consider policy and practice, and facilitate the development of policy which is

underpinned by ethos and values. Finally, EPs can share psychological knowledge with school staff by delivering training, developing guidance, and sharing resources.

The importance of working holistically and collaboratively is recognised within the final GT towards the successful implementation of TIP. Informed by the principles of Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems theory and the construct of holism (Mahmoudi et al, 2012), the GT foregrounds person-centred working informed by holistic assessment and multi-agency working. This should also include communication and collaboration with parents or carers. This has implications for EPs who, as external professionals, can work collaboratively and objectively with parents and professionals across different services. Their training and experience in the use of consultation models, particularly collaborative and eco-systemic models, means they are well placed to facilitate positive working relationships between systems, bridging the gap between home and school to encourage positive change for CYP (Diamanduros et al, 2018). Finally, EPs may also have direct involvement with CYP affected by trauma through casework, including offering holistic assessment, advice, and possible delivery of targeted intervention (Ashton & Roberts, 2006).

A final implication for EPs refers to their role in supporting school staff wellbeing. Literature reviewed in Chapter 5 identified that professionals working closely with CYP who have experienced trauma may experience an impact on their own wellbeing and may be at risk of secondary trauma (Buchanan et al, 2013; Hill, 2011; Howard, 2019). The GT recognises that supervision can offer a helpful protective factor against this, providing opportunity for professional learning, emotional containment, and restoration (BPS, 2010; Caringi et al, 2015). Currently, the participants of the current study acknowledged that supervision does not take place regularly or in a formal capacity within their school settings. As EPs receive training upon the purposes and techniques of supervision in their professional development, they can and should share their knowledge to enable schools to develop independence in embedding supervisory processes within their settings (BPS, 2010; Eggbeer et al, 2007). Finally, just as school staff need to be emotionally available, adequately knowledgeable, and professionally supported to implement TIP (Berger & Martin, 2021), these same principles apply to EPs in supporting schools, therefore

EPs themselves should be mindful of their own wellbeing and continue to access professional supervision themselves.

### **7.3.3 Dissemination of research findings**

Upon completion of this research project and in promotion of stakeholder engagement, I committed to share broad findings with participating individuals and schools, as well as the EPS, as outlined in section 3.3.1. For convenience and ease of distribution, I proposed to share findings in written format with Headteachers of the participating schools which could then be distributed among individual participants and other staff members as appropriate, however verbal feedback was offered if requested. Outcomes of the study will be shared verbally with the EPS during a whole-service meeting. To maintain participant and school anonymity, all findings shared will be broad and non-school or participant specific, and transcripts will not be shared. Throughout the process of completing this study, I maintained communication with the Principle EP (PEP) and Specialist Senior EP (SSEP) for vulnerable children to share its progress and ensure the project remained relevant in the context of the LA. Resulting from these conversations and directed by the agendas and aims of the LA SEND services, I agreed to share more detailed outcomes of the constructed GT with relevant professionals working within the education directorate, where they were working on initiatives that aligned with the aims of the research study focus. This includes sharing the GT with the SSEP for vulnerable children and VCET to inform joint writing of guidance for settings on developing relational policy, sharing results of the potential behavioural presentations of complex trauma with members of the Behavioural Support Team to inform their direct involvement and advice, and finally working collaboratively with the SSEP for SEMH and Mental Health Support Team on an initiative to promote systemic TIP. In line with national contexts which indicate TIP is gaining considerable traction in UK schools as detailed in section 2.3, conversations and initiatives to embed this work are gaining momentum in the LA in which this research was conducted, thus it is hoped that disseminating the outcomes to appropriate professionals will underpin and inform this movement.



## 7.4 Methodological evaluation – Part 2

An initial outline of the steps taken to improve the quality of the current study, as informed by Charmaz's (2014) evaluation criteria, was presented in section 3.6. Following completion of data collection and analysis it is important that the evaluation criteria is revisited to critically reflect upon the study's credibility, originality, resonance, and usefulness. This is presented in Table 7.1 and should be considered alongside the measures presented in section 3.6.

<u>Evaluation Criteria</u>	<u>Outcomes</u>
Credibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Listening to recordings of focus groups and interviews as well as completing initial and focused coding by hand facilitated an intimate knowledge of the data collected.</li><li>• Examples of reflexive processes engaged with, including the use of memoing, evidence my close interactions with the data and the increasing levels of abstraction as the study developed (Appendix 14).</li><li>• The identified focused codes, categories, and resultant GT are rooted within the data collected, demonstrated through a transparency of analysis process (Appendix 10, 11, 12 and 15).</li></ul>
Originality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The distinct contribution of this research study, as well as the implications for practice, are outlined in section 7.3. Drawing these areas together, the current study offers a unique insight into the field of TIP in education, culminating in a conceptualised framework for whole-school practice.</li><li>• The adopted methodology of constructivist GT and the use of the constant comparative</li></ul>

Resonance	<p>method facilitated a rigorous approach to research (Charmaz, 2014).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Data collected through focus groups with professionals in various roles ensured the participant sample was reflective of school staff populations and their experiences within the context of their setting.</li> <li>• During my research journey, the constructed categories and final GT were shared with my university tutor, trainee EPs, and colleagues within the EPS. They shared that the findings were reflective and resonant of their professional experience working with complex trauma in education.</li> </ul>
Usefulness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The outcomes of the current study have several implications for practice for EPs and teaching staff which are identified in section 7.3.2. Recommendations for future research are also highlighted in section 7.5.</li> <li>• Through dissemination of the research findings as discussed in section 7.3.3, colleagues within the EPS identified several ways in which the final GT may be taken forward in line with LA agendas, which is a testament to the usefulness of this study.</li> </ul>

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**Table 7.1 - Table indicating measures taken to improve the quality of the current study, informed by Charmaz's (2014) evaluation criteria.**

### **7.5 Strengths, Limitations, and Future Research**

The research questions explored in the current study are as follows:

1. What are secondary school staff's understandings of trauma-informed practice and its implications for their role?

2. What are the barriers to implementing trauma-informed approaches at a whole-school level, according to school staff's perspectives?

These questions offered helpful guidance in the direction of this research, including choice of appropriate methodology, data collection strategies, development of semi-structured focus group schedules, and in directing the discussion as it developed during focus groups. The outcomes of this study as presented in Chapters 4 and 6 include the construction of seven conceptual categories and the development of a theoretically informed GT, which offer appropriate and relevant answers to these questions. Upon reflection, the final categories and conceptualised GT reflect not only school staff's understandings of TIP and the perceived barriers to implementation, but their experiences of working with complex childhood trauma more broadly which is not directly reflected in the above research questions.

Perhaps an alternative phrasing of the first research question, reading 'What are secondary school staff's understandings and experiences of trauma-informed practice and its implications for their role?' may better reflect the outcomes of the current study. Having said this, GT methodologies recognise that due to its inductive nature and the requirement to be led by data, research questions should remain open and may evolve and change as a theory develops (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Overall, I consider that the choice of research questions was advantageous in the direction of this research and facilitating a theoretical understanding of the research topic.

Constructivist GT methodology was employed in this study to explore the research questions. As little research has been conducted into TIP in mainstream UK schools, adopting this methodology enabled me to approach the study without preconceptions or hypotheses, and facilitated an understanding of social phenomena which is grounded in data and real-life experiences (Chun Tie et al, 2019). Unlike alternative methods of qualitative research, as discussed in section 3.2.3, constructivist GT was advantageous in allowing me to move beyond descriptive research outcomes and develop a conceptualised understanding of a complex topic area (Charmaz, 2008; Mills et al, 2006). A further strength offered through the adoption of this methodology is the process of developing a GT through the rigorous iterations of data collection and analysis, resulting in a conceptualised framework for practice. With several identified implications as discussed in section 7.3, I consider that the application of

GT methodology was helpful in conducting research where outcomes would be directly applicable and informative for practice (Willig, 2013). However, the successes of this study are bound by the pressures of completing a doctoral thesis, and thus several limitations are recognized and discussed.

Guidance on constructivist GT does not dictate a recommended participant sample size but emphasises that researchers should strive to reach a point of data saturation (Charmaz, 2014). In the case of the current study, a sample of eighteen participants were recruited across four secondary schools in the LA, including one Headteacher recruited at the point of theoretical sampling. This was above theoretical suggestions for focus group numbers and sizes (Guest et al, 2016), allowing for varied discussions which enabled the construction of rich and detailed categories (Aldiabat & Le Navenec, 2018; Winlow et al, 2012). I was able to successfully recruit participants in a range of roles and with varying years of experience (see Table 3.2 and 3.3), which ensured a sample representative of a school staff population and outcomes which are relevant and applicable for practice (Boddy, 2016). However, this research is limited as it remains a small-scale qualitative study, with outcomes specific to mainstream secondary schools in one LA. The discussed experiences and perceptions of TIP are relative to a small group of participants and did not include early years provision, primary school, post-16 settings, or alternative provisions. Future research could broaden the participant sample to staff working in these settings or other LAs and explore potential differences in understanding and perceptions between different provisions or geographical areas. This would also offer the benefit of extending knowledge to reflect professionals' statutory duty to support CYP aged 0-25 in education (DfE & DoH, 2015).

A further limitation of the current study refers to the potential for participant bias. As highlighted below by a participant in FG3, those who volunteered to take part in the current study are likely to have done so due to a personal or professional interest in the topic area and are therefore more likely to value TIP in education.

*I think you've probably got [...] a skewed result here because you've obviously got three people who are actually interested in this aspect of practice. (FG3, P3, p. 14, 503-504)*

Similarly, due to the time pressures of completing a doctoral thesis, I was only able to recruit one Headteacher at the stage of theoretical sampling, which poses a threat to the credibility of this study (Charmaz, 2014). Future research, with increased resources and greater capacity for recruitment could seek a broader sample which may allow for the identification of additional categories that contribute to a fuller exploration of TIP in education. Alternatively, whilst my experience of using constructivist GT was that it was well aligned with my own epistemological and ontological standpoint and facilitated a rich, theoretical insight into the social phenomenon studied in this research, it did limit the number of participants I was able to recruit and in turn the quantity of data I was able to collect. Future research underpinned by post-positivist epistemologies might consider adopting an alternative methodology such as a mixed-method questionnaire which may be easily distributed to a large participant sample, whilst still allowing for the collection of data which reflects individuals' differing experiences and views (Cohen et al, 2013; Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017). Some researchers have suggested that GT methodologies can be enhanced when used alongside quantitative methods to produce rich and applicable outcomes (Birks & Mills, 2015).

The present study was concerned with the experiences of school staff when working with complex trauma and did not collect data from other members of a school community including parents and carers, or CYP themselves, thus its findings are limited to one population group. Whilst it is recognised that staff experiences and interactions are likely to impact upon student experiences (Roffey, 2012; Bergin & Bergin, 2009), it is not possible to understand the perceptions of CYP, nor parents and carers, without speaking directly with them and gathering data which explores their perceptions. Future research may extend understanding by offering insight into the views of CYP, their parents and carers, or offering a triangulation of data across populations.

## **7.6 Researcher reflexivity**

The current research study adopted a constructivist GT methodology to explore school staff understanding and perceptions of TIP, and their perceived barriers to its implementation at a whole-school level. To reflect my close interaction with the data and iterative processes engaged with towards the construction of the final GT

(Charmaz, 2014), and in line with my own social constructionist epistemological standpoint, I chose to write in first person as indicated in Chapter 1 and section 3.2.2. Although a first person narrative has been criticised as less formal and scientifically fluent in academic writing, some authors have argued it is more appropriate than third person in qualitative research, as first person offers greater recognition of and reflection upon the social aspects of research and a researcher's interactions with data collection and analysis (Webb, 1992; Davies, 2012). Furthermore, research has suggested that use of the first person can offer a helpful role in postgraduate study by demonstrating the juxtaposition of student and expert, allowing an author to demonstrate their knowledge and skill in academic research whilst giving opportunity for increased reflection upon their own learning and development (Hyland & Jiang, 2017). I consider that use of the first person, alongside memoing, supported a rigorous and reflexive approach to studying the social phenomena of the current research topic (Charmaz, 2014).

It is also important to discuss the threats to reflexivity which occurred during the research process. My doctoral training and role as a TEP has included some practical and theoretical learning about complex trauma and the roles of educational professionals. If not monitored, this could have limited reflexivity and led to pre-conceptions about the possible outcomes of this study, in turn limiting the 'purity' of the GT and increasing risk of researcher bias. In addition, my views may have influenced my interviewing approach and focus. To ensure awareness and mitigation of these risks, methodological use of in-vivo codes, memoing, and the constant comparative method allowed interpretation to remain close to the data and limit my influence of data gathering procedures, as exemplified in Figure 7.1. These processes facilitated reflexivity and, in turn, protected analysis against influence of preconceptions and assumptions as far as is possible.

**Memo: Focus groups and leading questions**

**09.11.22**

Upon transcribing the first focus group, I felt my questions had been less open than I had intended, and I had included leading additions to the prepared questions which I felt influenced participant responses. I also noticed myself agreeing with participant responses where I perhaps should have given a more neutral response. Whilst my epistemology of social constructionism recognises the constructions of the researcher will influence data collection and analysis, I wanted to insure this was limited as much as possible, so will adapt my questions and responses in the next focus group.

**Figure 7.1 - Memo reflecting upon the nature of questioning used during the first focus group**

**7.7 Chapter Summary**

With the aims of exploring the social phenomenon of school staffs' understanding and perceptions of TIP, and the perceived barriers to implementing this at a whole-school level, the current study adopted a constructivist GT methodology to facilitate an inductive, conceptual understanding. Having presented the findings and subsequent developed GT of the current study, this chapter considered the outcomes of the study contextualised with literature discussed in Chapter 2 and discussed its unique contributions and implications in research and practice. Following this, an evaluation of the research validity and quality, and the strengths, limitations and considerations for future research, was presented. A discussion of researcher reflexivity concluded this chapter. The final chapter will present a concluding summary of the current study.

## 8.0 Conclusion

Despite recognition that schools are best placed to offer early intervention and support for young people who have experienced trauma, very little research has been conducted into the use of TIP in UK schools, nor the perceptions of school staff regarding the approach (Spence et al, 2021). This qualitative study aimed to fill this gap in research literature, by exploring school staff's current understanding of TIP, the implications for their role, and their perceived barriers to implementing the approach at a whole-school level. Positioned within a building body of literature which advocates for the adoption of trauma-informed, relational practice in schools, the current study sought to explore the individual yet interacting perspectives of school staff through rigorous and inductive research methods. Constructivist GT methodology (Charmaz, 2014) was employed with a view to extend theoretical understanding and offer a unique contribution to inform professional practice in schools and educational psychology, as well as LA service level agendas.

Following data collection and analysis processes, seven conceptual categories were identified which directly informed the development of this study's GT. Findings were theoretically sensitised through reviewing relevant literature which discussed theories of attachment and belonging, psychological frameworks for understanding behaviour, staff wellbeing, and holistic assessment. This facilitated the construction of the study's GT, entitled 'Trauma-Informed Practice in Education: A Framework for Schools', which offers a theoretically informed framework for whole-school TIP. The GT promotes the development of a shared, whole-school ethos which underpins policy and practice. Through supervision and CPD opportunities, staff are supported and upskilled to operationalise the whole-school ethos by fostering a sense of safety and belonging, prioritising positive relationships, developing a holistic understanding of complex trauma, and safeguarding students' emotional and physical wellbeing.

The quality of the current study was assessed according to Charmaz's (2014) evaluative criteria of credibility, resonance, usefulness, and originality, and the identified limitations were presented. Some limitations of the study include its relatively small participant sample which was limited to secondary schools in one LA, and a limited time to dedicate to theoretical sampling, which was a threat to the study's credibility. Future research could consider adopting alternative



methodologies, such a mixed-method approach, to reach a greater number of participants and offer further insight upon TIP in education. Overall, methodological evaluation indicated this study is of good quality and validity, improved through my application of reflexive measures such as memoing throughout the research process.

The constructed GT provides a theoretical framework that not only illuminates understanding of the social phenomenon of the focused topic, but which can support developments of TIP in educational settings. This has several identified implications for the professional practice of school staff and EPs. For example, it is proposed that TIP should be embedded at a whole-school level and underpinned by shared values, ethos, and culture. This research recognises that EPs have a unique role in supporting schools to initiate and maintain these systemic changes, and work collaboratively with schools, external professionals, parents, and young people to facilitate positive change. Ultimately, I consider that the outcomes of this research have both practical and theoretical implications which can improve the educational experiences of young people who have experienced trauma, but also the wellbeing and practice of their teachers.

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## Appendix 1. Ethics Committee Approval Outcome



The University of  
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SJ/tp

Ref: **S1426**

Wednesday 18<sup>th</sup> May 2022

Dear Aisha Hackett-Evans and Sarah Godwin,

### **Ethics Committee Review**

Thank you for submitting an account of your proposed research '*School staff's understanding and perceptions of trauma-informed approaches and the barriers to implementing these at a whole school level: A grounded theory exploration*'

That proposal has now been reviewed and we are pleased to tell you it has met with the Committee's approval.

### **However:**

**Please note the following comments from our reviewers;**

#### **Reviewer One:**

- The applicant ensure that interviews are stored in a GDPR compliant location (e.g., university OneDrive rather than on the password protected computer of the researcher) and delete the recordings as soon as transcription has been completed and these are no longer needed for analysis.
- The standard line in the consent form about sharing data with other researchers if it is anonymized. Consider whether that is possible in this context and if not, remove it, and if you keep it in, consider discussing why/where/how the data would be shared with other researchers (open science websites for publications or at the request of the author).
- I recommend adding the University of Nottingham logo to the recruitment letters if possible.

Final responsibility for ethical conduct of your research rests with you or your supervisor. The Codes of Practice setting out these responsibilities have been published by the British Psychological Society and the University Research Ethics Committee. If you have any concerns whatever during the conduct of your research then you should consult those Codes of Practice. The Committee should be informed immediately should any participant complaints or adverse events arise during the study.

Independently of the Ethics Committee procedures, supervisors also have responsibilities for the risk assessment of projects as detailed in the safety pages of the University web site. Ethics Committee approval does not alter, replace, or remove those responsibilities, nor does it certify that they have been met.



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Yours sincerely

*Professor Stephen Jackson  
Chair, Ethics Committee*

## **Appendix 2. Email sent to LA EPs at the stage of purposeful sampling**

Hi all,

As part of my doctoral training requirements with the University of Nottingham I am aiming to conduct a piece of research exploring school staff's understanding and perceptions of trauma-informed approaches and the perceived barriers to implementing these at a whole-school level. I hope my findings will offer the Local Authority (LA) and Educational Psychology Service an insight upon which to inform future training and support for schools in this area.

I am emailing to ask if you could suggest to me any secondary schools within the LA that might be interested in working with me and participating in this research. As the research is exploratory and concerned with staff's understanding and perceptions, the schools do not need to be actively using trauma informed approaches currently, so suggestions do not need to be made on this basis.

As guided by my methodology (grounded theory) and to ensure data saturation occurs, I am hoping to recruit a minimum of 6 members of staff who may participate in interviews or focus groups led by myself. I aim to have a representative sample of different staff working in schools, including a member of senior leadership team, SENCo, class teacher and teaching assistant. I hope to recruit staff from a number of different schools, so that a broader picture of staff's understanding and perceptions across the LA can be obtained.

Following your suggestions, I may or may not send an email to the Head Teacher of these schools to enquire as to whether they would be interested in taking part in my research. Please note that at this stage of recruitment, participation is not guaranteed.

If you can suggest schools that you think would be willing to become involved as part of this research, I would be very grateful if you could contact me via this email address. Also, please do get in touch if you have any questions or would like to chat further about this research.

Thank you for taking the time to read this email and considering which schools may be willing to take part in my research. I look forward to hearing from you.

Best wishes,

Aisha Hackett-Evans  
Trainee Educational Psychologist

## Appendix 3. Participant Invitation Letter

School of Psychology

Invitation Letter



The University of  
**Nottingham**

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*Ethics Approval Number: S1426*

*Researcher:* Aisha Hackett-Evans; [aisha.hackett-evans@nottingham.ac.uk](mailto:aisha.hackett-evans@nottingham.ac.uk).

*Supervisor:* Dr Sarah Godwin; [sarah.godwin@nottingham.ac.uk](mailto:sarah.godwin@nottingham.ac.uk)

Dear Sir/Madam,

My name is Aisha Hackett-Evans, I am a current third year Trainee Educational Psychologist studying at the University of Nottingham and on placement with XXX Psychology Service. As part of my training requirements whilst on placement with the psychology service, I will be carrying out a piece of research within children's services, which I invite you to consider taking part in.

Research Title: ***School staff's understanding and perceptions of trauma-informed approaches and the barriers to implementing these at a whole-school level: A grounded theory exploration.***

I am interested in developing an understanding of what teachers know about trauma informed practices, and what they consider to be the key barriers which may limit these approaches being implemented in schools at a policy or whole-school level. Your contribution would be greatly appreciated.

If you agree to participate, you will be asked to take part in an interview or focus group discussion led by myself. Interviews or focus groups will take place in a private space volunteered by a participating school, or, if preferred, online via Microsoft Teams, and will last no more than one hour. You will be asked questions about your understanding of trauma informed approaches and your role in supporting students who have experienced trauma, as well as your perceptions of barriers that may be limiting schools' ability to implement trauma informed approaches at a whole-school level.

As the primary researcher, I will carry out the interviews or focus groups, analyse the data gathered and provide feedback to yourselves with regards to broad findings. These findings will not be participant or school-specific thus participant anonymity will be maintained. Full ethical considerations and details of the study will be shared with you before agreeing to

engage with the project.

If this is a research study that you would like to take part in, then please do contact me via this email address. Additionally, do not hesitate to contact me if you have any questions or require any additional information.

I can be contacted via email at:  
aisha.hackett-evans@nottingham.ac.uk

Any enquiries for my university supervisor can be directed to Dr Sarah Godwin at:  
Email: [sarah.godwin@nottingham.ac.uk](mailto:sarah.godwin@nottingham.ac.uk)

Thank you for taking the time to read this invitation and considering taking part in my research. I would be greatly appreciative of your participation in the research and look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely,  
Aisha Hackett-Evans  
Trainee Educational Psychologist

## Appendix 4. Participant Information Sheet

School of Psychology  
Participant Information Sheet



*Ethics Approval Number: S1426*

*Researcher:* Aisha Hackett-Evans; aisha.hackett-evans@nottingham.ac.uk.

*Supervisor:* Dr Sarah Godwin; sarah.godwin@nottingham.ac.uk

I am a Trainee Educational Psychologist studying at the University of Nottingham and on placement with XXX Educational Psychology Service. This is an invitation to take part in a research project I shall be conducting on school staff's understanding and perceptions of trauma-informed practice. Your contribution to my research would be greatly appreciated.

Before you decide if you wish to take part, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully.

Research Title: ***School staff's understanding and perceptions of trauma-informed approaches and the barriers to implementing these at a whole-school level: A grounded theory exploration.***

I am interested in developing an understanding of what teachers know about trauma informed practices, and what they consider to be the key barriers which may limit these approaches being implemented in schools at a policy or whole-school level. This will inform and enhance future support and training opportunities offered by the Local Authority and Educational Psychology Service, and ultimately improve the support we offer to young people who may have experienced trauma in their lifetime.

If you participate, you will be asked to take part in either an individual interview or a focus group led by myself. If focus groups are chosen, you will be asked to participate in a group discussion alongside up to 5 other participants, who may work in a different school setting to you. Interviews or focus groups will take place in a private space volunteered by a participating school, or if preferred, online via Microsoft Teams, and will last no more than one hour. You will be asked questions about your understanding of trauma informed approaches and your role in supporting students who have experienced trauma, as well as your perceptions of barriers that may be limiting schools' ability to implement trauma

informed approaches at a whole-school level. Once I have analysed the data, broad findings from the study will be fed back to you.

Participation in this study is totally voluntary and you are under no obligation to take part. You are free to withdraw at any point before or during the study. In addition, you have the right to ask for all, or specific parts of your data, to be withdrawn and destroyed up until your data has been processed. You have the right to decline to respond to any questions asked during the interview or focus group.

All data collected will be kept confidential and used for research purposes only. It will be stored in compliance with the Data Protection Act and University of Nottingham's Privacy Policy. Your Head Teacher will also know that you are taking part in this study. In the event of a safeguarding concern, either in relation to yourself or another person, your right to confidentiality will be overridden and school and local safeguarding protocols adhered to.

You will be debriefed at the end of the interview or focus group and provided opportunity to raise any concerns and ask questions you may have. To further ensure your wellbeing, I will provide you with my contact details, as well as details of alternative, confidential and anonymous support outlets which you may wish to use.

If you are interested in taking part in this study, please do contact me via the email address listed above. Similarly, if you have any questions or concerns, please don't hesitate to ask. We can also be contacted after your participation has concluded.

**If you have any complaints about the study, please contact:  
Stephen Jackson (Chair of Ethics Committee)  
stephen.jackson@nottingham.ac.uk**

## Appendix 5. Participant Consent Form

<b>School of Psychology</b> <b>Consent Form</b>
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*Title of Project*

***School staff's understanding and perceptions of trauma-informed approaches and the barriers to implementing these at a whole-school level: A grounded theory exploration.***

*Ethics Approval Number: S1426*

*Researcher: Aisha Hackett-Evans; aisha.hackett-evans@nottingham.ac.uk.*

*Supervisor: Dr Sarah Godwin; sarah.godwin@nottingham.ac.uk.*

The participant should answer these questions independently:

- Have you read and understood the Information Sheet? YES/NO
- Have you had the opportunity to ask questions about the study? YES/NO
- Have all your questions been answered satisfactorily (if applicable)? YES/NO
- Do you understand that you are free to withdraw from the study? YES/NO  
(at any time and without giving a reason)
- Do you agree to take part in the study? YES/NO

“This study has been explained to me to my satisfaction, and I agree to take part. I understand that I am free to withdraw at any time.”

Signature of the Participant:

Date:

Name (in block capitals):

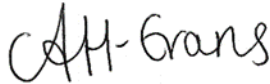
Job title:

Amount of time in role:

I have explained the study to the above participant and he/she has agreed to take part.

Signature of researcher:

Date:



Aisha Hackett-Evans  
Trainee Educational Psychologist



**Appendix 6. Table summarising the composition of focus groups and interview, including number of participants, job role, and years of experience in their current role.**

Focus Group Number or Interview	Participant Assigned Number (eg P1)	Gender Identity	Job role	Years of experience in their current role
1	P1	Male	Teaching Assistant	1
	P2	Female	Teaching Assistant	1
	P3	Female	Higher Level Teaching Assistant	3
	P4	Female	Teaching Assistant and SEMH tutor	2
2	P1	Female	Deputy Headteacher	5
	P2	Female	Class Teacher and Safeguarding and Child Protection Lead	1
	P3	Female	Maths Teacher	8
	P4	Female	Higher Level Teaching Assistant	5
	P5	Female	Teaching Assistant	2
3	P1	Female	Art Teacher	3
	P2	Female	Science Teacher	23
	P3	Female	Deputy Headteacher	2

4	P1	Male	Pastoral Head of Year	2
	P2	Female	SENCo	6
	P3	Female	Senior Learning Support Assistant	13
	P4	Female	Assistant Headteacher and Designated Safeguarding Lead	2
Interview	HT	Female	Executive Headteacher	10

## Appendix 7. Semi-Structured Focus Group Schedule

### Focus Group Schedule

#### **Introductions and co-construction of ground rules and contract.**

**The following areas will be explored as part of the main discussion. NB the researcher does not expect to ask all questions in each interview/focus group:**

#### ***Staff Understanding of Trauma***

1. What do you understand by the term 'trauma'?/ What does the term 'trauma' mean to you?
  - *Can you give some examples of potential causes of trauma among young people?*
  - *What do you think leads to trauma?*
  - *When might someone experience a traumatic event?*
2. What impacts can experiencing trauma have on children and young people?
  - *Short- and long-term impacts?*
3. How might you expect a child or young person who has experienced trauma to behave/present in school?

#### ***Staff perceptions of their role in supporting trauma affected students***

4. How has your role and experiences contributed to your understanding of trauma?
  - *Have you received any training/CPD which has informed your understanding?*
5. Tell me about your own role in supporting students who have experienced traumatic events.
  - *What do you feel your role is?/Do you feel you have a role in this?*
  - *What do you feel your responsibilities are?*
  - *What impacts upon your role in relation to supporting students who have experienced trauma? Eg. Time, resources, curriculum demands etc*
6. How confident do you feel in supporting students who have experienced trauma?
  - *What has enabled/contributed to this?*
  - *What might you need to feel more confident?*

#### ***Staff understanding of trauma informed practice***

7. Have you heard of trauma-informed practice? Tell me about your understanding of what this is?
  - *How might you define the term? Why?*
  - *What has contributed to your understanding of this?*
  - *Might other people think differently to you? Who/Why?*
8. Do you think trauma informed practice has value in schools? / Is this approach relevant to your role?
  - *Why/Why not?*

9. What does support for children who have experienced trauma look like in your school currently?/ Do you consider yourself/your school to be using a trauma-informed approach?
  - *In what ways? Can you give me an example?*
  - *At what level? Individual vs group vs whole-school*
  - *If so, what factors have enabled this?*
  - *If so, how do you find using this approach? What factors are facilitative/make this difficult?*
10. What might trauma-informed practice look like in schools? OR If we waved a magic wand and your school was implementing trauma-informed practice across all levels of provision, what might this look like?
  - *Prompt staff to think about practice at different levels, ie individual level, group/class level, whole-school/systemic level*
  - *How might trauma informed practice be reflected in school policy documents?*
  - *If I visited a school, how might I know that trauma informed approaches are being used? What might I see?*

***Perceived barriers to implementing trauma informed practice at a whole-school level***

11. Do you think a trauma informed behaviour policy would be helpful/relevant in your school?
  - *Why/Why not?*
12. What barriers can you think of to implementing a trauma informed policy/whole-school approach?
  - *You spoke about ... what do you think might be preventing achieving this?*
  - *What might you need to overcome these barriers? Support/changes*

**Closing statements**

1. Any further comments/thoughts you would like to add? Have we missed anything that feels important?
2. Do you have any questions or concerns?
3. Thank participants for their contribution and distribute debrief statements. Reiterate their rights and offer a final space for questions.
4. Explain next steps of research before dismissing the participant/s.

*NB questions in italics are to be used as prompts.*

## Appendix 8. Semi-Structured Focus Group Schedule, amended after Focus Group 1

### Semi-Structured Interview/Focus Group Schedule

Introductions and [for focus group] co-construction of ground rules and contract.

The following areas will be explored as part of the main discussion. NB the researcher does not expect to ask all questions in each

interview/focus group: *Broaden → Can you tell me everything you know about trauma?*

#### **Staff Understanding of Trauma**

1. What do you understand by the term 'trauma'?/ What does the term 'trauma' mean to you? *→ Do you think the concept of trauma is objective?*
  - *Can you give some example of potential causes of trauma among young people?*
  - *What do you think leads to trauma?*
  - *When might someone experience a traumatic event?*
2. What impacts can experiencing trauma have on children and young people?
  - *Short- and long-term impacts?* *prompt only* *→ explore in two domains*  
*← internal vs external*
3. How might you expect a child or young person who has experienced trauma to behave/present in school?

#### **Staff perceptions of their role in supporting trauma affected students**

4. How has your role and experiences contributed to your understanding of trauma? *professional*
  - *Have you received any training/CPD which has informed your understanding?*
5. Tell me about your own role in supporting students who have experienced traumatic events.
  - *What do you feel your role is?/Do you feel you have a role in this?*
  - *What do you feel your responsibilities are?*
  - *What impacts upon your role in relation to supporting students who have experienced trauma? Eg. Time, resources, curriculum demands etc*
6. How confident do you feel in supporting students who have experienced trauma?
  - *What has enabled/contributed to this?*
  - *What might you need to feel more confident?*

#### **Staff understanding of trauma informed practice**

6. Have you heard of trauma-informed practice? Tell me about your understanding of what this is?
  - *How might you define the term? Why?*
  - *What has contributed to your understanding of this?*
  - *Might other people think differently to you? Who/Why?*
8. Do you think trauma informed practice has value in schools? / Is this approach relevant to your role?
  - *Why/Why not?*
- \* 9. What does support for children who have experienced trauma look like in your school currently?/ Do you consider yourself/your school to be using a
  - 7. trauma-informed approach?
    - *In what ways? Can you give me an example?*

*Do you feel its important to be aware of any ACE's or traumatic events a young person may have experienced? - How would this inform your practice?*

*Do you  
How  
successful  
are these  
approaches?*

- Individual vs group working tensions?*
- At what level? Individual vs group vs whole school
  - If so, what factors have enabled this?
  - If so, how do you find using this approach? What factors are facilitative/make this difficult?
10. What might trauma-informed practice look like in schools? OR If we waved a magic wand and your school was implementing trauma-informed practice across all levels of provision, what might this look like?
- Prompt staff to think about practice at different levels, ie individual level, group/class level, whole school/systemic level
  - How might trauma informed practice be reflected in school policy documents?
  - If I visited a school, how might I know that trauma informed approaches are being used? What might I see?

**Perceived barriers to implementing trauma informed practice at a whole school level**

- \* 11. Do you think a trauma informed behaviour policy would be helpful/relevant in your school?
  - Why/Why not?
- 12. What barriers can you think of to implementing a trauma informed policy/whole school approach?
  - You spoke about ... what do you think might be preventing achieving this?
  - What might you need to overcome these barriers? Support/changes

**Closing statements**

1. Any further comments/thoughts you would like to add? Have we missed anything that feels important?
2. Do you have any questions or concerns?
3. Thank participants for their contribution and distribute debrief statements. Reiterate their rights and offer a final space for questions.
4. Explain next steps of research before dismissing the participant/s.

*NB questions in italics are to be used as prompts.*

## Appendix 9. Draft focus group schedule used and reflected upon during a small pilot study

Pilot 6. 11. 22

Ethics Submission Form Version 12 2018

**Semi-Structured Interview/Focus Group Schedule**

**Introductions and [for focus group] co-construction of ground rules and contract.**

**The following areas will be explored as part of the main discussion. NB the researcher does not expect to ask all questions in each interview/focus group:**

**Staff Understanding of Trauma**

1. What does the term 'trauma', mean to you? *potentially triggering - ask more neutral question eg 'What do you understand by...'*

2. What do you think leads to trauma?

3. What impacts can experiencing trauma have on children and young people?  
- Short- and long-term impacts?

4. How might you expect a child or young person who has experienced trauma to behave/present in school?

*Came up naturally in q1, add as a prompt - Also when in life might a trauma lead to complex trauma?*

**Staff perceptions of their role in supporting trauma affected students**

5. How has your role and experiences contributed to your understanding of trauma? *→ Prompt: training/CPD → Don't need to share personal experience.*

6. Tell me about your own role in supporting students who have experienced traumatic events.  
- What do you feel your role is?/Do you feel you have a role in this?  
- What do you feel your responsibilities are?  
- What impacts upon your role in relation to supporting students who have experienced trauma?

7. How confident do you feel in supporting students who have experienced trauma?  
- What has enabled/contributed to this?  
- What might you need to feel more confident?

*Helpful a, lots of varied roles + discussion*

**Staff understanding of trauma informed practice**

8. What does the term 'trauma-informed practice' mean to you?  
- How might you define the term? Why?  
- What has contributed to your understanding of this?  
- Might other people think differently to you? Who/Why?

9. What might trauma-informed practice look like in schools?  
- Prompt staff to think about practice at different levels, ie individual level, group/class level, whole school/systemic level  
- How might trauma informed practice be reflected in school policy documents?  
- If I visited a school, how might I know that trauma informed approaches are being used? What might I see?

10. Do you think trauma informed practice has value in schools?  
- Why/Why not?

*Could be hard to answer if no knowledge/experience, instead 'Have you heard of...'*

*Again could be hard to answer if no knowledge. → Start by asking what support is in place at your school*

*make more relevant to their school?*

*Helpful in drawing out if staff find TIP helpful*

*what works, what doesn't work*

**Perceived barriers to implementing trauma informed practice at a whole school level**

*Prompt to think about VS. behaviourist.*

*use this to pull out discussion of what 'ideal' / best practice looks like, is we miracle question?*

Merge with earlier q of what support is in place

11. Do you consider yourself/your school to be using a trauma-informed approach?

- *In what ways? Can you give me an example?*
- *At what level? Individual vs group vs whole school*
- *If so, what factors have enabled this?*
- *If so, how do you find using this approach? What factors are facilitative/make this difficult?*

12. Do you consider a trauma informed approach to be relevant/valuable in schools or for your role?

- *Why/Why not?*

13. Do you think a trauma informed behaviour policy would be helpful/relevant in your school?

- *Why/Why not?*

14. What barriers can you think of to implementing a trauma informed policy/whole school approach?

- *What might you need to overcome these barriers? Support/changes*

→ Repetitive of q 10 - delete?

→ may need egs / explaining what this is

→ Are there any impacts on staff wellbeing?

Ask staff  
to consider if  
their policy  
reflects  
their  
practice

#### Closing statements

1. Any further comments/thoughts you would like to add? Have we missed anything that feels important?
2. Do you have any questions or concerns?
3. Thank participants for their contribution and distribute debrief statements. Reiterate their rights and offer a final space for questions.
4. Explain next steps of research before dismissing the participant/s.

*NB questions in italics are to be used as prompts.*



## Appendix 10. Example of Initial Coding of Focus Group 1

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Making 'reasonable arrangements understanding students needs</li> </ul>	<p>We already have um, reasonable arrangements for students that have got certain difficulties anyway. Okay. Do you know what I mean? Um, so I think that's not.</p> <p>P1</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Making 'adaptations' - In vivo</li> </ul>	<p>Like adaptations.</p> <p>P3</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Positive reflections on behaviour policy(?)</li> </ul>	<p>Yeah. Yeah. So that's not too bad to be quite honest with you. On some students.</p> <p>P1</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• One page profiles</li> <li>• understanding students needs</li> <li>• Knowing how to respond / being prepared / recognising impacts.</li> </ul>	<p>You get like the one-page profile sent out to like the teachers and the TAs and it tells you on there if like, Oh yeah, by the way, if they do this then don't worry because they have this that's happened to them.</p> <p>P2</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Time out pass</li> <li>• Accessing a 'safe space'</li> </ul>	<p>And somebody can have a pass to come out of class if needed to access The Link and chat and chill in safe spaces.</p> <p><u>Interviewer</u></p> <p><u>Amazing. Um, so you've touched on some of the adaptations. Is there any other like, support mechanisms in place then for those more vulnerable young people?</u></p> <p>P2</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Support from external professionals</li> </ul>	<p>Do counsellors come in, isn't their a counsellor that comes in for some students?</p> <p>P3</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Support from external professionals</li> </ul>	<p>Some yeah, we have Mind and we have SMASH as well and I do SEMH groups and I do ELSA.</p> <p>P2</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• running intervention group</li> </ul>	<p>I there is a one to one counsellor that comes in too.</p> <p>P3</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Support from external professionals</li> </ul>	<p>Yeah, I think he's a part of Mind or from their,.</p> <p>P4</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Support from external professionals</li> </ul>	<p>Yeah so from Mind, there is one to one and another group.</p> <p><u>Interviewer</u></p> <p><u>Thank you. So, um, lots of different good stuff then that's going on. So, do you think there's anything that could be improved on, on what's going on in school at the moment or anything that could be done differently?</u></p> <p>P4</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Facilitators</li> <li>• increased time / capacity</li> <li>• increased staff members</li> </ul>	<p>More time and more staff &lt;laugh&gt;</p> <p>P3</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• increased time</li> </ul>	<p>&lt;laugh&gt; Yeah other than time &lt;laugh&gt;..</p> <p>P1</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Accessing resources</li> </ul>	<p>Maybe resources I think,.</p> <p>P3</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• understanding students needs</li> <li>• understanding students needs</li> <li>• Responding to concerns / incidents</li> <li>• Accessing staff support</li> </ul>	<p>I mean we're all pretty aware of like the students that we have and what's going on with our students, you know what I mean? So if there is a problem, there's always somebody in school you can go to or what have you.</p> <p>P4</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Approach not 'fitting' student needs</li> <li>• one size doesn't fit all</li> <li>• Differentiating approaches(?)</li> </ul>	<p>Sometimes what you're doing doesn't fit the student you know. It doesn't all fit all does it, you know, It depends on the student as well, doesn't it?</p> <p>P1</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Finding 'something that works for everyone'</li> </ul>	<p>Yeah. It's hard to find something that works for everyone.</p> <p>P4</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Agreeing</li> <li>• Responding to incidents / events</li> </ul>	<p>For everybody. Yeah. Yeah. I think sometimes you, you've just got to look at what, what that student's doing now and</p>

7

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Responding based on context / behaviour</li> <li>• looking at / <del>seeing</del> reviewing policies</li> <li>• readjusting behaviour policies</li> <li>• Impacts of covid-19</li> <li>• New experiences / new responses</li> </ul>	<p>how, how they're behaving to know how to respond. And I think behavior policies, I think they always need looking at and readjusting because we've just like had the covid pandemic and that's gonna affect the students in many different ways that we've not had before.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Shared 'trauma experience'</li> </ul>	<p>P2 Yeah. In a way that's a trauma experience that we've all had.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increasing mental health needs</li> <li>• Comparing to previous years / cohorts</li> </ul>	<p>P3 We've, I mean there's more mental health needs now with students than we've had for years.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Media coverage</li> </ul>	<p>P4 Definitely I mean it's just been on the news, hasn't it?</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Acknowledging importance / value of approach</li> </ul>	<p><u>Interviewer</u> Yeah. The, the stats are quite scary to read aren't they?</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Accessing 'courses'</li> <li>• Refreshing knowledge / learning</li> </ul>	<p>P1 Yeah. And I guess that's what makes all this so important.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ongoing training</li> </ul>	<p><u>Interviewer</u> Okay. And is there anything in terms of, um, support for staff or training that you think might support yourselves or your school that we've not touched on already?</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• staying up to date</li> <li>• Being aware of changes / ongoing training</li> </ul>	<p>P4 I think always doing courses would, would help and refresh.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Recognising / Acknowledging Value</li> </ul>	<p>P1 Yeah, just ongoing.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 'Especially on teenagers'</li> <li>→ facilitating</li> </ul>	<p>P4 And as I say, if new things are added, you know, or things have changed, we can keep learning. So ongoing training. It's not a bad thing at all is it?</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Accessing supervision</li> <li>• Accessing supervision</li> </ul>	<p><u>Interviewer</u> No, definitely not.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Expressing surprise (?) at lack of supervision (?)</li> </ul>	<p>P4 Especially on teenagers. Well any student really, I suppose. But.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Unaware of support available</li> </ul>	<p>P2 Yeah, I think supervision as well. I mean, I've been here a year, I've not had, um, a one to one supervision.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Talking to peers</li> <li>• Time constraints / incidental supervision</li> </ul>	<p>P4 Have you not?</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Time constraints / support from senior staff</li> <li>• incidental supervision</li> </ul>	<p>P2 I mean, does it take place? I'm not aware of it.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• incidental supervision / check in opportunities</li> </ul>	<p><u>Interviewer</u> Okay. So do you get opportunities to talk to each other or to more senior members of staff about your roles?</p>
	<p>P4 I mean, we can talk to each other about as much as you want, incidentally but, time constraints.</p>
	<p>P3 Yeah that's the time thing and we can talk to higher members of staff, yeah, but it's all in, it's very much all in passing isn't it?</p>
	<p>P1 It's just like you walk past them and get a little quick hello, you okay.</p>
	<p>P3</p>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• lack of <sup>→ barrier</sup> supervision</li> <li>• incidental supervision</li> <li>• seeking supervision</li> <li>• Accessing supervision</li> <li>• Agreeing</li> <li>• Agreeing</li> <li>• Agreeing</li> <li>• Clarifying <del>the</del> question.</li> <li>• Needs led approaches/resources (?)</li> <li>• <del>Can't</del> unable to answer q</li> <li>• Unaware of pupil needs</li> <li>• Emphasis on understanding needs</li> <li>• Getting to know CYP</li> <li>• Getting to know CYP</li> <li>• Experiencing shock (teacher)</li> <li>• Unaware of pupil needs</li> <li>• Getting to know CYP</li> <li>• Working directly with CYP</li> <li>• Feeling inexperienced</li> <li>• Getting to know each other</li> <li>• Building positive relationships</li> <li>• Anticipating responses</li> <li>• Diffusing a situation / responding to incidents</li> <li>• Gaining information of students</li> <li>• one page profiles</li> <li>• Developing awareness (of need) / of students</li> <li>• Developing <del>ing</del> awareness of all pupils</li> <li>• Respecting confidentiality</li> <li>• Having knowledge of CYP experiences / contexts</li> <li>• Having knowledge of CYP experiences / contexts</li> </ul>	<p>Yeah. Its never a downtime debrief. It's always just, incidental, yeah.</p> <p>P4 But I suppose if you asked senior member of staff, they would give you the time.</p> <p>P3/ P2 Yeah they would.</p> <p>P4 If you really needed it.</p> <p>P3 Yeah.</p> <p><u>Interviewer</u> Okay so that would be a helpful thing if you had those set opportunities?</p> <p>P4 Yeah it would.</p> <p><u>Interviewer</u> Okay. Fab, so supervision would be good. Training would be good. Is there anything around like access to resources or do you feel what you've got at the moment is, enough?</p> <p>P3 Resources for what though?</p> <p><u>Interviewer</u> Well, I guess anything, for supporting young people who've experienced trauma primarily, but if there's anything else that you feel like would help to do your jobs better generally.</p> <p>P4 I suppose we'd only know that if it came up with a pupil really wouldn't we so it's a difficult one to answer I think.</p> <p>P1 It is, Yeah. Cause you don't know who you'll have, what they need, so it's sort of like less important what you've got, but you just gotta get to know them really. Sort of like once you get to know them, you know how they approach things and cuz there's always that shock when you first meet 'em. It's like, oh well what they gonna be like and then you actually get to know them, it's like, oh, okay then I see. Cause the main person I'm with, um, at first it was just like, I've never done anything like this before and now it's sort of just like we've just gotten used to each other and more comfortable. So now it's sort of like, I know what they're gonna do before they do it.</p> <p>P4 And then you can diffuse that situation and respond in a better way.</p> <p>P2 And I think, I do think that there's information on the one-page profiles, but like, because we're usually assigned to different students, you have a good awareness of that student. But I think sometimes it's good to have a good awareness of them all because we come into contact with them at breaks and things like that. And I know there's always, you know, rules, around confidentiality, but I think sometimes we could do with a little bit more background.</p> <p>P4 Information, knowledge of important things. Yeah.</p>
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<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sharing information</li> <li>• Acknowledging good practice</li> <li>• Students sharing information / students confiding in staff</li> <li>• Being unaware of students needs - barrier</li> <li>• <del>Act</del></li> <li>• Sharing information</li> <li>• Not working directly / working indirectly with CYP / Responding to incidents</li> <li>• Understanding behaviour as communication (?)</li> <li>• Adapting behaviour management approach / technique / response</li> <li>• Issuing written warnings</li> <li>• Reaching to traumatic experience</li> <li>• Developing awareness / Having knowledge of CYP experiences</li> <li>• Agreeing - <sup>doubt?</sup></li> <li>• Not understanding responses / behaviours (student)</li> <li>• Being unsure how to respond (adult)</li> <li>• Working directly with CYP</li> <li>• Giving examples of trauma / current involvement</li> <li>• Experiencing loss / bereavement</li> <li>• Witnessing suicide</li> <li>• Displacement of home</li> <li>• Demonstrating self-harm (students)</li> <li>• Impacts of trauma (fear)</li> <li>• Reacting to trauma / past experiences</li> <li>• Agreeing</li> <li>• Being unaware of CYP experiences</li> <li>• Enforcing / using behaviourist response</li> <li>• Approaches being unhelpful</li> <li>• <sup>- in view</sup> 'Not knowing' / Being unaware of CYP experiences</li> <li>• Sharing information / Having 'debriefs'</li> <li>• Agreeing</li> <li>• Referring to school systems / IT software</li> <li>• Not able to access information</li> <li>• Not knowing / Being unaware of knowledge of CYP experiences / context.</li> </ul>	<p>P2 And I think they are starting to do that a little bit. Cause it was really good what you did with what you knew about a student.</p> <p>P3 I only found that out because the student had literally confided in me. So therefore it, it's like what I mean is you don't know these things unless they tell you, so it's difficult.</p> <p>P2 Yeah and it is important to share information, so if we see, even though we're not working within one to one or in a classroom, if we see them about and we see certain behaviours then I think for a lot of TAs, it makes them stop and think, oh well you're not just being rude, you're not just being this. And then like you say, you can use a different, uh, behaviour management technique, you know? Don't go straight in there issuing written warnings for doing this, that and the other, if that child is reacting to a traumatic experience.</p> <p>P1 We need more, more awareness. Yeah, yeah.</p> <p>P3 That's a good point actually.</p> <p>P1 You don't want the child to think like, you know, oh, why are they doing this? Like, I dunno why I am myself, like.</p> <p>P3 There's another child that I'm dealing with that's that her mum passed away about five, six months ago from a suicide overdose. So now both her and her sister live with Gran. But Gran was in hospital two weeks ago. So of course her natural reaction is, Oh my God, is gran gonna come out? So now she's literally torn her wrist up. Do you know what I mean?</p> <p>P2 Yeah exactly say for example, that student is doing something that they shouldn't in a reaction to the trauma.</p> <p>P4 Yes. Yeah.</p> <p>P2 If, if we're not aware, you might go down the behaviour sanction route, like what you said and that really isn't gonna be helpful for her.</p> <p>P3 Not at all.</p> <p>P2 So I think there is, to me there's a bit of a loophole of not knowing. I know you can't always remember. Everything, but I think we should have more debriefs about students.</p> <p>P4 I agree with you there and also, everything is on CPOMs, you see, and not everybody is allowed, not allowed to access it, see.</p> <p>P3 But at the same time you don't always know everything but certain things you do.</p>
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## Appendix 11. Example of Focused Coding of Focus Group 1

<p>Making reasonable adjustments</p> <p>Knowledge of children and young people's experiences</p> <p>Respite opportunities</p> <p>Working with external professionals</p> <p>Group intervention</p> <p>one to one intervention</p> <p>working with external professionals</p> <p>Lack of time</p> <p>Access</p>	<p>Yeah exactly</p> <p><u>Interviewer</u> Okay, so um, if we move on to thinking about supporting schools with policies like their behaviour policies, and how we can link behaviour policies with supporting children who've experienced trauma or adverse experiences. Um, I wondered what your thoughts were on the behaviour policy in general in your school and how effective you think that might be for young people who've experienced trauma.</p> <p>P3 We already have um, reasonable arrangements for students that have got certain difficulties anyway. Okay. Do you know what I mean? Um, so I think that's not.</p> <p>P1 Like adaptations.</p> <p>P3 Yeah. Yeah. So that's not too bad to be quite honest with you. On some students.</p> <p>P1 You get like the one-page profile sent out to like the teachers and the TAs and it tells you on there if like, Oh yeah, by the way, if they do this then don't worry because they have this that's happened to them.</p> <p>P2 And somebody can have a pass to come out of class if needed to access [redacted] and chat and chill in safe spaces.</p> <p><u>Interviewer</u> Amazing. Um, so you've touched on some of the adaptations. Is there any other like, support mechanisms in place then for those more vulnerable young people?</p> <p>P2 Do counsellors come in, isn't their a counsellor that comes in for some students?</p> <p>P3 Some yeah, we have Mind and we have SMASH as well and I do SEMH groups and I do ELSA.</p> <p>P2 I there is a one to one counsellor that comes in too.</p> <p>P3 Yeah, I think he's a part of Mind or from their,.</p> <p>P4 Yeah so from Mind, there is one to one and another group.</p> <p><u>Interviewer</u> Thank you. So, um, lots of different good stuff then that's going on. So, do you think there's anything that could be improved on, on what's going on in school at the moment or anything that could be done differently?</p> <p>P4 More time and more staff &lt;laugh&gt;</p> <p>P3 &lt;laugh&gt; Yeah other than time &lt;laugh&gt;..</p> <p>P1 Maybe resources I think,.</p> <p>P3</p>
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knowledge of CP experiences	I mean we're all pretty aware of like the students that we have and what's going on with our students, you know what I mean? So if there is a problem, there's always somebody in school you can go to or what have you. P4
subjective nature of trauma	Sometimes what you're doing doesn't fit the student you know. It doesn't all fit all does it, you know, it depends on the student as well, doesn't it? P1
subjective nature of trauma	Yeah. It's hard to find something that works for everyone. P4
Working flexibly	For everybody. Yeah. Yeah. I think sometimes you, you've just got to look at what, what that student's doing now and how, how they're behaving to know how to respond. And I think behavior policies, I think they always need looking at and readjusting because we've just like had the covid pandemic and that's gonna affect the students in many different ways that we've not had before. P2
Changing policies and priorities	Yeah. In a way that's a trauma experience that we've all had. P3
Impacts of covid-19	We've, I mean there's more mental health needs now with students than we've had for years. P4
High levels of need among students	Definitely I mean it's just been on the news, hasn't it? <u>Interviewer</u> Yeah. The, the stats are quite scary to read aren't they. P1
Recognising TIP as valuable and important	Yeah. And I guess that's what makes all this so important. <u>Interviewer</u> <u>Okay. And is there anything in terms of, um, support for staff or training that you think might support yourselves or your school that we've not touched on already?</u> P4
ongoing CPD	I think always doing courses would, would help and refresh. P1
Accessing training	Yeah, just ongoing. P4
Accessing supervision	And as I say, if new things are added, you know, or things have changed, we can keep learning. So ongoing training. It's not a bad thing at all is it? <u>Interviewer</u> <u>No, definitely not.</u> P4
consistency of approaches	Especially on teenagers. Well any student really, I suppose. But. P2
	Yeah, I think supervision as well. I mean, I've been here a year, I've not had, um, a one to one supervision. P4
	Have you not? P2
	I mean, does it take place? I'm not aware of it.

Accessing supervision

Accessing supervision

Accessing supervision

Accessing supervision

Lack of time

Interviewer

Okay. So do you get opportunities to talk to each other or to more senior members of staff about your roles?

P4

I mean, we can talk to each other about as much as you want, incidentally but, time constraints.

P3

Yeah that's the time thing and we can talk to higher members of staff, yeah, but it's all in, it's very much all in passing isn't it?

P1

It's just like you walk past them and get a little quick hello, you okay.

P3

Yeah. Its never a downtime debrief. It's always just, incidental, yeah.

P4

But I suppose if you asked senior member of staff, they would give you the time.

P3/P2

Yeah they would.

P4

If you really needed it.

P3

Yeah.

Interviewer

Okay so that would be a helpful thing if you had those set opportunities?

P4

Yeah it would.

Interviewer

Okay. Fab, so supervision would be good. Training would be good. Is there anything around like access to resources or do you feel what you've got at the moment is, enough?

P3

Resources for what though?

Interviewer

Well, I guess anything, for supporting young people who've experienced trauma primarily, but if there's anything else that you feel like would help to do your jobs better generally.

P4

I suppose we'd only know that if it came up with a pupil really wouldn't we so it's a difficult one to answer I think.

P1

It is, Yeah. Cause you don't know who you'll have, what they need, so it's sort of like less important what you've got, but you just gotta get to know them really. Sort of like once you get to know them, you know how they approach things and cuz there's always that shock when you first meet 'em. It's like, oh well what they gonna be like and then you actually get to know them, it's like, oh, okay then I see. Cause the main person I'm with, um, at first it was just like, I've never done anything like this before and now it's sort of just like we've just gotten used to each other

Getting to know children and young people

Adopting a child-led approach	and more comfortable. So now it's sort of like, I know what they're gonna do before they do it.
Knowledge of CYP experiences	P4 And then you can diffuse that situation and respond in a better way.
Knowledge of CYP experiences	P2 And I think, I do think that there's information on the one-page profiles, but like, because we're usually assigned to different students, you have a good awareness of that student. But I think sometimes it's good to have a good awareness of them all because we come into contact with them at breaks and things like that. And I know there's always, you know, rules, around confidentiality, but I think sometimes we could do with a little bit more background.
Receiving and responding to disclosures	P4 Information, knowledge of important things. Yeah.
Sharing information	P2 And I think they are starting to do that a little bit. Cause it was really good what you did with what you knew about a student.
Making reasonable adjustments	P3 I only found that out because the student had literally confided in me. So therefore it, it's like what I mean is you don't know these things unless they tell you, so it's difficult.
Knowledge of CYP experiences	P2 Yeah and it is important to share information, so if we see, even though we're not working within one to one or in a classroom, if we see them about and we see certain behaviours then I think for a lot of TAs, it makes them stop and think, oh well you're not just being rude, you're not just being this. And then like you say, you can use a different, uh, behaviour management technique, you know? Don't go straight in there issuing written warnings for doing this, that and the other, if that child is reacting to a traumatic experience.
Experiencing bereavement	P1 We need more, more awareness. Yeah, yeah.
suicide and self-harm	P3 That's a good point actually.
Recognising behaviour as a communication	P1 You don't want the child to think like, you know, oh, why are they doing this? Like, I dunno why I am myself, like.
	P3 There's another child that I'm dealing with that's that her mum passed away about five, six months ago from a suicide overdose. So now both her and her sister live with Gran. But Gran was in hospital two weeks ago. So of course her natural reaction is, Oh my God, is gran gonna come out? So now she's literally torn her wrist up. Do you know what I mean?
	P2 Yeah exactly say for example, that student is doing something that they shouldn't in a reaction to the trauma.
	P4



**Appendix 12. Table demonstrating focused codes, focused codes after analysis, and constructed categories**

<b>Focused codes</b>	<b>Focused codes after analysis</b>	<b>Category</b>
<p>Event causing physical or emotional harm</p> <p>Event with enduring consequences</p> <p>Considering an event as traumatic</p> <p>Experiencing bereavement</p> <p>Looked after children</p> <p>Physical injury or illness</p> <p>Accessing and engaging with learning</p> <p>Anxiety</p> <p>Depression or low mood</p> <p>Suicide and self-Harm</p> <p>Emotional Literacy and Regulation Skills</p> <p>Emotionally Based School Avoidance</p> <p>Disordered eating and drinking</p> <p>Impacts of trauma on all areas of development</p>	<p>Defining trauma</p> <p>Subjective nature of trauma</p> <p>Risk factors for complex trauma</p> <p>Impacts of trauma; Accessing and engaging with learning; Communication and Interaction Difficulties; Social emotional responses; Physiological responses to trauma</p> <p>Developing a holistic understanding</p>	<p>Understanding Trauma</p>

<p>Impacts at a classroom level</p> <p>Internal responses to trauma</p> <p>Mental health difficulties</p> <p>Masking difficulties</p> <p>Withdrawing</p> <p>Seeking control</p> <p>Self-perception and image</p> <p>Low confidence and self-esteem</p> <p>Challenging behaviour</p> <p>Recognising behaviour as a communication</p> <p>Risk taking behaviours</p> <p>Using trauma as an excuse</p> <p>Experiencing Flashbacks</p> <p>Future aspirations and motivation</p> <p>Triggering events and experiences</p> <p>Social media</p> <p>Demonstrating resilience</p>		
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<p>Physiological responses to trauma</p> <p>Communication and Interaction Difficulties</p> <p>Attachment difficulties</p> <p>Subjective nature of trauma</p> <p>Changes to responses and presentations</p> <p>Differing responses to trauma</p> <p>Developing a holistic understanding</p> <p>Knowledge of children and young people's experiences</p>		
<p>Consistent routines and expectations</p> <p>Planned transitions from primary school</p> <p>School as a safe space</p> <p>Environmental considerations</p> <p>Respite Opportunities</p> <p>Empowering children and young people's voice</p>	<p>Consistent routines and expectations</p> <p>Environmental considerations</p> <p>School as a safe space; Respite Opportunities; Accessing Safe Spaces</p> <p>Empowering young people's voice</p>	<p>Fostering a sense of safety and belonging</p>
<p>Working collaboratively with other staff members</p>	<p>Working collaboratively; working with external professionals; communicating with parents and carers</p>	<p>Promoting positive relationships</p>

<p>Working with external professionals</p> <p>Communicating with parents and carers</p> <p>Parent perceptions and views</p> <p>Support from emotionally available adults</p> <p>Identifying key adults</p> <p>Emotional check-ins with students</p> <p>Staff managing their own emotions</p> <p>Demonstrating care and unconditional positive regard</p> <p>Establishing and maintaining trust</p> <p>Demonstrating empathy</p> <p>Being relatable to CYP</p> <p>Getting to know children and young people</p> <p>Being Approachable</p> <p>Talking about feelings and experiences</p> <p>Peer mentors and support</p>	<p>Support from emotionally available adults; Identifying Key Adults; Staff managing their own emotions</p> <p>Demonstrating care and unconditional positive regard; Establishing and maintaining trust</p> <p>Peer mentors and support</p>	
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<p>Safeguarding</p> <p>Receiving and Responding to Disclosures</p> <p>Passing on concerns</p> <p>Sharing Information</p> <p>Using school technology systems</p> <p>Prioritising wellbeing over attainment</p> <p>Monitoring students' wellbeing</p> <p>Prioritising early intervention</p> <p>One to One Intervention</p> <p>Group Intervention</p> <p>Learning intervention</p> <p>Reviewing intervention and progress</p>	<p>Safeguarding; Receiving and Responding to Disclosures</p> <p>Prioritising wellbeing over attainment</p> <p>Monitoring students' wellbeing</p> <p>Intervention</p>	<p>Safeguarding young people's emotional and physical wellbeing</p>
<p>Whole-school ethos</p> <p>Using restorative approaches</p> <p>Adopting a child-led approach</p> <p>Adopting nurture-based approaches</p> <p>Solution focused approaches</p>	<p>Whole-school ethos; staff values and alignment with trauma-informed practice</p> <p>Policy and practice; Changing policies and priorities; Making Reasonable Adjustments; Sanctions and Rewards; Working flexibly</p> <p>Impacts of covid-19</p>	<p>Cultural and systemic implications</p>

<p>Policy and practice</p> <p>Changing policies and priorities</p> <p>Trauma-Informed Policy</p> <p>Guidance for staff on responding to events</p> <p>Working flexibly</p> <p>Making reasonable adjustments</p> <p>Sanctions and rewards</p> <p>Impacts of exclusions</p> <p>Trauma informed practice as valuable and important</p> <p>Impacts of covid-19</p>		
<p>Access to resources</p> <p>Lack of capacity</p> <p>High levels of need among students (SEMH)</p> <p>Lack of time</p>	<p>Lack of capacity; High levels of need among students</p> <p>Lack of time</p>	<p>Organisational factors</p>
<p>Accessing supervision</p> <p>Ongoing CPD</p>	<p>Accessing supervision</p>	<p>Staff wellbeing, confidence, and competence</p>

<p>Accessing training</p> <p>Modelling good practice</p> <p>Learning through experience</p> <p>Consistency of approaches</p> <p>Staff confidence in practice</p> <p>Staff awareness and perceptions</p> <p>Staff wellbeing</p> <p>Support for staff wellbeing</p> <p>Worrying about CYP Wellbeing and Welfare</p>	<p>Ongoing CPD; Accessing training; Guidance for staff on responding to events; Learning through experience</p> <p>Consistency of approaches</p> <p>Staff confidence in practice</p> <p>Staff wellbeing</p>	
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## **Appendix 13. Amended Semi-Structured Interview Schedule for Theoretical Sampling**

### **Interview Schedule**

**Introductions and co-construction of ground rules and contract.**

**The following areas will be explored as part of the main discussion. NB the researcher does not expect to ask all questions in each interview/focus group:**

#### ***Staff Understanding of Trauma***

1. What do you understand by the term 'trauma'?/ What does the term 'trauma' mean to you?
  - *What do you think leads to trauma?*
  - *Do you think the concept of trauma is objective?*
2. What impacts can experience trauma have on children and young people?
  - *Short- and long-term impacts?*
  - *Do you think presentations can be categorised into internal and external?*
3. How might you expect a child or young person who has experienced trauma to behave/present in school?
4. Do you think it is important for staff members to have an awareness of any ACEs or traumatic experiences?
  - *If so, which staff? All?*
  - *How might this understanding change/inform your/their practice?*

#### ***Staff perceptions of their role in supporting trauma affected students.***

5. How has your role and professional experiences contributed to your understanding of trauma?
  - *Have you received any training/CPD which has informed your understanding?*
6. Tell me about your own role in supporting students who have experienced traumatic events.
  - *What do you feel your role is?/Do you feel you have a role in this?*
  - *What do you feel your responsibilities are?*
  - *What impacts upon your role in relation to supporting students who have experienced trauma? Eg. Time, resources, curriculum demands etc*
  - *As Headteacher, do you have a role in supporting staff to implement TIP?*
7. Does supporting students who have experienced trauma impact on staff wellbeing? If so, how?
  - *What can be done to support this?*
8. How confident do you feel in supporting students who have experienced trauma?
  - *What has enabled/contributed to this?*
  - *What might you need to feel more confident?*



### **Staff understanding of trauma informed practice.**

9. Have you heard of trauma-informed practice? Tell me about your understanding of what this is?
  - *How might you define the term? Why?*
  - *What has contributed to your understanding of this?*
  - *Might other people think differently to you? Who/Why?*
10. Do you think trauma informed practice has value in schools? / Is this approach relevant to your role?
  - *Why/Why not?*
11. What does support for children who have experienced trauma look like in your school currently?/ Do you consider yourself/your school to be using a trauma-informed approach?
  - *In what ways? Can you give me an example?*
  - *At what level? Individual vs group vs whole-school*
  - *If so, what factors have enabled this?*
  - *If so, how do you find using this approach? What factors are facilitative/make this difficult?*
12. Could current practices be improved in any way?
  - *Prompt to think about practice at different levels, ie individual level, group/class level, whole-school/systemic level*
  - *Are there practices you would like to embed in your school that aren't currently?*
  - *If I visited a school, how might I know that trauma informed approaches are being used? What might I see?*

### **Perceived barriers to implementing trauma informed practice at a whole-school level**

13. Do you think a trauma informed behaviour policy would be helpful/relevant in your school?
  - *Why/Why not?*
14. What barriers can you think of to implementing a trauma informed policy/whole-school approach?
  - *What might you need to overcome these barriers? Support/changes*
  - *Focus groups have identified time demands and staff capacity as a barrier, do you agree with this?*
  - *If so, as Headteacher can you reflect on how capacity could be increased?*

### **Closing statements**

1. Any further comments/thoughts you would like to add? Have we missed anything that feels important?
2. Do you have any questions or concerns?
3. Thank participants for their contribution and distribute debrief statements. Reiterate their rights and offer a final space for questions.
4. Explain next steps of research before dismissing the participant/s.

*NB questions in italics are to be used as prompts.*

## Appendix 14. Examples of memos written through the research process

### **Memo: Social Constructionism and Grounded Theory**

21.01.23

Something I have been grappling with whilst reflecting on ontology and epistemology, is the alignment of a social constructionist paradigm, and the core values of GT as a methodology. The core principle at the heart of GT is that data collection and research can lead directly to knowledge and theory, suggesting a positivist view that a truth can be 'known' through research (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). This seems in opposition to the post-modernist ontology of social constructionism which suggests the nature of reality is subjective, determined by our social interactions and experiences, thus ultimately 'unknowable' (Moore, 2005). Having said this, GT is acknowledged to be "epistemologically flexible" (Walsh et al, 2015), therefore lending itself to several different world views and methodologies. In relation to theory development, Charmaz's (2014) constructivist GT suggests the concept of 'theory' may be different to different researchers, and thus the theoretical outcomes of studies are likely to vary. Within the time constraints of this thesis project, I do not consider that I will establish a fully formed theory in answer to my research question but do hope to determine descriptive theory in the form of mini-narratives (Charmaz, 2014). Within the constructionist paradigm, these mini-narratives will be grounded within the social contexts and experiences of participants, and linked with my own constructs as a researcher. On reflection therefore, I consider social constructionism to be well aligned with my understanding of constructivist GT, where "both data and analysis are social constructs that reflect the conditions of their production" (Charmaz, 2014; p. 240), and lead to contextualised theory.

### **Memo: Participant Bias**

03.01.23

Members of staff who volunteered to take part in my research, including Headteachers who acted as gatekeepers, were interested in TIP and/or may have held prior knowledge and experience of using it in practice. This is likely to mean discussions will be biased in favour of TIP, informing the outcomes and the developing theory, and perhaps not be reflective of the wider school staff population. Could there have been an alternate method of data collection or sampling to ensure a more representative, unbiased sample?

### **Memo: Organising Focus Groups**

07.11.22

As the first focus group took place during lunch time, participants took longer than expected after lessons to arrive in the booked room, and so after reviewing consent and ground rules, time for the actual discussion was much shorter than I had hoped, with staff members only having half an hour before needing to return to lessons. Participants were also eating their lunch during the discussion, and while this was agreed in advance, on reflection I felt it limited the flow of discussion as participants weren't fully engaged. The timing of the session also meant that two participants were unable to attend, due to needing to support and respond to incidents regarding pupils, resulting in a less representative sample and less rich data collected. Going forwards, ideally organise for focus groups to take place at the end of the school day if possible when staff can fully engage and students have gone home, or during scheduled release time to ensure participation.

**Memo: Group dynamics****16.01.23**

Whilst a representative sample of participants with different roles was required to ensure the research outcomes were reflective of school staff populations, I was aware of the impact on group dynamics of having, for example, members of SLT in the same groups as Class Teachers and TAs. Staff may feel they need to present as more skilled and/or demonstrate positive views of TIP in order to 'impress' their seniors. I don't think this can be avoided entirely, but I need to think about how this can be reduced by ensuring discussions are informal, warm environments where staff know their views will be respected.

**Memo: Focus groups and leading questions****09.11.22**

Upon transcribing the first focus group, I felt my questions had been less open than I had intended, and I had included leading additions to the prepared questions which I felt influenced participant responses. I also noticed myself agreeing with participant responses where I perhaps should have given a more neutral response. Whilst my epistemology of social constructionism recognises the constructions of the researcher will influence data collection and analysis, I wanted to insure this was limited as much as possible, so will adapt my questions and responses in the next focus group.

**Memo: Line by line coding****12.11.22**

Line by line coding has felt time consuming and challenging, but thorough. As a novice researcher new to GT coding, it enabled me to adopt a systematic approach which felt simple to apply, and I feel confident no ideas have been overlooked (Charmaz, 2014). I do hold reflections upon the 'robustness' of this approach however, as lines of transcript did not fit a consistent bound amount of text per line (eg a sentence per line), therefore some codes contained more depth than others, and some lines of text felt irrelevant to code, such as short sentences or utterances including '*access it see?*' or '*see what I mean*'. Perhaps codes for these smaller, seemingly less significant pieces of data will be removed upon focused coding.

**Memo: Internal vs external behaviours****09.11.22**

There seems to be a distinction emerging already from the first focus group between internal vs external behaviours/presentations of trauma. Internal behaviours being those which only impact on the individual, eg anxiety, self-harm, eating disorders etc, where external behaviours have impact on those around them too. In this focus group there seemed to be more discussion around external behaviours as these have a bigger impact in the classroom.

**Additions made after Focus Group 3****18.01.23**

This theme has continued throughout focus groups however I have found it more helpful to consider presentations more widely in terms of what school staff perceive to be the impacts of trauma. I have found broader discussions around this, rather than a focus on internal vs external, has facilitated richer discussions and understanding of behaviour as a communication of need.

**Memo: Evidence based practice vs practice based evidence****20.02.23**

When reflecting on policies and their influence on school staff practice, a SENCo shared “I think it's almost looking at the policy, looking at what we do and going, not amending what we're doing to the policy, but then amending the policy to what we're doing”. This reminded me of considerations upon evidence-based practice vs practice-based evidence and doing something because it works in practice, not because the evidence says so. This may be linked to being driven by the school ethos/values rather than by policy.

**Memo: Sharing information****20.02.23**

A prevalent theme just far has been around sharing information, where participants recognised knowledge of CYP experiences help to inform their understanding and improve their practice. I have questions and reservations regarding this and wonder what research suggests, do staff need to know about experiences to implement principles? My initial instinct is not, the principles should extend to all pupils without needing to know context, I am also mindful of GDPR and right to privacy. However, if it does mean staff are able to work with increased empathy and understanding, that surely is a good thing! Perhaps schools need systems to help them share information in a secure way.

**Memo: “Being the class-clown”****18.01.23**

Teachers discussed behaviour as children wanting to “be the class clown”, this phrase has come up frequently during focus groups. It is interesting that some participants demonstrated an understanding of behaviour as communication, but then also described behaviour using this phrase. There seems to be a misconception here as teachers don't recognise this may be communicating a function eg seeking interaction from peers. Does this suggest teachers would benefit from further training around the functions of behaviours? Are behaviourist approaches limiting teachers understanding of behaviours due to limited opportunity for reflection?

**Memo: ‘Meltdowns’****20.02.23**

An emerging in-vivo code is the description of challenging behaviour or emotional dysregulation using the term ‘meltdown’. It may be useful to explore/unpick with participants what this term means to them and what behaviours and emotional responses they are referring to with the use to this term. I wonder if the labelling of dysregulated behaviour as ‘meltdowns’ may influence staff perceptions or attributions of the behaviour and in turn their response of the young person's behaviour? Does this demonstrate a misconception among staff regarding what these behaviours may be communicating eg, do they recognise a ‘meltdown’ as a communication of distress, or a choice to be disruptive? Is there a more appropriate term eg panic attack?

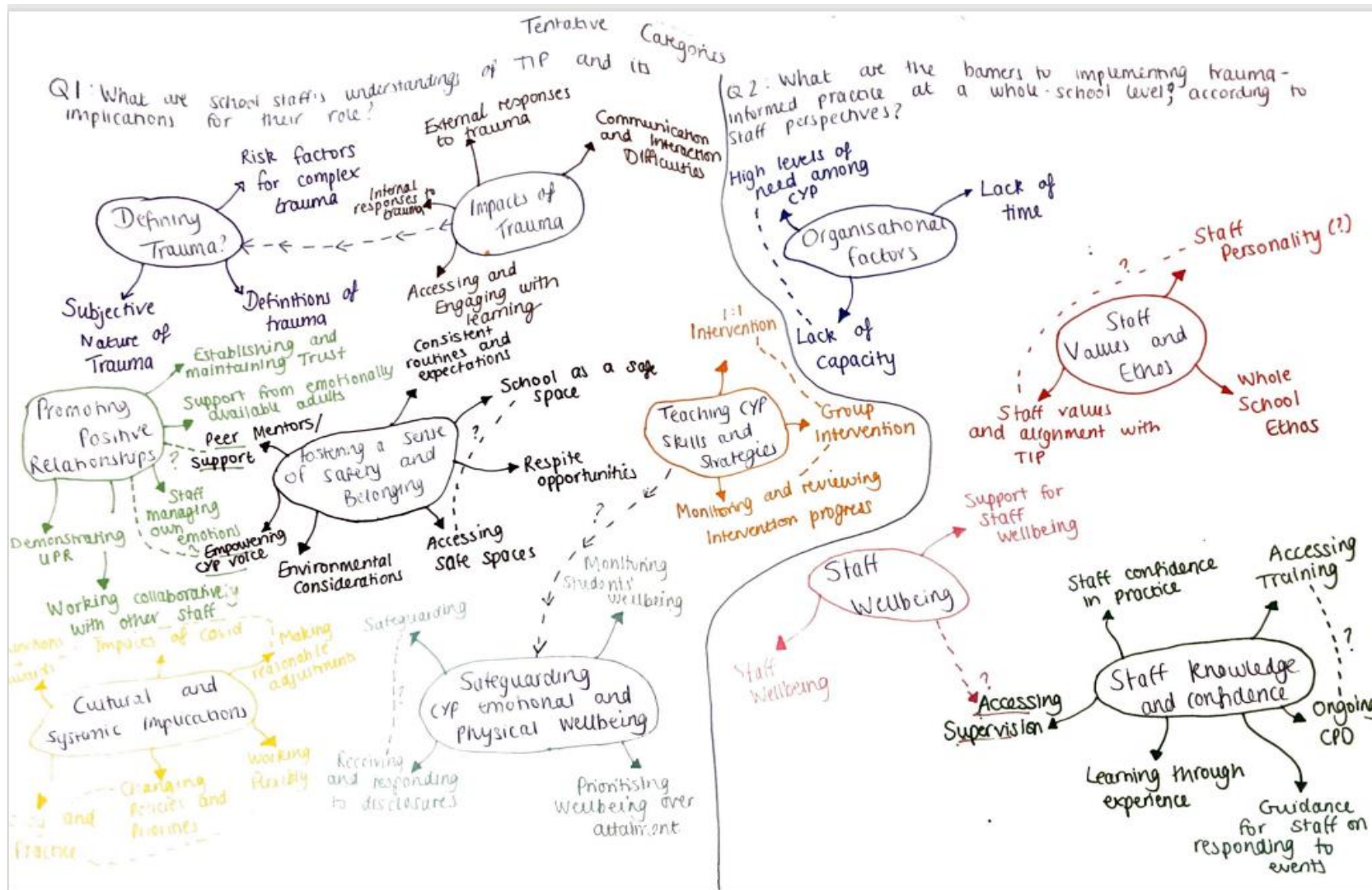
**Memo: 'One size does not fit all' / subjective nature of trauma**

**20.03.23**

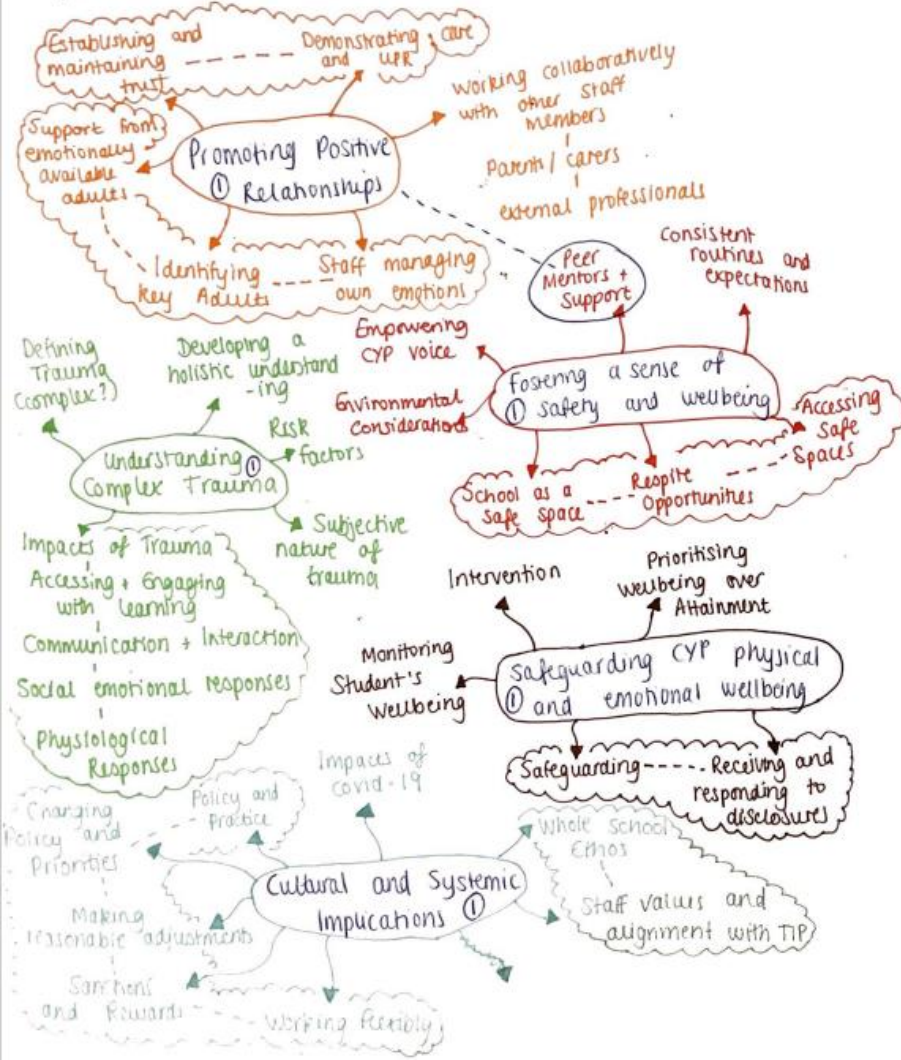
Participants in all focus groups and theoretical sampling interview reflected that trauma is subjective, both in their perceptions of what constitutes a traumatic event but also how they respond to it. As a result, participants discussed that when it comes to approaches, 'one size does not fit all' and therefore staff must get to know young people well, develop an understanding of how trauma has impacted on them individually and what support they respond well to.

These reflections overlap with several other codes including 'getting to know children and young people' and 'developing a holistic understanding', suggesting this code is analytical relevant and important in answering my research questions. It is also interesting that it aligns with a constructivist epistemology and subjective ontology.

**Appendix 15. Exemplification of the use of diagramming and clustering towards the tentative formulation of categories.**



① What are school staff's understandings of TIP and its implications for their role?

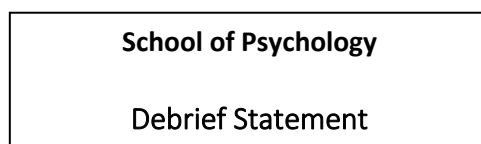


② What are the barriers to implementing TIP at a whole-school level?





## Appendix 16. Participant Debrief Statement



*Title of Project*

*School staff's understanding and perceptions of trauma-informed approaches and the barriers to implementing these at a whole-school level: A grounded theory exploration.*

*Ethics Approval Number: S1426*

*Researcher: Aisha Hackett-Evans; aisha.hackett-evans@nottingham.ac.uk.*

*Supervisor: Dr Sarah Godwin; sarah.godwin@nottingham.ac.uk.*

The study you have just taken part in is concerned with exploring school staff's understanding of trauma informed practices, and what they consider to be the key barriers which may limit these approaches from being implemented in schools at a policy or whole-school level. As a vast number of children and young people (CYP) experience trauma, and due to resources, systems, and services in place, literature has suggested educational settings are best placed to offer early intervention and support (Spence et al, 2021). This research will provide a valuable insight into school staff's understanding and perceptions, to inform and enhance future training and support opportunities offered by the Local Authority and Educational Psychology Service.

### **Your rights**

You are reminded that you have the right to withdraw your participation and data at any time until it has been processed by myself, the researcher. If you would like to withdraw your contribution, please contact me on or before 1<sup>st</sup> March 2023 (estimated date of data being processed). If you do not contact me, I will assume that you are happy for your data to be used in the study.

### **Support and Advice**

If you would like to contact me to discuss any further questions or concerns, please do so using the email address listed above. You are also welcomed to contact my university supervisor by email should you wish to express any concerns about this study. The Head Teacher within your school may also be contacted for support.

If you would like to seek further anonymous and confidential support outside of the research and your school, you could choose to utilise one of the support outlets listed below;

- Samaritans: A registered charity aimed at providing emotional support to anyone in emotional distress. Please contact the helpline, open 24 hours, on 116 123.

- NHS Mental Health Advice and Support Line (Yorkshire and Humberside): An NHS based service offering a 24 hour, free helpline for anyone seeking information, advice and support with their mental health. Please contact the helpline on 0800 138 0990
- Shout 85258: Shout is a text-based service offering free, confidential, anonymous advice 24/7 to listen and support individuals to get to a calmer and safe place. To start a conversation with a trained volunteer, text 'SHOUT' to 85258.

***I would like to say a big thank you for volunteering your time to take part in this research project, your contribution has been invaluable!***

Aisha Hackett-Evans  
Trainee Educational Psychologist

**If you have any complaints about the study, please contact:  
Stephen Jackson (Chair of Ethics Committee)  
stephen.jackson@nottingham.ac.uk**