

## Fostering a Future for Trauma Informed Care in SBAE

### Introduction

To date, the research conversation in the Journal of Agricultural Education is silent as it pertains to Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs), student trauma, and trauma-informed care (TIC). ACEs refer to quantifying primary exposure of persons between the ages of 0-17 to various forms of trauma such as abuse or household dysfunction (Felitti et al., 1998). Examples of ACEs include witnessing domestic violence, household substance abuse, or neglect (Felitti et al., 1998). Students with mental health disorders, challenging socio-economic status or ACEs can experience “emotional difficulties and subsequent academic struggles that come to the attention of their teachers” (Hydon et al., 2015, p.322) when confronted with compounding traumatic events. TIC, then, fills a particular niche in SBAE teacher professional development (PD), as literature suggests that motivating students to learn, and managing student behavior are in-service needs (Roberts & Dyer, 2004; Smith & Smalley, 2018; Sorensen et al., 2014). We seek to elaborate this niche by offering findings from an exploratory study in teacher PD related to Trauma Informed Care (TIC) to understand the impacts on teachers from ACEs in their students.

Having seen the implications of ACEs in our own teaching, we recognized the importance of moving from an anecdotal understanding of the need for TIC training to an empirical one. The purpose of this study was to identify the perceived need for TIC training. To this end, we addressed the following research questions:

1. At what frequency does TIC training occur for early-career SBAE teachers in Oregon and by what means is this training delivered?
2. What is the felt need for additional TIC training for this sample of SBAE teachers?

This research aligns with AAAE Research Priority 4: Meaningful, Engaged Learning in All Environments, Question 3.

### Conceptual Framework

To understand the impact of trauma on an individual’s functioning, and in conjunction with TIC, we approached this exploratory research with Contemporary Trauma Theory (CTT) (Goodman, 2017). Fundamental to CTT is a paradigm shift focusing our attention on trauma’s impacts to student learning (i.e. motivation to learn and behavior management) (Goodman, 2017). A trauma-based paradigm focuses understanding on these central properties: *dissociation*, *attachment*, *reenactment*, *long-term effect on later adulthood*, and *impairment on emotional capacities* (Goodman, 2017, p.187-188). While we recognize these tenets as interconnected and equally important in a focus on TIC, Merrick (2018) suggests significant numbers of students with ACEs. This informs our need to address the ways teachers deal with *attachment* related to trauma impacts (Goodman, 2017). In today’s classrooms, childhood trauma (CT) affects abilities to develop the productive interpersonal relationships through which learning occur (Goodman, 2017). It is imperative for us to consider the ways teachers are trauma-informed to understand future needs in this critical, and underrepresented area of student experience.

### Methodology

We chose a quantitative approach to the data to consider trends in understanding TIC and perceived needs of early-career SBAE teachers around TIC. This study included a convenience sample of secondary SBAE teachers who attended the 2020 Oregon Early Career Agriculture Teacher workshop ( $n = 49$ ), which was open to anyone teaching SBAE for five years or less,

including ten preservice teachers. We distributed a pilot assessment, asking teachers to self-identify their attitudes, needs, and experiences related to TIC to gain a baseline for understanding SBAE teacher needs in Oregon

We analyzed the compiled data using frequency distributions to determine the percentage of respondents indicating prior experience with TIC training, delivery outlet and method for any prior training received, interest in receiving additional training, and preferences for delivery outlet and method for future TIC education opportunities. We recognize our limited ability to infer from this data and capitalize on the findings of this study as a baseline from which to guide our implementation of TIC PD in Oregon moving forward, and hope our findings are helpful to inform this type of PD in other states as well.

### Results

Research question one ascertained at what frequency TIC training occurs and how training is delivered. In our sample of early-career SBAE teachers, 46% ( $n = 22$ ) said they had received prior TIC training while 45% ( $n = 18$ ) did not. Nine teachers (18%) indicated they “maybe” received prior training. Sixty-three percent ( $n = 31$ ) of our sample who have or maybe have received training, were encouraged to select “all that apply” regarding a list of eleven external supports. Of the 86 responses, workshops hosted by the district (55%,  $n = 17$ ), ongoing staff training (71%,  $n = 22$ ), and workshops hosted by other organizations (35%,  $n = 11$ ) comprised outlets to develop TIC competency.

Our second research question derived the felt need for further TIC training among our sample. Early-career SBAE teachers in Oregon indicated that they would both like more information on supporting students with trauma (61%,  $n = 30$ ) and that they would attend additional training about TIC in education (53%,  $n = 26$ ). Few teachers indicated little interest in more information (8%,  $n = 4$ ) and unwillingness to attend further training (4%,  $n = 2$ ). More teachers, however, indicated their interest as “maybe;” 31% ( $n = 15$ ) said they might want more information and 43% ( $n = 21$ ) may attend TIC trainings. Emphasis on these opportunities should focus on tools and strategies (87%,  $n = 41$ ), is part of the PD schedule (59%,  $n = 28$ ), and improves relationships with students (74%,  $n = 35$ ).

### Conclusion/Discussion/Recommendations

The inclusion of TIC training is occurring within a majority of school districts from this sample, which suggests the recognized need and value of such PD. At the same time, could this be an emerging priority for teacher preparation given less than 20% ( $n = 16$ ) reported this occurrence within their own teacher preparation program? While the majority (61%,  $n = 30$ ) have a desire to grow in their knowledge of TIC, we observed 39% ( $n = 19$ ) indicating they “maybe” or “did not” have an interest in additional information. In follow up conversations after the workshop, we learned some teachers feel they already have all the training they need. Perhaps others work in districts where TIC has not been identified as a need.

Seventy-percent of our sample was eager to engage in additional PD to improve relationships, which Goodman references as *attachment* (2017); a necessary arena for further study. In addition, there were clear preferences to integrate TIC trainings into existing PD schedules. Further clarity around the logistics of moving this type of PD forward must be considered to encourage attendance. The need for further training found in our sample directs us to take action, both in providing TIC training and collaborating with existing organizations or TIC experts to facilitate this paradigm shift in teaching and learning.

## References

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