

**Pre-Service Teachers' Views of Trauma-Informed Practices in Online Classrooms:
A Focus on Refugee Students and a Sense of Belonging**

by

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An oral defense of this thesis took place on August 11, 2022, in front of the following examination committee:

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The above committee determined that the thesis is acceptable in form and content and that a satisfactory knowledge of the field covered by the thesis was demonstrated by the candidate during an oral examination. A signed copy of the Certificate of Approval is available from the School of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies.

Abstract

This mixed methods study aimed to explore the pre-service teachers' knowledge of trauma-informed practices, especially in the area of supporting refugee students and creating a sense of belonging for them in online spaces. Quantitative and qualitative data were collected from pre-service teachers in a teacher education program at an Ontario university through pre-and post-course surveys. Secondary data was used to answer two research questions (1) what knowledge pre-service teachers receive regarding trauma-informed education in the areas of general knowledge, supporting refugee students, and online learning and (2) what ideas pre-service teachers have for creating a sense of belonging in online spaces. The study findings indicate that many of the pre-service teachers lack trauma-informed knowledge in all three areas of trauma-informed practices. However, although they reported low levels of knowledge, they reported creative and innovative ideas for creating a sense of belonging in online spaces. These findings imply that teachers require training on effective strategies that promote a sense of belonging for students, especially in online classrooms, and to support students who are refugees. There is also the potential to harness the creative ideas of new and emerging teachers, many with technology skills, to develop online trauma-informed practices for students.

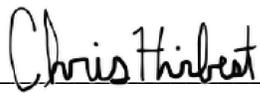
Keywords: refugee students; sense of belonging; trauma-informed practices in online classrooms; teacher education

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The research work in this thesis was performed in compliance with the regulations of the Research Ethics Board/Animal Care Committee under REB #16843.



Christopher Hinbest

Statement of Contributions

I hereby certify that I am the sole author of this thesis and that no part of this thesis has been published or submitted for publication. I have used standard referencing practices to acknowledge ideas, research techniques, or other materials that belong to others. Furthermore, I hereby certify that I am the sole source of the creative works and/or inventive knowledge described in this thesis.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (2018) estimated that an average of 30,000 refugees are admitted into Canada each year, with nearly half of those refugees being children under 18 years of age. In recent years, these statistics increased because of humanitarian emergencies and crises. Amidst the Syrian refugee crisis, the Canadian government committed to resettling at least 25,000 refugees (Immigration, Refugees, and Citizenship Canada, 2019). However, as many as two times the initially planned number of refugees were resettled in Canada within three years (IRCC, 2019). Much more recently, the Canadian government announced their support for refugees seeking to flee the crisis in Ukraine (IRCC, 2022).

Canada's goal of supporting and resettling refugees fleeing countries due to fear of persecution and violence has layers of complexities. Refugees cannot be expected to seamlessly adjust and thrive in Canada because many arrive with traumas endured due to the realities of their home country and the displacement and migration process (Nofal, 2017). Also, refugees are adjusting to life in a new country with a different language, culture, and set of freedoms, further contributing to their adverse life experiences (Nofal, 2017).

Upon their arrival in Canada, refugees often face discrimination, social isolation, and a lack of belonging. Refugees arriving from Middle Eastern and Arabic countries are commonly exposed to the false narrative being perpetuated that the refugees only live off government assistance and lack agency, furthering the prejudicial backlash and discrimination (Hynie, 2018). This discrimination is an obstacle to developing a sense of belonging and is a traumatic experience for refugees. Children who are refugees are uniquely affected by their life circumstances. Though the precise needs of children who are refugees are not necessarily homogenous, proper support is nevertheless still required (Pelley, 2019).

One of the foremost environments where children interact with others, and seek support and belongingness, is in school. Despite a desire to belong, children who are refugees often lack a sense of belonging in Canadian classrooms (Record-Lemon & Buchanan, 2017). This lack of belonging is often caused by underlying emotional distress and trauma, and that educators generally lack an understanding of their unique circumstances and how to properly support their needs (Guo, Maitra, & Guo, 2019). Belongingness at school is important for students who have experienced trauma because it helps them start the healing journey and reduces the impact of trauma on learning. This is vital because trauma impacts a student's cognitive, academic, and socio-emotional-behavioural functioning (Burke et al., 2011; van der Kolk, 2003).

A sense of belonging in school and learning environments is important for students, because learning spaces that promote a sense of belonging and safety are paramount to ensuring student learning and development (Cantor et al., 2018). One of the principles of trauma-informed care is physical and psychological safety (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, 2014). It is therefore important for children who have experienced trauma to have a sense of belonging in schools. This is because belongingness can act as a protective factor against the neurobiological impacts of trauma (Cantor et al., 2018).

Children exposed to traumatic events are affected partly due to their biological stress mechanisms, which trigger their hypervigilance and elevated anxiety levels (Cantor et al., 2018). This increased brain activity as a result of the stress responses reduces their working memory and focus, thereby impeding their ability to learn. Thus, it is important to ensure a sense of belonging in classrooms, allowing children to feel emotionally and psychologically safe. Educators should be able to create a healthy and positive environment in the classroom where students can feel a sense of belonging. As Akar-Vural et al. (2018) noted, classroom cultivation

of a sense of belonging enhances and promotes learning and social skills for elementary school-aged children.

In addition, children who are refugees require greater attention and consideration in this regard. Children who are refugees often have a stronger desire for a sense of belonging in the classroom because of their previous experiences, which often means past traumatic experiences and adjusting to a new country and culture (Guo, Maitra, & Guo, 2019). Although there is extant research that indicates a sense of belonging in classrooms is important for children who are refugees, the lack of research on ensuring a sense of belonging in online learning persists.

Online learning in Ontario classrooms has become increasingly relevant in recent years, and the urgency for understanding how online learning affects students has become necessary. Aside from the COVID-19 pandemic, there has been a shift in Ontario towards online learning. For instance, Ontario secondary school students are now required to complete at least two online courses to graduate from high school (Rushowy, 2019). However, remote learning for children is an inherently challenging task because these are the formative years for children to learn both the skills outlined in the curriculum, but also social skills and coping skills (de Miranda et al., 2020). In addition, remote learning affects children from a psychosocial framework, including a decrease in cognitive skills, learning and memory, increased inattention, increased prevalence, and exacerbations of depression and anxiety (de Miranda et al., 2020; Phelps & Sperry, 2020).

Online teaching is a skill that needs to be cultivated by educators; however, it is also important for teachers to know how to use trauma-informed practices to support students in online learning spaces. Currently, there is a lack of support and initiatives for teachers in Ontario to be fully equipped with the appropriate resources to be able to provide trauma-informed care in online classroom settings (Brown et al., 2022; Rodger et al., 2020). Considering the influx of

refugees into Canada in recent years, and given their complex needs, these children and youth have an increased need for trauma-informed care (Brown et al., 2022; Roger et al., 2020). Thus, trauma-informed care is an indispensable technique that should be used by educators in both face-to-face and online classrooms. At the same time, it is equally important to ensure that the implementation of trauma-informed practices in classrooms does not go beyond the normal scope of a teacher's role in Ontario, as outlined in the Education Act (1990). This means ensuring trauma-informed practices for teachers to use in the classroom are practical rather than clinical.

Nevertheless, given the recent increase in, and shift towards online learning, it would behoove educational researchers and policymakers to ensure that virtual classrooms also consider trauma-informed practices and that educational departments ensure proper education of teachers. However, as Cherubini (2020) noted, online learning exacerbates the inequities for youth who are already struggling, with online learning pushing them further behind. This is because online classrooms have a profound impact on student learning, with students who are refugees particularly struggling in this regard.

Research Problem

Ontario teacher education programs are required to provide courses to help teachers support students with mental health concerns (Ontario College of Teachers, 2017). However, trauma-informed practices are seldom included in teacher education programs across Ontario, meaning that few teachers can create trauma-sensitive learning environments (Thomas, Crosby & Vanderhaar, 2019). As Cantor et al. (2018) described, a sense of belonging in classrooms can be a protective factor against new traumas and help facilitate the healing process for past traumas. This is indicative of the importance of ensuring that teachers are educated on trauma-

informed practices. However, teachers untrained in trauma-informed practices are often relied on to deliver trauma interventions, negating their effectiveness (Record-Lemon & Buchanan, 2017). Moreover, teachers feel unprepared to handle the complex needs of students who have experienced trauma (Gagné et al., 2012; Record-Lemon & Buchanan, 2017). This is demonstrative of the need for Ontario teachers to have access to training on trauma-informed practices to better support students.

In addition to a lack of basic knowledge of trauma-informed practices, there is also a lack of understanding of how to use these practices in online spaces, and with students who are refugees. For example, DeCoito and Estaiteyeh (2022) found that Canadian teachers have struggled to adjust their normal teaching practices to online spaces during the COVID-19 pandemic. Teachers indicated that their general unfamiliarity with online teaching and learning made it challenging for them to teach students in online classes. Moreover, teachers are concerned about their inability to properly support students who are struggling academically and/or psychologically (DeCoito & Estaiteyeh, 2022). This is unsurprising when considering the study by Barrett (2021), who found that many Ontario teacher education programs often exclude training on online teaching and learning.

The implication of a lack of knowledge in implementing trauma-informed practices in online classrooms is problematic for elementary and secondary school students for two reasons. First, this lack of knowledge may lead to secondary traumatic stress, which, according to Christian-Brandt et al. (2020), is associated with teachers deciding to leave the education field. It could then be intimated teachers are experiencing burnout, but this turnover rate will also mean students face a revolving door of educators. A frequent change in educators present in their

school lives could adversely influence the formation of trustworthy teacher-student relationships and result in lower educational outcomes (Christian-Brandt et al., 2020).

Of equal concern is that few researchers, beyond Dippo, Basu, and Duran (2012), recognize the importance of ensuring educators have the knowledge and resources available to ensure learning environments are accessible and effective for students of all backgrounds. The Government of Ontario (2013) has taken steps to ensure learning environments are accessible to close the education gap. However, it stops short of considering how Ontario schools can improve learning outcomes for students who are refugees. In addition, practicing and pre-service teachers lack knowledge and awareness of the specific needs of students who are refugees, which invariably affects their sense of belonging in Canadian classrooms (Dippo, Basu, & Duran, 2012; Nofal, 2017). Put together, it becomes clear there is a need to ensure that teachers have sufficient knowledge of trauma-informed practices in classrooms to facilitate a sense of belonging for students at risk, such as students who are refugees.

Research on, and implementation of, trauma-informed practices in school settings has focused on their use in physical classrooms. Dressler and Gereluk (2017), for instance, studied the need to incorporate trauma-informed practices in the physical classroom to help teachers address students' trauma using the principles of safety, connections, and emotional management skills. However, the potential of online learning environments to be trauma-informed remains understudied.

This is important because the need for research on online learning has been exacerbated due to the coronavirus pandemic. Students have experienced varying degrees of trauma because of the pandemic, which is considered an adverse childhood experience (McManus & Ball, 2020). The sudden transition to online classrooms has adversely affected children's mental health, but

many teachers lack knowledge on how to support students in online classrooms (McManus & Ball, 2020). Ontario has recently had a renewed focus on online learning, as described by Rushowy (2019), yet the forced migration to e-learning has exposed its many flaws and inequities for vulnerable students. Teachers have struggled teaching online and supporting students, while students have been challenged by the transition to online learning (Edmonds & Flahault, 2021). Vulnerable students, such as students who are refugees, are particularly susceptible to falling behind and feeling increasingly isolated, posing yet another challenge for unprepared teachers (Edmonds & Flahault, 2021).

It is vital that new educational methodologies introduced in e-learning classrooms keep pace with emerging research on trauma-informed pedagogy to prevent students who are refugees from falling even further behind their non-refugee peers. It is concerning that the increased reliance on online learning comes without sufficient measures to properly support students who are refugees. With respect to students who are refugees, as Edmonds and Flahault (2012) note, this poses yet another significant barrier in their attempts to integrate into life in Canada.

Finally, most of the Canadian research on trauma and a sense of belonging in Canadian classrooms, especially relating to students who are refugees, has been limited to work done by graduate-level students. This research has consistently established that students who are refugees struggle in Canadian classrooms, as do many students who have experienced trauma (Ayoub & Zhou, 2022; Nofal, 2017; Smyth, 2017). Moreover, even though school can be a protective factor to ease past traumas, teachers lack sufficient knowledge of trauma-informed practices to support students (Clark, 2017; Nofal, 2017; Pelley, 2019).

It is notable that graduate students in Canada are focusing their research on topics pertaining to trauma and a sense of belonging. This is indicative that trauma-informed practices

in schools are a growing area of research concern. The aforementioned graduate-level research provided a solid research base that increasingly points to the need for further research on supporting students who are refugees and using trauma-informed practices in online spaces.

Research Purpose

Considering the lack of research in this area, this mixed-methods research study aims to explore the views of pre-service teachers on creating a sense of belonging, a trauma-informed practice, in online classrooms for students who are refugees. The coronavirus pandemic has uncovered many challenges in the sudden shift to online teaching and learning across Canada. Notably, at-risk students, such as refugee students, are at greater risk of falling behind in their learning because of this forced migration to online classrooms. Meanwhile, teachers and pre-service teachers lack sufficient knowledge of trauma-informed practices or how these apply to online classrooms. The specific research questions guiding this study are:

RQ1: What knowledge do pre-service teachers acquire in a pre-service program about trauma-informed education, as it relates to:

- (a) Elementary and secondary school students with trauma
- (b) Students who are refugees
- (c) Online learning environments

RQ2: What ideas do pre-service teachers have for creating a sense of belonging (a trauma-informed practice) in online spaces for students who are refugees?

- (a) Within these ideas, do pre-service teachers identify barriers to trauma-informed practices in online learning environments?
- (b) Within these ideas, do pre-service teachers identify some solutions to resolving or overcoming these barriers?

Theoretical Framework

Theoretical frameworks ground research findings within broader theoretical constructs, by offering both direction and an impetus to a research inquiry or study (Adom, Hussein, & Joe, 2018). In this regard, this research study was conducted based on the psychological perspective on the field of mental health and well-being. There are many conceptualizations and theories pertaining to mental health and well-being, even within the discipline of psychology. Arguably, one of the challenges that arise in defining mental health is the reality that most definitions are influenced by the culture that defines it (Galderisi et al., 2015). Therefore, a culturally sensitive and inclusive definition of mental health and well-being might be:

...a dynamic state of internal equilibrium which enables individuals to use their abilities in harmony with universal values of society. Basic cognitive and social skills; ability to recognize, express and modulate one's own emotions, as well as empathize with others; flexibility and ability to cope with adverse life events and function in social roles, and harmonious relationships between body and mind represent important components of mental health which contribute, to varying degrees, to the state of internal equilibrium. (Galderisi et al., 2015).

Scholars in educational psychology also recognize the importance of culturally inclusive conceptualizations of mental health and well-being. As Shute et al. (2011) summarized, educational psychologists across diverse cultures have somewhat varying perceptions of mental health. However, there is a consensus across cultures that mental wellness is vital for children and that it is equally vital for schools to provide socio-emotional learning for children from all backgrounds to promote a sense of well-being (Shute et al., 2011).

Definitions of mental health that are culturally inclusive are of value in the context of this research, which has a focus on children who are refugees. Given that different cultures have different perspectives and theories on mental health, it was therefore important for this research study to adopt a theoretical conceptualization of mental health that is mindful of these differences. Accordingly, this study adopted the culturally inclusive and sensitive framework for mental health and well-being described by Galderisi et al. (2015).

Trauma

Trauma has been perceived, defined, and conceptualized differently in recent decades as knowledge and understanding of psychological trauma and the impact of traumatic experiences evolves (van der Kolk, 2003). This study is based upon the definition described by SAMHSA (2014), which states that, “trauma results from an event, series of events or circumstances that is experienced by an individual as physically or emotionally harmful... and that has lasting effects on the individual’s functioning...” (p.7). According to the trauma approach, trauma can lead to traumatic reactions such as increased heart rate, excessive sweating, fatigue, vomiting and dizziness, headaches, and sleep disturbances (Gold, 2019). Further, reactions to trauma are dependent on the severity and type of traumatic event, and whether the person has had a traumatic experience before or undergone therapy after a traumatic experience (Gold, 2019).

Trauma-Informed Care and Practices

Trauma-informed practices acknowledge the role past traumatic experiences have on an individual, thereby shifting the narrative from the individual to a broader understanding of how the underlying experiences affect them (Harris & Falot, 2001). Thus, adopting a trauma-informed care approach means reducing barriers to ensure that the services offered reduce the likelihood of re-traumatization. Trauma is prevalent across all backgrounds and ages but is particularly notable in many marginalized and vulnerable populations (Thomas et al., 2019).

Trauma-informed practices follow the six guiding principles of trauma-informed care, which offer a framework for providing services to individuals who may have experienced trauma. SAMHSA (2014) identified the six principles as (1) a sense of safety, (2) trustworthiness and transparency, (3) peer support, (4) collaboration and mutuality, (5) empowerment and choice, and (6) consideration of cultural, historical, and gender issues. Among the fundamental principles of trauma-informed practices is a sense of belongingness, which can help begin the healing process and overcome or mitigate the effects of the trauma.

Belongingness

The importance of belongingness is introduced in Maslow's (1987) hierarchy of needs theory, which posited belongingness is only less important than food and safety. Subsequently, Baumeister and Leary (1995) described a sense of belonging as a fundamental human motivation that exists when an individual feels accepted by others. Somers (1999) expanded on this, positing that a sense of connectedness and esteem can contribute to a sense of belonging. Belongingness creates the perception and the need to be involved with other people at different interpersonal levels, contributing to the sense of connectedness (Levett-Jones et al., 2017).

Belongingness, or a lack thereof, is related to many well-being factors such as depression and anxiety, low self-esteem, and sleep disturbances (Levett-Jones et al., 2017). Also, it has a close association with the promotion of well-being from both a social and personal perspective. The well-being of an individual is based on the social identity created by a society, which sets standards on how people perceive themselves as part of a community (Levett-Jones et al., 2017).

Trauma-Informed Practices in Education

Wiest-Stevenson & Lee (2016) pointed out that trauma-informed approaches in schools are aimed at lessening the impact of trauma and appropriately responding to student behaviour from a trauma-informed perspective. This means appropriately addressing academic,

behavioural, and socio-emotional problems that students who have experienced trauma might display in school.

However, schools are culturally and racially diverse environments and, consequently, there is no all-encompassing approach to appropriately addressing student trauma. Similarly, as Levi (2019) noted, there is not necessarily homogeneity across cultures in their responses to traumatic events, nor the support needed to recover from these traumas. Thus, it becomes important for trauma-informed practices in educational settings to be culturally inclusive and culturally responsive to be maximally beneficial to all students.

To that end, Dressler and Gereluk (2017) indicated that schools that implement trauma-informed practices can be of particular benefit to students who are refugees. This is because it provides refugees with a safe space to develop a sense of belonging and form meaningful relationships. In addition, given that refugees may come from more than one culture, ensuring that the implemented trauma-informed practices are culturally responsive and sensitive further allows this process to occur (Dressler & Gereluk, 2017).

This is important for children who are refugees because any child is more likely to want to feel any sense of belonging and acceptance after having experienced a traumatic event (Kestenberg & Kestenberg, 1988). Expanding on this theory of a desire for belongingness in children after a traumatic event, Pendergast et al. (2018) posited that students value their ability to seek a sense of belonging at school. Here, children can develop belongingness with their classmates and similar-aged peers in the classroom and the broader school community. Doing so instills resilience and acts as a protective factor for student well-being, health, and educational outcomes (Pendergast et al., 2018).

Chapter 2: Literature Review

This literature review encompasses four major areas pertinent to this study. Research on trauma and trauma-informed care will be examined first, followed by a review of the research on supporting students with refugee status in Canada. Research on a sense of belonging as a trauma-informed practice, and considerations for the classroom and for students who are refugees, will follow. Finally, the current state of teacher education in Ontario will be discussed in relation to trauma-informed education and supporting students online.

Trauma

Despite the growing calls for trauma-informed care and interventions in many occupations, including in education, there appears to be minimal consensus on how to conceptualize psychological trauma. Achieving anything that approaches a consensus definition of psychological trauma is arguably paramount to any kind of progress, whether in research or in application (Weathers & Keane, 2007). There are many nuanced definitions of psychological trauma, which holds implications for understanding the context in which trauma occurs and the effects it has.

As Jones and Wessely (2006) summed up, much progress has been made in the perception and understanding of trauma and its effects on the afflicted individuals. Before the 1970s, the common perception was that trauma was self-healing for most individuals (Jones & Wessely, 2006). That is, individuals without a predisposition to mental illnesses, such as anxiety or depression, recover from trauma quickly and suffer no long-term effects. Since the 1970s, societal perceptions toward mental illness or trauma have evolved. Those who suffered effects from traumatization were no longer deemed ‘vulnerable’ or ‘the product of a degenerate family’ (Jones & Wessely, 2006). This change was marked by the inclusion of post-traumatic stress

disorder into the DSM-III in 1980, based on the understanding that a significant event, such as war, can cause psychological trauma (Jones & Wessely, 2006). Thus, it became understood that individuals themselves were not to blame. Rather, they should be viewed as vulnerable people whose needs should be paramount.

Two editions and a few decades later, the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fifth Edition* (DSM-5) now has a much clearer definition of psychological trauma. Here, trauma is described as occurring when a person is exposed "...to actual or threatened death, serious injury, or sexual violence" (American Psychiatric Association, 2013, p. 271). This definition is expanded upon by Romano et al. (2015), who describes trauma as a series of responses as a result of exposure to external events that tend to involve serious actual or perceived threat, injury, or death. Crucially, trauma is a debilitating condition that affects individuals from all backgrounds, irrespective of age, culture, race/ethnicity, socio-economic status, or any other factor (Romano et al., 2015).

In developing a comprehensive guide on trauma-informed practices, Arthur et al. (2013) differentiated between types of traumas. Single incident trauma occurs when there is a singular unexpected and overwhelming event, such as a sudden loss or witnessing an act of violence. Complex trauma is described as exposure to ongoing traumatic events, such as war, abuse or domestic violence that occurs over a period of time. Developmental trauma occurs when one is exposed to early ongoing trauma at a young age, such as during childhood or adolescence (Arthur, 2013). When developmental trauma occurs, it is also likely that an adverse childhood experience (ACE) has also occurred. This is when a child or youth has experienced a chronic or traumatic stressor during childhood that impacts their health or behaviour (Ranjbar & Erb, 2019;

Wood et al., 2020). Evidently, these adverse childhood experiences have long-lasting impacts on an individual, substantiating the need for trauma-informed care at all developmental stages.

Trauma-Informed Care

Adopting a trauma-informed approach when working with individuals who have experienced trauma means being understanding and cognizant of the nature of trauma and promoting an environment that facilitates healing and recovery. In 2014, the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) outlined the six principles of trauma-informed care that should be implemented in all workplaces. These six principles are safety, trustworthiness and transparency, peer support, collaboration and mutuality, empowerment, voice, and choice, and cultural, historical and gender issues. These principles are also shown in Figure 1 below, in the infographic created by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2020).

Figure 1.

Six Guiding Principles of Trauma-Informed Care, from CDC (2020)



First, it is important to ensure physical and psychological safety in physical environments and interpersonal interactions (SAMHSA, 2014). Trustworthiness and transparency should be maintained by ensuring all decisions are made with the goal of building and maintaining trust with all involved. Providing peer support to individuals who have experienced trauma helps to

establish safety, hope, and a sense of belonging. Each of these promotes recovery and healing (SAMHSA, 2014).

The principle of collaboration and mutuality understands that all individuals in a community have a role to play in creating trauma-sensitive environments. Specifically, SAMHSA (2014) explains that one does not need to be a therapist to be therapeutic. It is also important to ensure that the individual who has experienced trauma feels empowered, has a voice in decisions being made, and has a choice. That is, those living with trauma have a choice in decision-making and the plan of action moving forward (SAMHSA, 2014). Since trauma-informed care focuses on the individual and their needs, it is expected those individuals should have input. This is especially important because, just as everyone has different strengths and life experiences, all experiences with trauma are different and may therefore require different supports.

Along these same lines, a trauma-informed approach requires seriously addressing potential cultural, historical, and gender-based issues. SAMHSA (2014) explains that being trauma-informed means actively striving to move past cultural stereotypes and biases. In practice, this could include providing gender-responsive and inclusive services, being respectful of cultural differences, and continually being responsive to the diverse racial, ethnic, and cultural needs.

Sense of Belonging

Conceptualizing belongingness is a task that has challenged scholars across and within disciplines for decades. Fundamentally, it seems likely most would agree that everyone desires to feel accepted, valued, and appreciated by others. Belongingness is a basic human motivation and has been a focus of many psychological theorists. Maslow (1987) listed belongingness on his motivational hierarchy of needs, ranked only below the need for food and safety.

Baumeister and Leary (1995) arguably most clearly defined a sense of belonging as a fundamental human motivation, positing that a sense of belonging exists when an individual feels accepted and liked by others. Applying this to school environments, a sense of belonging might therefore occur when students feel as though their classroom is a warm, inviting space where they feel connected and valued by their teachers and classmates. Somers (1999) expanded on this by positing that a sense of belonging contributes to one's sense of connectedness (being a part of something and feeling accepted) and esteem (feeling cared about, valued, and respected).

Trauma-Informed Practices in Education

According to Record-Lemon and Buchanan (2017), approximately 34% of Canadian children in elementary school have experienced at least one of the symptoms that were characteristic of moderate or high levels of traumatic stress, based on the DSM-IV definition (Record-Lemon & Buchanan, 2017). There were no discernible gender differences noted by the researchers, but the specific underlying events giving rise to the trauma were not examined.

It is important to be cognizant of the potentially therapeutic role that schools play with students who have experienced, or are experiencing, trauma. Since many students lack the ability to access proper treatment, school often tends to be their main opportunity to begin the healing journey (Brunzell, Water & Stokes, 2015). This makes sense because school is often the most regular and predictable routine in the lives of children, and it also meets their needs for social belongingness. School in itself can be a source of therapy and healing for students who have experienced trauma. Reflecting back on the trauma-informed principle of collaboration and mutuality that states one does not need to be a therapist to be therapeutic, this suggests that teachers and classmates could fill this role in schools. This can be accomplished through predictable routines, a safe and compassionate learning environment, and safe spaces for learning and socialization (Brunzell, Water, & Stokes, 2015).

Despite these potentially therapeutic implications, it is nonetheless vital that educators and school administration be mindful of the ways trauma affects student learning. Van der Kolk (2003) noted that there are three childhood developmental pathways that are adversely affected by trauma. The maturation of specific brain pathways at ages they are supposed to no longer occurs, these students exhibit a range of physiological responses to the trauma, and their cognition, affect regulation, and behavioural control are all affected (Van der Kolk, 2003). Thus, it is important to realize how these changes affect student learning.

Trauma-informed approaches in schools aim to decrease the impact of trauma on students and effectively and appropriately respond to student behaviour from a trauma-informed perspective (Wiest-Stevenson & Lee, 2016). This means appropriately addressing academic, behavioural, and socio-emotional problems exhibited by students who may have experienced trauma. Building on this, Maynard et al. (2019) suggested that trauma-informed approaches in schools should be multi-faceted. Doing so would improve the school environment in two main ways. First, it provides an increased staff ability to recognize and respond to students who might be in crisis or distress. Second, it prevents, mitigates, and reduces trauma-associated symptoms by consistently implementing trauma-informed practices in both the classroom and the school community (Maynard et al., 2019).

Such an approach aims to improve the academic, behavioural, and socio-emotional outcomes of students who may have experienced trauma. This is important because adverse childhood experiences have been shown to impact educational outcomes in children, such as through their cognitive, academic, and socio-emotional-behavioural functioning (Burke et al., 2011; van der Kolk, 2003). Further, adverse childhood experiences without proper intervention can contribute to negative physical and mental health outcomes in adolescence and adulthood

(Crouch et al., 2018). This impact is often seen in vulnerable and at-risk populations, such as students who are refugees.

Students with Refugee Status

With many children with refugee status being enrolled in Canadian public schools, it is important for school administration and educators to anticipate that there will be an adjustment period with many complex challenges for these children. As Dressler and Gereluk (2017) noted, the cultural and educational experiences of students who are refugees make them a distinct group in the Canadian education system. That is, they have distinct needs that differentiate them from other high-risk students, including other immigrant students. For example, this includes a history of traumatic exposures to conflict and war and periods where they received no or minimal schooling. In addition, in many instances, female students were denied education and/or forced into child marriages (Dressler & Gereluk, 2017). These adverse childhood experiences result in refugee students emerging from situations with stunted development, physically, mentally, socially, and academically.

Thus, it should be incumbent on Canada to provide appropriate support and services for the refugees who are being welcomed into the country. During the Syrian refugee crisis, when the Canadian government welcomed over 25,000 Syrian refugees, most of them were government-assisted (Nofal, 2017). At the time, the government claimed that this would provide support for refugee families and children looking for a fresh start and help them eventually contribute positively to Canadian society (Nofal, 2017). Be that as it may, it has become clear that this was not anywhere near enough. The insufficient support for students who are refugees was also uncovered by Thomas, Crosby, and Vanderhaar (2019), who noted considerable barriers persist in providing adequate support for students who experienced trauma, particularly

refugees. Given the understanding that adverse childhood experiences have implications throughout one's life, providing trauma-informed support for vulnerable populations, such as refugees, figures to be especially valuable in mitigating the negative effects of trauma.

Mental Health and Trauma

Research by Fazel et al. (2012) suggested that between 20 – 50% of children who are refugees who resettle in a new country experience mental health problems. Determinants of mental illness in this population are wide-ranging but generally include their pre-migration experiences, post-migration family and school environment, discrimination, and the number of years since they arrived in their new country (Guruge & Butt, 2015). However, school and cultural connectedness is one of the factors that can mitigate against this (Khan et al., 2018). The potentially therapeutic role that education and school connectedness can have on the mental health of children who are refugees is particularly noteworthy, especially in the context that SAMHSA (2014) identifies this as a principle of trauma-informed care.

As Bath (2008) noted, many refugees suffer from multiple complex traumas inherent to the realities of leaving their unstable home country, undergoing the uncertainties of seeking refuge, and then attempting to adjust to life in a new homeland. Children who are refugees tend to be more acutely affected by these traumatic experiences (Mayor, 2019). They have experienced adverse childhood experiences (ACEs), which are chronic or traumatic stressors experienced during childhood that impact one's health and behaviour (Ranjbar & Erb, 2019; Wood et al., 2020). For children who are refugees, their underlying traumas are complex, multi-faceted, and often difficult to fathom.

As Nofal (2017) describes, by the time the Syrian refugee students arrived and began school in Canada, they had already experienced a range of adverse childhood experiences. Pre-migration, these students endured stressors and events that are inherent to the Syrian refugee

crisis and the associated war, like assault, death, and loss of friends or family members (Nofal, 2017). During the displacement process, there was a pervasive general sense of uncertainty, instability, and unpredictability. Finally, during the transition to Canada, refugees struggle with the adjustment to a new country and culture (Nofal, 2017). For children specifically, this period of time is often marked by intermittent education at best, and, while in Canada, the challenges of integrating into a new school environment.

That being said, it is imperative not to jump to conclusions and make assumptions about the traumatization of children who are refugees. Not all refugee children will experience the same kinds of trauma, if at all, nor will they all necessarily exhibit the same signs and symptoms of trauma (Mayor, 2019). Regardless, it is still important to be cognizant of the ways that traumatization can adversely affect a child's development, functioning, and ability to learn.

Academic Challenges

Arguably the biggest factor affecting a child's academic progress are the language barriers that exist since many students who are refugees tend to struggle with the English language. Even though some students who are refugees might be able to speak and understand basic English, the underlying problem is their lack of confidence in being able to communicate effectively in English (Gagné et al., 2012). Further to this, parents of immigrant or refugee children often worry about the academic success of their children who are either unable to speak fluent English, or who lack confidence in their ability to speak English (Gagné et al., 2012). This suggests that both children and their parents who are refugees are fearful of the language barriers posing a threat to their child's ability to succeed academically.

That these students lack fluency in English to succeed in Canadian schools, and/or lack the confidence to contribute to their own learning is worrisome. As Kirova (2019) noted, many students who are refugees fear contributing to their own learning because of their perceived poor

English language skills. For example, students who are refugees might fear participating in class or seeking clarification on the concepts being taught. This can lead to struggles in other subjects, such as mathematics. Even if the student might have good math skills, the language barrier might mean they do not understand what the written math question is asking or might be unable to fully explain their math solutions (Kirova, 2019). In essence, they are being expected to both learn the English language and learn the material missed during their displacement, and that is required to learn under the Canadian curriculums. As a consequence of this, children who are refugees or immigrants are invariably placed in lower grades that are not necessarily commensurate with their true academic ability (Kirova, 2019).

In many instances, parents of children who are refugees have the perception that educators are not fully prepared on how best to support the unique learning needs of students who are refugees (Gagné et al., 2012). This perception is fair, as pre-service teachers report a lack of preparedness and training to support students who are refugees (Levi, 2019). Pre-service teachers, as well as practicing teachers, recognize the profound life experiences children who are refugees have experienced, such as traumatization, language barriers, and cultural changes (Gagne et al., 2012; Levi, 2019). Despite this recognition, many teachers nonetheless struggle to effectively support students who are refugees due to the lack of training being offered. Thus, many students who are refugees experience weak student-teacher relationships in part due to teachers lacking sufficient preparation and knowledge on how best to support students who are refugees. This impedes the successful educational integration of refugees, but also their sense of belonging in the school community. However, the social and cultural challenges that children who are refugees endure after arriving in Canada are also a factor.

In addition to the aforementioned academic barriers, an additional academic challenge presents itself in online learning. First, Simko et al. (2018) point out that online privacy and security is a concern for many refugees as they try to navigate online environments. This perceived fear of being found through participation in online activities then translates to a fear of online learning. For example, in Al-Jizawi et al. (2020), the researchers observed several incidences where governments practice transnational suppression, where they track and trace political exiles and refugees to their host countries using digital presence. From this perspective, students who are refugees, might have an additional fear of actively participating in online learning. This fear leads to a lack of willingness to participate in online education activities, thus reducing learning outcomes (Al-Jizawi et al., 2020).

Another identified challenge in online learning for students who are refugees is that online learning developers in English-speaking countries tend to assume that all of the student-learners speak fluent English. According to Drolia et al. (2020), a significant challenge that most refugees, especially those in Western countries, faced was not access to technology, but rather the characteristics of the educational technologies offered. Most online classroom tools are developed with a homogenous population in mind, yet pedagogical best practices recommend differentiation of instructional and evaluation methods and tools towards culturally responsive approaches (Newcomer et al., 2021). The implication here is that, with online education tools' characteristics not being linked to the specific needs of refugees, it becomes challenging to interact effectively with the online education system. This consequently reduces motivation to learn and engage with the rest of the class, and in so doing, online education becomes a challenge in itself.

Social and Cultural Challenges

Children who are refugees are likely to encounter a myriad of social and cultural challenges as they attempt to adjust to life in Canada. A primary fear amongst many new immigrants and refugees is the fear of stigmatization. In a study conducted with Syrian refugees, Nofal (2017) found that the most common fear prior to their arrival was that Canadians will try to force them to lose their sense of culture and identity, in order to be accepted into the larger society. Though many families report that they generally feel welcomed in their communities and have been allowed to maintain their sense of identity, refugees still endure many obstacles and challenges in Canada.

Refugees in Canada tend to settle in or near large metropolitan cities such as Toronto or Ottawa. This makes sense given that these areas are also more likely to be culturally diverse or be near people from similar cultural or ethnic backgrounds (Calvert, 2018). This figures to positively contribute to their sense of belonging in the general community, though even refugee families in other regions still generally indicate they feel welcomed (Calvert, 2018). This is partly due to the social and cultural inclusions and accommodations offered by the Canadian Government in recent years to refugees (Calvert, 2018).

One of the most meaningful opportunities to ensure that children who are refugees can develop a sense of belonging and integrate into Canada is through the education system. After all, Canadian schools are largely responsible for the socialization of children (Gagné et al., 2018). Though existing literature on the precise social and cultural needs of children who are refugees in Canada remains rather limited, it is nonetheless clear that these youth struggle to develop a sense of belonging (Guo, Maitra, & Guo, 2019). Children who are refugees often report they do not feel as though they belong in the classroom because of discrimination, social exclusion, and a lack of peers that they can consider to be their true friends (Guo, Maitra & Guo,

2019; Hanley et al., 2018). It is not for a lack of trying either, as most children who are refugees want to form meaningful friendships and develop a strong sense of belonging in their new communities (Guo, Maitra, & Guo, 2019). This makes sense, especially considering the probable trauma and life challenges they have encountered prior to arriving in Canada. However, socio-cultural integration and a sense of belonging is a two-way street insofar as schools and educators adapting to working with diverse student populations and facilitating their integration into the school community (Guo, Maitra, & Guo, 2019).

Overall, there seems to be a genuine intention by families and children who are refugees to gain a sense of belonging and integration into their new home in Canada (Kirova, 2019; Nofal, 2017). Though there are challenges, it is the responsible thing for schools to ensure that this process takes place; that they feel welcome and belong in a multicultural country like Canada. It is equally responsible for ensuring that refugees develop a sense of belonging without losing their cultural identity (Nofal, 2017). Therefore, it is important to ensure a healthy acculturation process, whereby an immigrant learns and incorporates elements of another culture to feel they belong, without losing sight of their own cultural identity and heritage (Safdar, Lay, & Struthers, 2003). Providing affirmation of an individual's culture may provide the sense of belonging that is necessary to feel welcome and accepted.

Sense of Belonging for Students who are Refugees

Despite the existence of research that describes the importance of a sense of belonging, the importance of belongingness to refugees has been the subject of limited research. However, in exploring sense of belonging amongst child survivors of the Holocaust, Kestenberg and Kestenberg (1988) surmised that one's sense of belonging after adverse events becomes progressively more complex. Children who were enrolled in school at the time of the study felt a

strong inclination to want to feel as though they are valued and accepted by their peers and teachers (Kestenberg & Kestenberg, 1988). This research is intriguing when considered in the context of the work by Pendergast et al. (2018). In their study, students (refugee or otherwise) value belongingness at school because, in addition to helping students develop resilience, a sense of belonging serves as a protective factor for students' social well-being, health, and educational outcomes (Pendergast et al., 2018).

Belongingness and Safe Learning Environments in Ontario Schools

Ontario elementary and secondary schools adhere to the provincially legislated 2000 *Safe Schools Act*, implemented to outline the types of conduct that is unacceptable in schools and the corresponding consequences (Government of Ontario, 2000). The apparent zero-tolerance policy is meant to ensure a safe school environment that is conducive to learning for all students. This Act has two primary limitations. First, it is likely to disproportionately affect racial or cultural minority students, including students who are refugees (Bhattacharjee, 2003). Second, it only addresses the role of student behaviour affecting the safe learning environment. In short, there is a litany of other factors beyond student behaviour that can contribute to a safe learning environment.

This was partly acknowledged and addressed when the Ontario Government introduced Bill 13, or the *Accepting Schools Act* in 2012. This more comprehensively outlines best practices and policies for achieving safe, inclusive schools, and acknowledges the role that a safe learning environment has on student achievement and general wellbeing (Government of Ontario, 2012). Notably, Bill 13 emphasized a whole-school approach to achieving a safe learning environment by building a positive and inclusive school climate.

On the one hand, Bill 13 begins to approach something resembling a trauma-informed school framework. Specifically, it acknowledges that all members of the school community can

contribute to a school's safe learning environment. Also, it begins to establish that creating a safe school environment requires a 'whole school' approach, including access to community support services. Despite this, it is clear that there is still more to be done to ensure a fully safe learning environment for all students.

Existing research, such as that of Daniel and Bondy (2008), supports the idea that students are more likely to feel safe in a learning environment where they feel like they belong and are a valued part of the learning community. Thus, it is important to ensure that Ontario schools are aware of valid strategies to ensure a greater sense of belonging for all students. Educational departments, teachers, and schools should explore various ways to create a sense of belonging considering the different settings, student needs, and existing barriers (Daniel & Bondy, 2008). Creating a sense of belonging supports a safe school culture. The main impetus behind the *Safe Schools Act* and *Accepting Schools Act* is to ensure a safe, inclusive learning environment for all students (Bhattacharjee, 2003).

Although these Acts are important to support student success and wellbeing, it is also important to continuously examine them to ensure they are addressing problems effectively. Some research found that these Acts may have an adverse effect on students from marginalized communities (Daniel & Bondy, 2008; Selimos & Daniel, 2017). For example, students from racialized and/or immigrant backgrounds have been disproportionately affected by such zero-tolerance policies (Daniel & Bondy, 2008; Selimos & Daniel, 2017).

Importance for Students who are Refugees

The desire to belong is often something of great importance to children who are refugees. Constant threats to safety, exclusion, and losses experienced can gravely impact one's sense of belonging (Kestenberg & Kestenberg, 1988). Based on Maslow's (1987) interpretation of belongingness, these constant threats to their wellbeing would inevitably heighten their desire to

belong. That is, if belongingness is rooted in the evolutionary desire to survive, their pre-migration experiences that threatened their survival would therefore increase their desire to belong. This desire would likely be magnified after arriving in a new country, since they have been forced to leave their home, and sometimes family and friends, behind (Guo, Maitra, & Guo, 2019).

In many instances, the lack of belongingness is an impediment to the academic success of students who are refugees. The previously described academic and socio-cultural challenges these students face certainly aggravate the difficult situation for students who are refugees. Lack of teacher familiarity and preparedness, language barriers, and social exclusion and discrimination all inhibit any efforts by students who are refugees to feel like they belong at school (Guo, Maitra, & Guo, 2019).

Similarly, school-aged children who are refugees also are presented with the difficult task of balancing acculturation and integration. As Berry (2005) describes, acculturation is the process of an individual from a cultural group adopting the beliefs and customs, such as values and norms, of another group. Meanwhile, integration is the maintaining of one's heritage while adopting some aspects of the new, larger mainstream culture (Berry, 2005). In a multicultural country like Canada, Berry (2005) argued that integration is possible but that it will still likely be difficult due to experiences of hostility, rejection, and discrimination. Maintaining a connection to their cultural heritage and identity is often central to a refugee's sense of belonging (identity to one's cultural heritage) yet doing so could potentially jeopardize their sense of belonging with their peers.

This balance can be especially tricky for children who are refugees, who desire a sense of belonging with peers their own age at school (Guo, Maitra, & Guo, 2019). These children are

looking to belong, are vulnerable, and schooling with children their own age seems like the most appropriate place to seek belongingness. Despite the attempts to ensure a safe learning environment, many students from cultural or ethnic minorities continue to experience discrimination in the classroom. This is illustrative of the need for further considerations in Ontario classrooms to be undertaken to ensure that all students feel safe and can develop a sense of belonging (Guo, Maitra, & Guo, 2019).

Considerations in the Classroom

Montero et al. (2012) suggests that a lack of belonging among refugee students contributes to high rates of dropout and attrition. This is because their needs for belongingness are not being meaningfully addressed outside of school, due to the strained situations of refugee families in Canada. To address the complex needs of students who are refugees and help them feel a greater sense of belongingness, Montero et al. (2012) posits that schools should “flip current school practices on their heads” (p.10). For example, revisiting persistent monolingual instruction by allowing students to use their first language in second language learning contexts. Allowing students to practice and converse in their native languages will likely contribute to their academic success and confidence, but also help them feel valued and accepted – both of which are central to belongingness (Montero et al., 2012).

Meaningfully addressing anti-immigrant sentiment would also be impactful in ensuring students who are refugees feel like they belong at school and are in a safe environment. Some students who are refugees report being bullied for wearing traditional clothes from their home country, with the incidents not being adequately addressed by school administration (Montero et al., 2012). Incidences of bullying and harassment prevent students’ sense of belonging at school, particularly when the anti-immigrant sentiment means attacking elements of their identity. Referring back to the work of Berry (2005) and Baffoe (2007), maintaining and preserving their

cultural or ethnic heritage is part of maintaining their identity and sense of belonging. Overall, though, school administration should treat incidents of bullying and harassment seriously. More to the point, any school disciplinary rules should be fair and evenly applied, otherwise it risks jeopardizing the safe learning environment at school that facilitates a sense of belonging (Montero et al., 2012).

A number of institutions have adopted online learning and a transition towards this learning approach seems to be prevalent right now (Szelei et al., 2022). Thus, the sense of belonging in online learning environments for students who are refugees poses added challenges for teachers as an abrupt shift to learning approaches and conditions not only impacts the students but the teachers as well. Interestingly, Szelei et al. (2022) found that school closures because of COVID-19 have not in itself affected students who are refugees' sense of belonging or motivation towards learning. This appears to be explained by the students who are refugees' already developing some coping ability and resilience to change enabled them to adjust easier to interrupted schooling and the subsequent transition to online learning.

However, there were still efforts undertaken by teachers to help students who are refugees begin to develop a sense of belonging in the classroom. Even though students who are refugees might show some resilience, Szelei et al. (2022) reiterated that teachers connecting with and developing meaningful connections with these students becomes even more important in the often-isolating online learning environment. These initiatives by teachers have contributed to the students maintaining a sense of belonging amidst a sudden transition to online learning (Szelei et al., 2022).

This research highlights some general frameworks and considerations for establishing a sense of belonging for students who are refugees, or other marginalized populations, in

classrooms. However, Viennet and Pont (2017) pointed out that there is a distinct difference between research and passing legislation and policies and the actual application of those in classrooms by teachers and school administration. A large component of ensuring best practices for developing a sense of belonging, including for those who have experienced traumas, exists in teacher education programs.

Teacher Education

Current State of Teacher Education in Ontario

In Ontario, all practicing teachers are required to be certified by the Ontario College of Teachers, which is the provincial regulatory body for the teaching profession. To receive certification normally requires the completion of an undergraduate degree and a Bachelor of Education (B.Ed.) degree. There are currently thirteen publicly funded universities in Ontario accredited by the Ontario College of Teachers currently offering B.Ed. degrees. Successful completion of a B.Ed. program allows for students to apply for certification with the Ontario College of Teachers.

In 2013, the Government of Ontario announced an extension to the teacher education programs, meaning the program will now be two years (four academic semesters) long rather than one year, or two academic semesters. As Petrarca and Kitchen (2017) noted, the rationale for the decision was to address the surplus of teacher candidates, but this created a state of general uncertainty for the faculties of education in Ontario. Teacher education programs had to reconceptualize their programs in order to create two academic years of courses that prepare their students for the teaching profession, while also adhering to the core content requirements legislated by the Government of Ontario (Petrarca & Kitchen, 2017). The core content requirements were broad enough to allow faculties of education to continue their diverse program offerings in addition to the requisite practicum and knowledge of the Ontario

curriculum requirements. Of particular note, are the requirements to have offerings pertaining to “the use of technology as a teaching and learning tool; mental health, addictions, and well-being; safe and accepting schools and creation of a positive school climate.” (Ontario College of Teachers, 2017).

Despite the increased set of requirements for teacher education programs outlined by the Ontario College of Teachers (2017) and the Government of Ontario, there is nothing that specifically mentions education for teachers who want to support students with refugee status, or students who have experienced trauma. Though infusing technology into teaching and learning is commonly discussed, it is often taught as an in-person practice rather than preparing teachers for the possibility of having to teach remotely in online classrooms.

Trauma-Informed Practices

In response to growing concerns about the increasing prevalence of mental health problems occurring in childhood and adolescence, the Government of Ontario (2012) took steps to ensure that Ontario faculties of education ensure pre-service teachers are adequately knowledgeable about supporting students with mental health concerns. Even though teachers are not expected to directly help alleviate the students’ mental health concerns, they are expected to know how such concerns impact a student’s ability to learn and be familiar with potential resources and supports to help these students (Government of Ontario, 2013). To ensure this, the Ontario College of Teachers (2017) accreditation requirements requires that pre-service teacher education programs include mental health in their programming.

This premise is not too dissimilar from a fundamental principle of trauma-informed care. Referring back to SAMHSA’s (2014) trauma-informed principle of collaboration and mutuality, one does not need to be a therapist in order to be therapeutic. This acknowledges that, in a school environment, teachers and school administration do not need to have all the answers to play a

therapeutic role in the lives of students. As Atkins and Rodger (2016) noted, teachers can be valuable members of a team approach to addressing the mental health of their students. However, teachers can also support students with mental health or trauma needs through making some minor classroom adjustments. Against this backdrop, it is therefore concerning that it is generally unclear how Ontario faculties of education address the intersection of mental health and trauma-informed practices in student populations, if at all.

If the research by Smyth (2017) is any indication, it seems that very few teachers received any mandatory pre-service or in-service training specific to trauma-informed teaching practices. Many teachers acknowledged receiving some training on supporting mental health concerns in students, but still reported concern about how to support students with trauma experiences (Smyth, 2017).

Despite topics of mental health and trauma being mostly related, supporting students with trauma is rarely covered in teacher education programs. This lack of trauma-specific training availability continues in the additional qualification courses offered for Ontario teachers. Of the teacher education programs offering additional qualification courses, none have a clear focus on trauma-informed teaching practices or even trauma-sensitivity (Smyth, 2017). This is consistent with the research of Dippo, Basu, and Duran (2012), who studied teacher workshops in Ontario to ascertain the extent that trauma-informed training for teachers is provided. Overall, the workshops placed a greater emphasis on student mental health concerns rather than trauma-informed considerations specifically (Dippo, Basu, & Duran, 2012).

Though this review of the workshops was conducted a decade ago, it appears little has changed. In recent years in Ontario, workshops and other forms of training on student mental health have increased in frequency for both pre-service and practicing teachers, while little time

is spent on trauma (Thomas, Crosby, & Vanderhaar, 2019). This lack of knowledge on the importance of creating a trauma-sensitive classroom is especially glaring in Ontario's teacher education programs. To be specific, teacher education programs often either neglect to discuss impacts of trauma on student learning at all or include it almost as though it is an afterthought (Thomas, Crosby & Vanderhaar, 2019). Similarly, there is minimal knowledge and awareness amongst teachers how best to support the needs of students who are refugees in the classroom, despite the influx of these students entering Ontario public schools (Dippo et al., 2012).

Supporting Students who are Refugees

Much like the increased prevalence of trauma in children and adolescents, the number of students who are refugees in Ontario classrooms is expected to increase. Canada continues to accept refugee families, with children enrolling in public schools who have a diverse and complex set of educational needs (Kirova, 2019). The number of refugees admitted into Canada has increased in recent years, in part due to the Syrian refugee crisis, but this is by no means a recent phenomenon. After all, Canada has admitted an average of 30,000 refugees per year since approximately 1980 (UNHCR, 2018).

Although many school boards and schools across Ontario tout their commitment to diversity and inclusive education, there continues to be a lack of general knowledge or awareness among teachers on how to actually accomplish this. Dippo, Basu, and Duran (2012) point out that, despite these claims of fostering culturally inclusive classrooms, teachers often feel unprepared to support students from minority or other at-risk populations. In the case of students who are refugees, many teachers falsely assume that their needs are no different than any other immigrant into Canada (Dippo, Basu, & Duran, 2012). The researchers operated under the premise that these problems are not self-correcting, rather they warrant intervention by way of training. Workshops with pre-service teachers at York University on the complex needs of

students who are refugees resulted in increased awareness and confidence in being able to properly support them in the classroom (Dippo, Basu, & Duran, 2012).

Despite this, teachers continue to experience challenges adequately supporting students from refugee backgrounds. This is no small part due to the continued lack of pre-service education on supporting refugee students, or even students from other countries. Research by Levi (2019) found that pre-service teachers lack opportunities to work with students from refugee backgrounds. Further, although many pre-service teachers recognize the urgent needs of students who are refugees, they are unsure how to do this in the classroom (Levi, 2019). Intriguingly, the pre-service teachers identified further training in trauma-informed practices as one of the major gaps in their teacher education program for supporting students who are refugees (Levi, 2019). This might suggest that pre-service teachers, and practicing teachers, are cognizant that many students who are refugees likely experienced trauma, and that this impacts their ability to succeed academically.

Coelho (1998) described schooling as one of the first steps that allows children who are refugees to move back towards a normal life, because it provides a safe, welcoming, and predictable environment. Since teachers play a large role in ensuring this type of environment, it seems prudent to ensure that teachers receive sufficient training for this. In particular, training on ensuring a safe learning environment for all students across all backgrounds, including students who are refugees. Without proper teacher education on this, the process of creating a safe and inclusive classroom environment arguably cannot take place.

Cherian (2007) studied the experiences of pre-service teachers in their teacher education programs and in their placements in Ontario classrooms. Notably, some teacher-candidates reported that their mentoring classroom teachers were sometimes reluctant to fully embrace the

anti-racist and social justice pedagogies that would be involved in allowing for open discussions on the experiences of refugees within the safe classroom environment (Cherian, 2007). There could be a few explanations for this reluctance, but the pre-service teachers were left with the impression that perceived controversial issues pertaining to social justice were to be avoided in favour of "...sticking to the curriculum" (Cherian, 2007). In other instances, some faculties of education, and some pre-service teachers, were resistant to challenging social inequalities embedded in the classroom (Dunn et al., 2009). This might suggest that there are few opportunities for pre-service teachers to receive knowledge about supporting students who are refugees and have meaningful opportunities work with these students.

In a review of the Ontario teacher education programs, the University of Ottawa's faculty of education was the only one to make clear mention of their efforts to prepare pre-service teachers for working with students who are refugees. In their chapter on the teacher education program at the University of Ottawa, Ng-A-Fook et al. (2017) highlighted the cohort system used. All students in the program are placed in one of five cohorts based on student interest. One of the cohorts, Urban Education Community (UEC), is for those interested in working with diverse groups of students, including refugees and new immigrants (Ng-A-Fook et al., 2017). Moreover, pre-service teachers in this cohort are also placed in priority schools with a comparatively large population of students who are refugees or immigrants.

Virtual Classrooms

Teaching and learning with technology have been an increasing focus at many of the teacher education programs in Ontario, and across Canada, in the past decade. The focus here has been on making effective and appropriate use of digital technologies to facilitate student learning in in-person classrooms. This is mostly because of research suggesting the benefits from the use of technology in education. For example, Devlin et al. (2013) describe that incorporating

technology in the classroom as an instruction tool has been shown to consistently enhance student learning and their academic outcomes. This is seemingly corroborated in the meta-analysis by Cheung and Slavin (2011), who found that mathematics scores improved in students who received traditional instruction mixed with additional computer-assisted instruction.

Since these studies took place, greater emphasis has continued to be placed on incorporating technology into Ontario classrooms. However, educational technologies can only improve student achievement if they are implemented thoughtfully and meaningfully. To that end, many faculties of education have taken measures to implement technological education and digital literacy into their program curriculums (Barrett, 2021). Notably, Ontario Tech University, York University, Brock University, and the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE) at the University of Toronto have infused technology meaningfully into many of their current course offerings in their respective teacher education programs (Petrarca & Kitchen, 2017).

In all instances, pre-service teachers only learn about effectively integrating technology into the classroom. Most of the teacher education programs in Ontario do not prepare teachers for teaching classes using online learning environments (Barrett, 2021). It is perhaps a truism that this should be unsurprising, as most elementary and secondary school students receive in-person education. Though the Government of Ontario recently considered making online learning a permanent choice for families, this was met by considerable backlash from Ontario teachers' unions, educators, and parents (Katawazi, 2021). Overall, though, it is arguably unlikely that online learning will replace in-person as the predominant mode of education.

In March 2020, in-person learning was disrupted when the coronavirus pandemic hit Canada. Consequently, remote learning was mandated for students across Ontario across all grade levels, regardless of their ability to learn online (Barrett, 2021). In the ensuing time,

Ontario elementary and secondary school students have received their education through an inconsistent mix of in-person and remote learning (Barrett, 2021). This has adversely affected students, impacting their academic achievement and learning, mental health, and motivation and engagement (Gallagher-MacKay et al., 2021). Further, these disruptions have been especially disruptive to students with disabilities, English language learners, and those from marginalized populations (Gallagher-MacKay et al., 2021).

In terms of the academic-related impacts the closure of Ontario schools has had on students, some of this can be attributed to the lack of knowledge teachers have for running online classrooms (Barrett, 2021). Many teachers are cognizant of the importance of establishing safe, positive, and welcoming learning spaces in the classroom, but struggle to adapt this practice to virtual classrooms. As Farmer and West (2019) noted, even experienced teachers can struggle to adapt to virtual classrooms because of the technical skills required and the challenges of remote student learning and teaching. This inevitably makes it challenging for educators to establish an online learning community with students.

Overall, the unexpected and rapid transition to online classrooms by educational institutions across Canada has created a sudden, significant emphasis on this learning approach. This has introduced challenges and difficulties to teachers because of their inexperience, insufficient knowledge, and general lack of preparedness in implementing this educational mode of delivery (Farmer & West, 2019). This impacted students' learning and well-being as the sudden change to online learning has been difficult for both students and teachers. Furthermore, the transition to online learning has made it more challenging for teachers to create a sense of belonging for students who are refugees when they are also struggling with the shift to online learning.

Chapter 3: Methods

Overview

This study was designed to explore the views of pre-service teachers on creating a sense of belonging, which is a trauma-informed practice, in online classrooms for students who are refugees. The specific research questions for this study were:

RQ1: What knowledge do pre-service teachers acquire in a pre-service program about trauma-informed education, as it relates to:

- (a) Elementary and secondary school students with trauma
- (b) Students who are refugees
- (c) Online learning environments

RQ2: What ideas do pre-service teachers have for creating a sense of belonging (a trauma-informed practice) in online spaces for students who are refugees?

- (a) Within these ideas do pre-service teachers identify barriers to trauma-informed practices in online learning environments?
- (b) Within these ideas do pre-service teachers identify some solutions to resolving or overcoming these barriers?

To answer these questions, a mixed-methods study involving both qualitative and quantitative data was conducted using the results from an end-of-course survey. Each year, pre-service teachers in a Bachelor of Education (B.Ed.) program at an Ontario university complete an end-of-course survey for their Mental Health in Schools course. The pre- and post-course surveys are intended to improve the quality of the course to ensure greater student learning. Also, the survey responses obtained influence the future direction of the course by informing the instructor and the Faculty of Education how to adjust the course in the future to, ideally, benefit future students

(Borch, Sandvoll, & Risor, 2020). Further, these specific course surveys provided insight into pre-service teachers' views of trauma-informed practices, supporting students who are refugees, and their education in the area of trauma-informed practices.

A mixed-methods approach involving both quantitative and qualitative data was used because it allows researchers to attain a deeper understanding of the problem (Creswell, 2014). The survey included open-ended qualitative questions such as, “*Describe how you acquired your knowledge and experience on trauma-informed practices in online classrooms/learning environments*” and quantitative questions such as, “*What knowledge and experience have you acquired about each of the following, in your teacher education program?*”

Context

This research uses secondary data collected from pre-service teachers in a Bachelor of Education (B.Ed.) program at an Ontario university. As part of the program, pre-service teachers complete a course titled *Mental Health in Schools*, which is offered in the Fall academic term from September to December. This course is intended for students in the second year of the B.Ed. program and focuses on providing them with strategies for supporting students with a wide range of mental health problems.

Students enrolled in the course complete an end-of-course survey which explores student learning, views of the content, and future ideas for course content. The course survey is normally administered every December, at the end of the term. In addition to delivering the course survey to students at the end of the course, the survey is also administered to year one students who have not yet completed the course. Doing so allows for the instructor to assess the students' baseline knowledge and views of mental health and trauma prior to their enrollment in the

course. Students also had the ability to give, or not give, permission for their responses to be used in future research by the course instructor or graduate students working with the instructor.

Participants

The participants for this study are pre-service teachers in a B.Ed program at an Ontario university. In the academic year of 2021-2022, there were approximately 144 students enrolled in this program. To be admitted into this program, students had to have previously completed an undergraduate degree. Students in the program ranged in ages from 23 to 58 years and came from a wide range of ethnicities and cultures. Given that this research relied on participants who were already enrolled in the program, convenience sampling was used. Convenience sampling is described as using participants because they are convenient and readily available (Jager, Putnick, & Bornstein, 2017). This was an appropriate selection strategy because it makes use of a readily available sample of pre-service teachers

The archived data used for this study comes from two sub-groups of B.Ed. students. The first sub-group were second-year students who completed the *Mental Health in Schools* course in the Fall of 2021. Although all students complete the post-course survey, only those who gave their permission for their data to be used in future research were included (10 students). The second sub-group were first-year students who had not yet completed the course but completed the pre-course survey (35 students). This process reduced participant selection bias because only those giving permission were included. Across the two sub-groups, there was a total of 45 participants for this study.

Data Sources

The data sources for this study were surveys completed by students enrolled in the Bachelor of Education program at an Ontario university. These were pre- and post-course

surveys completed by students for the Mental Health in Schools course. The online course survey, delivered through Survey Monkey, is sent every year to first-year students prior to their enrollment in the course and to second-year students at the end of the course.

Although there were 15 questions in the survey, only 10 were related to the aims of this study. These included questions pertaining to trauma-informed practices, students who are refugees, and online learning environments were used. The participant survey questions were identical for both the pre-course and post-course surveys.

Among these 10 survey questions, there was a mix of quantitative and qualitative questions. A Likert scale consisting of four, 6-point items was used to measure students' self-perceived knowledge and experience about trauma-informed care and practices acquired through the teacher education program. There were also nine open-ended questions, whose purposes were trifold. First, it allowed students to describe how they acquired their knowledge. Second, it allowed students to include ideas, suggestions, and perceptions on trauma-informed care with students who are refugees, and in online classrooms. Third, it invited students to identify future information they would like on trauma-informed practices and their preferred means of receiving this knowledge. The alignment between the study's research questions and the survey questions is depicted in Table 1.

Table 1

Alignment of Research Questions to the Survey Questions

Research Questions	Survey Questions
<p>1. What knowledge do pre-service teachers acquire in a pre-service program about trauma-informed education, as it relates to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">(a) Elementary and secondary school students with trauma(b) Students who are refugees(c) Online learning environments	<p>1. What knowledge and experience have you acquired about each of the following, in your teacher education program?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">(a) Trauma-informed care and practices, in general(b) Trauma-informed care and practices, with elementary and secondary school students(c) Trauma-informed care and practices, with students who are refugees(d) Trauma-informed care and practices, in online classrooms <p>2. Describe how you acquired your knowledge and experience on trauma-informed care with elementary/secondary school students.</p> <p>3. Describe how you acquired your knowledge and experience on trauma-informed care with students who are refugees.</p> <p>4. Describe how you acquired your knowledge and experience on trauma-informed care in online classrooms/learning environments.</p>
<p>2. What ideas do pre-service teachers have for creating a sense of belonging (a trauma-informed practice) in online spaces for students who are refugees?</p>	<p>5. Creating a sense of belonging is a goal of trauma-informed care. What are some ways teachers can create a sense of belonging in a virtual environment for elementary/secondary school students?</p> <p>6. What ideas do you have for trauma-informed practices that teachers can use in virtual spaces for students who are refugees who may have experienced trauma?</p>
<p>2a. Do pre-service teachers identify barriers to trauma-informed practices in online learning environments?</p>	<p>7. What are some possible barriers to creating a sense of belonging online for students who are refugees who may have experienced trauma?</p>
<p>2b. Can pre-service teachers identify some solutions to resolving or overcoming these barriers?</p>	<p>8. Do you have any suggestions for overcoming these barriers?</p> <p>9. What additional information would you want on trauma-informed practices for online learning and/or refugee students?</p> <p>10. Do you believe more education on trauma-informed care should be provided to pre-service teachers? If so, what are your suggestions for providing this information to pre-service teachers?</p>

Procedure

Overview

Table 2 provides the details and description that occurred for each step in this study. Participating students refers to pre-service teachers enrolled in the B.Ed. program who completed the pre- or post-course surveys that were distributed to students by the instructor for the Mental Health in Schools course. Each step will subsequently be discussed.

Table 2

Overview of the Procedure

Step	Procedure
1	The course instructor distributed online post-course surveys and consent forms to second-year students enrolled in the Mental Health course.
2	Second-year students completed the online post-course surveys.
3	The course instructor distributed online pre-course surveys and consent forms to first-year students who have not completed the Mental Health course.
4	First-year students completed the online pre-course surveys.

Consent

This study relied on secondary use of data. Consent for the secondary use of the data was already obtained from participants by the course instructor on a survey-by-survey basis. Each online survey began with an invitation letter which detailed key information for the potential participant to consider. This included the assurance of anonymity and confidentiality of their responses, and an overview of the purpose for the survey. It was also explained that their responses might be used for secondary research purposes by the instructor or graduate students and were further assured of the anonymity and confidentiality of their responses if they consented to the sharing of their responses. A consent decision question on allowing the use of their responses for secondary research purposes followed. Participants could check ‘yes’ or ‘no’

for consenting to their data being used for secondary data. No incentives were offered for participation in this study.

Post-Course Surveys

At the end of the Fall 2021 term, the post-course surveys were distributed to the 144 second-year students enrolled in the Mental Health in Schools course. These post-course surveys gather information on their knowledge and skills related to mental health issues in schools, as well as ideas for course modification and satisfaction. These surveys were completed online through Survey Monkey. Students were notified of the survey by an e-mail from the instructor and a post on the course discussion board on the university's learning management system. Students were initially given two weeks to complete the survey. Additional reminders were sent to the enrolled students in December 2021, before the survey was closed. Ultimately, 10 participants completed the survey (and provided consent) at the end of the Fall 2021 academic term, between November 29, 2021, and January 3, 2022.

Pre-Course Surveys

Given the low number of responses received from the post-course surveys distributed to the second-year B.Ed. students, the same survey questions were subsequently distributed to first-year B.Ed. students. At the beginning of the Winter 2022 term, the pre-course surveys were distributed to first-year students in the B.Ed. program who had not yet completed the Mental Health in Schools course. These surveys assist the course instructor in evaluating the extent and scope of the knowledge and skills of students on mental health and trauma in school environments. These surveys were also completed online through Survey Monkey. Students were notified of the survey by an e-mail from the instructor through the university's learning management system and were provided with one week to complete the survey. In this group, 35

participants completed the survey during the first week of the Winter 2022 academic term, between January 12 – 18, 2022.

Ethics Approval and Data Storage

Secondary data was relied on for this study, since the pre- and post-course surveys were prepared by, and responses were collected by, the course instructor for the purposes of improving the course and formatively assessing student knowledge and skills. The specific student survey responses were not reviewed or analyzed until Research Ethics Board (REB) approval was granted for this study. Once this approval was received, the course instructor provided the log-in credentials to the Survey Monkey account used to distribute the pre- and post-course surveys. The Survey Monkey account is reasonably secure, as the original data were collected and stored on a password-protected account with multi-factor authentication enabled.

Only the survey responses from the participants who consented were included in the data collection and analysis process. In addition, only the survey questions that pertained to the topic of trauma-informed practices and a sense of belonging were included for this study. Copies of the survey responses for these questions were stored on a password-protected laptop with anti-virus software installed.

Data Analysis

This section will briefly describe the processes for how the data for this study were analyzed. A mixed-methods data analysis approach was used to examine the responses. As Gray and Denston (1998) noted, a combination of qualitative and quantitative data can be a highly effective way of understanding and conveying the findings of a research study. Further, Ponce and Maldonado (2015) posited that educational research needs to find ways to effectively address the inherent complexities of the educational profession, which might be best suited for mixed methods.

Analysis of Quantitative Data

First, quantitative data from the Likert scale question (survey question 1) was analyzed. These responses were exported into Microsoft Excel and tabulated. The ordinal Likert scale data were analyzed in terms of frequencies to determine the extent of pre-service teachers' self-perceived knowledge on trauma-informed practices in different contexts. Data was analyzed and presented separately based on whether the participant completed the Mental Health in Schools course.

Analysis of Qualitative Data

Content analysis was used to analyze the qualitative open-ended questions, which were survey questions 2 to 10. Content analysis is a qualitative methodology that condenses and classifies text data collected in research and sorts the text into categories, to obtain an organized and concise summary of the results (Erlingsson & Brysiewicz, 2017). It essentially identifies the core consistencies or meanings from the text. Doing so allowed for further insight into the ideas, suggestions, and perceptions held by the participants on trauma-informed practices in online classrooms, for elementary and secondary school participants, and with students who are refugees. Further, questions pertaining to desired additional education on trauma-informed practices in education are subjective. These insights are therefore more conducive to qualitative methodologies rather than quantitative (Erlingsson & Brysiewicz, 2017).

There were several steps used to conduct a content analysis of the qualitative data (Berg & Lune, 2011; Zhang & Wildemuth, 2009). The first step to content analysis involved the collection and sorting of the data. In this study, the data was stored electronically in a password protected SurveyMonkey account. The original consent forms included a statement that the data might be used for future research purposes. Once REB approval was obtained, the data was collected and exported into a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet. The participant responses to each

survey question were separated based on whether the participant had completed the Mental Health in Schools course. When preparing the secondary data for this study, privacy and confidentiality issues were already addressed. The data was anonymized, and the survey did not request any identifying information.

The second step involved the identification of units of analysis, for each of the survey questions that asked an open-ended qualitative question. Thus, a review of the qualitative responses was examined. These were then coded, which involved the identification of consistent themes that emerged from the responses to each of the survey questions.

The third step is to develop categories and a coding scheme, which was done by organizing and separating each response into two different groups of responses, based on whether the participant completed the course or not (pre-course/not-completed course and post-course/completed course).

For each group, their responses were reviewed, and emerging themes were identified. Based on this, the themes were categorized using a Google Doc. An inductive approach to the content analysis was used, whereby themes emerged in the responses to the open-ended qualitative questions. Responses were sorted into themes separately depending on whether the participant completed the Mental Health in Schools course. This consequently resulted in two separate categories of coded responses and themes.

The fourth step involved assessing for coding consistency. This occurred by reviewing the themes and responses periodically. Moreover, the research supervisors also subsequently reviewed the themes and responses to further refine the themes and ensure greater accuracy.

Chapter 4: Results

The purpose of the study was to determine the extent of the self-perceived knowledge of pre-service teachers on trauma-informed practices in different contexts, such as with students who are refugees and in online classrooms, and to ascertain how that knowledge was obtained. This study also focused on the perceptions and ideas pre-service teachers have on creating a sense of belonging in online classrooms, barriers to creating trauma-informed online classrooms, and barriers to learning for students who are refugees. In this chapter, the quantitative and qualitative results of the survey data are presented. There were two guiding research questions for this study:

RQ1: What knowledge do pre-service teachers acquire in a pre-service program about trauma-informed education, as it relates to:

- (a) Elementary and secondary school students with trauma
- (b) Students who are refugees
- (c) Online learning environments

RQ2: What ideas do pre-service teachers have for creating a sense of belonging (a trauma-informed practice) in online spaces for students who are refugees?

- (a) Within these ideas do pre-service teachers identify barriers to trauma-informed practices in online learning environments?
- (b) Within these ideas do pre-service teachers identify some solutions to resolving or overcoming these barriers?

First, an overview of the overall findings for this study are presented. This will then be followed by the detailed findings that address research question one (RQ1). Finally, the findings that address research question two (RQ2) will be presented.

Overall Findings

The aim of this study was to explore pre-service teachers' level of knowledge of trauma-informed practices, as well as their ideas and perceptions on creating a sense of belonging for students who are refugees. Overall, the findings suggest that the participating pre-service teachers who completed the *Mental Health in Schools* course had a higher level of trauma-informed knowledge than those who have not completed the course. However, all pre-service teachers who participated in this study had no or minimal trauma-informed knowledge when it came to students who are refugees and in online learning environments. Regardless of the knowledge level, pre-service teachers tended to have innovative ideas for creating a sense of belonging, a trauma-informed practice, to support students who are refugees and in online spaces. Greater depth and strength in these responses were provided by first-year students who had not yet completed the course.

RQ1: What knowledge do pre-service teachers acquire in a pre-service program about trauma-informed education?

The first research question examined the extent of knowledge pre-service teachers have on trauma-informed practices, and the ways in which they received that knowledge. There were three sub-questions that explored pre-service teachers' trauma-informed knowledge in three areas: (1) elementary and secondary school students, (2) students who are refugees, and (3) online learning environments. To answer this research question, there were four main survey questions:

S1: What knowledge and experiences have you acquired about each of the following, in your teacher education program?

- (a) Trauma-informed care and practices, in general

- (b) Trauma-informed care and practices, with elementary and secondary school students
- (c) Trauma-informed care and practices, with students who are refugees
- (d) Trauma-informed care and practices, in online classrooms

S2. Describe how you acquired your knowledge and experience on trauma-informed care with elementary/secondary school students.

S3. Describe how you acquired your knowledge and experience on trauma-informed care with students who are refugees.

S4. Describe how you acquired your knowledge and experience on trauma-informed care in online classrooms/learning environments.

The overall findings for RQ1 suggest that pre-service teachers who completed the mental health course reported a moderate level of trauma-informed knowledge in general and with elementary and secondary school students. However, they reported having no or minimal trauma-informed knowledge with students who are refugees and in online classrooms.

Comparatively, pre-service teachers who have not yet completed the mental health course generally reported no or minimal trauma-informed knowledge across all areas. Pre-service teachers who completed the mental health course frequently referred to the course as the source of trauma-informed knowledge, while those who have not completed the course drew upon a wide range of sources of knowledge. Table 3 outlines the overall results on the extent of knowledge pre-service teachers have on trauma-informed practices.

Table 3*Pre-Service Teachers' Knowledge of Trauma-Informed Practices*

	None	Minimal	Moderate	Above-Average	Extensive	N
General Knowledge						
Year 2	1	0	2	4	0	7
Year 1	17	8	6	3	1	35
With Elem/Sec Students						
Year 2	1	0	3	2	1	7
Year 1	15	12	8	0	0	35
With Refugees						
Year 2	1	4	1	1	0	7
Year 1	21	10	2	0	1	34
When Online						
Year 2	0	2	3	1	1	7
Year 1	20	10	4	1	0	35

Note: N = total number of respondents. Year 2 students who are those who have completed the mental health course, year 1 students are those who have not yet completed the course.

General knowledge

Extent of Knowledge. Seven participants who completed the mental health course answered this question. One participant indicated no knowledge or awareness, two participants indicated a moderate level of knowledge or awareness, and four participants indicated an above-average level of knowledge or awareness. Overall, among the participating year 2 students who completed the course, 14% reported no knowledge, 29% reported moderate knowledge, and 57% reported above-average knowledge of trauma-informed practices in general.

Thirty-five participants who have not yet completed the mental health course answered this question. Seventeen participants indicated no knowledge or awareness, eight participants indicated a minimal level of knowledge or awareness, six participants indicated a moderate level

of knowledge or awareness, three participants indicated an above-average level of knowledge or awareness, and one participant indicated an extensive level of knowledge or awareness. Overall, among the participating year 1 students who have not yet completed the course, 49% of the participants reported no knowledge, 23% reported minimal knowledge, 17% reported moderate knowledge, 9% reported above-average knowledge, and 3% reported extensive knowledge of trauma-informed practices in general.

Elementary and secondary students

Extent of Knowledge. Seven participants who completed the mental health course answered this question. One participant indicated no knowledge or awareness, three participants indicated a moderate level of knowledge or awareness, two participants indicated an above-average level of knowledge or awareness, and one participant indicated an extensive level of knowledge or awareness. Overall, among the participating year 2 students who completed the course, 14% reported no knowledge, 43% reported moderate knowledge, 29% reported above-average knowledge, and 14% reported extensive knowledge of trauma-informed practices with elementary and secondary school students.

Thirty-five participants who have not yet completed the mental health course answered this question. Fifteen participants indicated no knowledge or awareness, 12 participants indicated a minimal level of knowledge or awareness, and eight participants indicated a moderate level of knowledge or awareness. Overall, among the participating year 1 students who have not yet completed the course, 43% of the participants reported no knowledge, 34% reported minimal knowledge, and 23% reported moderate knowledge of trauma-informed practices with elementary and secondary school students.

Sources of Knowledge. Thirty-three participants answered this question, and 12 participants skipped this question. This includes six participants who completed the mental health course, and 27 participants who have not yet completed the mental health course.

Among those who completed the course, four themes emerged. Two participants indicated receiving this knowledge through the Mental Health First Aid (MHFA) training offered during the teacher education program, and two participants indicated receiving this knowledge through their mental health course. One participant indicated receiving this knowledge through self-learning. For example, Participant 4 specified, “...*reading about the topic and experiences.*” Finally, one participant indicated having no knowledge of trauma-informed practices with elementary and secondary school students.

Among those who have not yet completed the course, six themes emerged. Eleven participants indicated they had no knowledge. Five participants indicated their knowledge was obtained through their undergraduate degrees. Some examples of this education included a health sciences degree, an Early Childhood Studies degree, and a Learning and Development course at the University of Toronto. Notably, participant 33 mentioned, “*During my undergrad, I was able to do a little bit of research about trauma informed care in elementary/secondary school students...*”. Three participants indicated they learned about this through self-learning, which included websites and doing their own research. Three participants indicated employment experiences as their source of knowledge. Three participants indicated personal experiences. For example, participant 7 wrote, “*I have family members who have had trauma related mental health concerns that I have witnessed first hand.*” Finally, three participants indicated they received knowledge about this through their B.Ed. program, both in courses and during their

practicum placements. Table 4 summarizes the sources of trauma-informed knowledge received by pre-service teachers for supporting elementary and secondary school students.

Table 4

Methods of Receiving Knowledge of Trauma-Informed Care with Elementary and Secondary Students

Year 2 Pre-Service Teachers Who Completed the Mental Health Course n=6	
Theme	# of Responses
Mental health first aid	2
Mental health course	2
Self-learning	1
None	1
Uncategorizable	1
Year 1 Pre-Service Teachers Who Have Not Completed the Mental Health Course n=27	
Theme	# of Responses
None	11
Undergraduate	5
Self-learning	3
Employment	3
Personal experiences	3
Bachelor of Education program	3
Uncategorizable	3

Note: Responses were marked uncategorizable if the responses did not fit a common theme.

Students who are refugees

Extent of Knowledge. Seven participants who completed the mental health course answered this question. One participant indicated no knowledge or awareness, four participants indicated a minimal level of knowledge or awareness, one participant indicated a moderate level of knowledge or awareness, and one participant indicated an above-average level of knowledge or awareness. Overall, among the participating year 2 students who completed the course, 14% reported no knowledge, 57% reported minimal knowledge, 14% reported moderate knowledge,

and 14% reported above-average knowledge of trauma-informed practices with students who are refugees.

Thirty-four participants who have not yet completed the mental health course answered this question. Twenty-one participants indicated no knowledge or awareness, 10 participants indicated a minimal level of knowledge or awareness, two participants indicated a moderate level of knowledge or awareness, and one participant indicated an extensive level of knowledge or awareness. Overall, among the participating year 1 students who have not yet completed the course, 62% reported no knowledge, 29% reported minimal knowledge, 6% reported moderate knowledge, and 3% reported extensive knowledge of trauma-informed practices with student who are refugees.

Sources of Knowledge. Thirty-three participants answered this question, and 12 participants skipped this question. This included six participants who completed the mental health course, and 27 participants who have not yet completed the mental health course.

There were three themes that emerged in the responses from those who completed the course. Two participants indicated they have no knowledge of trauma-informed practices with students who are refugees. One participant indicated they received this knowledge through the course, in the form of case studies. One participant indicated their knowledge was received through self-learning, specifically reading websites online.

Meanwhile, four themes emerged in the responses from participants who have not yet completed the course. Seventeen participants indicated they have no knowledge of trauma-informed practices with students who are refugees. Three participants indicated their knowledge was obtained through self-learning. Some examples of this included doing research using academic journals and from reading about it on social media. Three participants indicated this

knowledge was received through employment experiences. Notably, participant 21 commented, “*I have worked in youth immigrant services for several years and attended a number of trainings related to trauma-informed practices with newcomer and refugee youth.*” Finally, two participants received this knowledge through their undergraduate programs. Examples offered included a Learning and Development course at the University of Toronto and an English Curriculum course at Ontario Tech University. Table 5 summarizes the sources of trauma-informed knowledge received by pre-service teachers for supporting students who are refugees.

Table 5

Methods of Receiving Knowledge of Trauma-Informed Care with Students who are Refugees

Year 2 Pre-Service Teachers Who Completed the Mental Health Course n=6	
Theme	# of Responses
None	2
Mental health course	1
Self-learning	1
Uncategorizable	2
Year 1 Pre-Service Teachers Who Have Not Completed the Mental Health Course n=27	
Theme	# of Responses
None	17
Self-learning	3
Employment	3
Undergraduate	2
Uncategorizable	3

Note: Responses were marked uncategorizable if the responses did not fit a common theme.

In online classrooms

Extent of Knowledge. Seven participants who completed the mental health course answered this question. Two participants indicated a minimal level of knowledge or awareness, three participants indicated a moderate level of knowledge or awareness, one participant

indicated an above-average level of knowledge or awareness, and one participant indicated an extensive level of knowledge or awareness. Overall, among the participating year 2 students who completed the course, 29% reported minimal knowledge, 43% reported moderate knowledge, 14% reported above-average knowledge, and 14% reported extensive knowledge of trauma-informed practices in online classrooms.

Thirty-five participants who have not yet completed the mental health course answered this question. Twenty participants indicated no knowledge or awareness, 10 participants indicated a minimal level of knowledge or awareness, four participants indicated a moderate level of knowledge or awareness, and one participant indicated an above-average level of knowledge or awareness. Overall, among the participating year 1 students who have not yet completed the course, 57% of the participants reported no knowledge, 29% reported minimal knowledge, 11% reported moderate knowledge, and 3% reported above-average knowledge of trauma-informed practices in online classrooms.

Sources of Knowledge. Thirty-three participants answered this question, and 12 participants skipped this question. This includes six participants who completed the mental health course, and 27 participants who have not yet completed the mental health course.

There were three themes that emerged in the responses from the participants who completed the course. Two participants indicated they have no knowledge of trauma-informed practices in online learning environments. One participant indicated they received knowledge on trauma-informed practices in online classrooms through the mental health course. One participant indicated receiving this knowledge through self-learning, which included reading about the topic online.

Four themes emerged in the responses from participants who have not completed the course. Seventeen participants indicated they had no knowledge on trauma-informed practices in online classrooms. Three participants indicated having received this knowledge through self-learning opportunities, such as through social media. For example, participant 12 explained, “...things I read about online via social media (Instagram) or see on a few pages on Tik Tok (including teaching pages).” Three participants indicated receiving this knowledge through employment experiences. Finally, two participants indicated receiving this knowledge through the B.Ed. program. Participant 33 expanded on this, by stating, “I acquired a bit of knowledge through placement last year and I was able to speak to different teachers about their experiences...”. Table 6 summarizes the sources of knowledge received by pre-service teachers for implementing trauma-informed practices in online learning environments.

Table 6

Methods of Receiving Knowledge of Trauma-Informed Care in Online Learning Environments

Year 2 Pre-Service Teachers Who Completed the Mental Health Course n=6	
Theme	# of Responses
None	2
Mental health course	1
Self-learning	1
Uncategorizable	2
Year 1 Pre-Service Teachers Who Have Not Completed the Mental Health Course n=27	
Theme	# of Responses
None	17
Self-learning	3
Employment	3
Bachelor of Education program	2
Uncategorizable	3

Note: Responses were marked uncategorizable if the responses did not fit a common theme.

RQ2: What ideas do pre-service teachers have for creating a sense of belonging (a trauma-informed practice) in online spaces for students who are refugees?

The second research question sought to explore the ideas pre-service teachers have for creating a sense of belonging, a trauma-informed practice, in online spaces for students who are refugees. There were six survey questions that addressed this question:

SQ5. Creating a sense of belonging is a goal of trauma-informed care. What are some ways teachers can create a sense of belonging in a virtual environment for elementary/secondary school students?

SQ6. What ideas do you have for trauma-informed practices that teachers can use in virtual spaces for students who are refugees who may have experienced trauma?

SQ7. What are some possible barriers to creating a sense of belonging online for students who are refugees who may have experienced trauma?

SQ8. Do you have any suggestions for overcoming these barriers?

SQ9. What additional information would you want on trauma-informed practices for online learning and/or refugee students?

SQ10. Do you believe more education on trauma-informed care should be provided to pre-service teachers? If so, what are your suggestions for providing this information to pre-service teachers?

The overall findings for RQ2 suggest that pre-service teachers had varying ideas on how to create a sense of belonging in online classrooms and similarly varied ideas on creating a trauma-informed online classroom for students who are refugees. Pre-service teachers who completed the mental health course frequently suggested referrals to external resources while those who have not completed the mental health course commonly suggested instructional

techniques and establishing an inclusive classroom. Language issues were frequently identified as a barrier to creating a sense of belonging for students who are refugees, particularly in online classrooms. Finally, all of the pre-service teachers expressed interest in obtaining future information on creating trauma-informed practices, especially in the areas of online teaching, and how to support students who are refugees.

Creating a sense of belonging in online classrooms

A total of 28 participants answered this question, and 17 participants skipped this question. This includes six participants who completed the mental health course, and 22 participants who have not yet completed the mental health course.

Among the responses that were categorizable, there were three identifiable themes presented by the participants who completed the course. The first theme was teacher check-ins, which was suggested by one participant. The second theme was fostering and encouraging inclusion in the classroom, which was suggested by one participant. Expanding on this suggestion, participant 5 wrote, *“We take the time to just learn about each other and share things about each other. I like to do this with ice breaker games. Either as part of the curriculum or not (although you can always sneak some specific expectations in!).”* Finally, one participant reported they had no suggestions for how to create a sense of belonging in online learning environments.

Among those who have not yet completed the course, there were five themes presented by the participants. The first theme was instructional techniques, which was suggested by 11 participants as a means of creating a sense of belonging in online classrooms. Examples of these techniques included setting up classroom norms, creating break-out rooms for students to work together, and focusing on group activities and assignments as much as possible. Here, participant 22 commented:

“Teachers need to slow the pace of classes, and express interest in students individually, representing attendance as interest in their health and well-being, understanding as interest in the pressures of everything that is going on in their lives. The students need to hear the teacher calling on them by name in tones which indicate concern and compassion.”

The second theme suggested was fostering inclusion as a way of creating a sense of belonging, which was suggested by nine participants. Specific ideas on this involved making the classroom as inclusive as possible, making an effort to do attendance so students hear their names being said, and using words of affirmation. The third theme was student-teacher check-ins, suggested by six participants. Here, the participants suggested that these check-ins occur specifically at the beginning of the school day and in private breakout rooms as needed. The fourth theme was positivity and was suggested three participants. Common responses that fell under this theme were that teachers should exude a positive attitude with their students as much as possible. Finally, the fifth theme was allowing and encouraging greater student involvement and was suggested by three participants as a way of promoting a sense of belonging. For example, participant 8 wrote, *“Allow students to have a say in how they complete their assignments, try to give them flexibility.”* Table 7 highlights the themes offered by the participants regarding ways to create a sense of belonging in online learning environments.

Table 7*Strategies for Creating a Sense of Belonging in Online Learning Environments*

Year 2 Pre-Service Teachers Who Completed the Mental Health Course n=6	
Theme	# of Responses
Teacher check-ins	1
Fostering inclusion	1
No ideas	1
Uncategorizable	2
Year 1 Pre-Service Teachers Who Have Not Completed the Mental Health Course n=22	
Theme	# of Responses
Instructional techniques	11
Fostering inclusion	9
Teacher check-ins	6
Positivity	3
Ensuring student involvement	3
Uncategorizable	1

Note: Responses were marked uncategorizable if the responses did not fit a common theme.

Supporting students who are refugees in online spaces

Twenty-eight participants answered this question, and 17 participants skipped this question. This includes six participants who completed the mental health course, and 22 participants who have not completed the mental health course.

There were three themes that emerged in the responses from participants who completed the course. The first theme, suggested by two participants, was accessing and using external resources. This included providing students who are refugees with links to websites and assisting in referrals to services provided by the Government of Ontario such as OHIP (Ontario Health Insurance Plan) and Mindbeacon. The second theme suggested was building familiarity with the student and their needs, which was suggested by one participant. Finally, two participants had no ideas on how to support students who are refugees.

There were five themes that emerged in the responses from the participants who have not yet completed the course. The first theme was instructional modifications, which was suggested by five participants. Some common responses were allowing students to turn their cameras off if they do not feel comfortable, trying to incorporate aspects of their culture, and actively listening to the students. Participant 26 elaborated on this, saying, *“Try and incorporate aspects of their cultures into the class so that they may feel comfortable. Give them opportunities to learn more about Canadian culture and how some aspects of their culture may be similar to ours.”* The second theme was building familiarity, suggested by four participants. Common responses under this theme were that teachers should strive to get to know the student, meet with their parents, and talk openly and actively listen to their circumstances and their needs. Moreover, participant 19 noted, *“Familiarizing oneself with the common challenges and anxieties refugees deal with on a regular basis.”* The third theme, suggested by three participants, was creating a safe space in the classroom, whether online or in-person. The fourth theme was check-ins between the teacher and students who are refugees, which was suggested by two participants. Finally, six participants had no ideas on how to support students who are refugees. Table 8 highlights the themes offered by the participants regarding ways to create a sense of belonging for students who are refugees in online learning environments.

Table 8*Ideas for Supporting for Students who are Refugees in Online Learning Environments*

Year 2 Pre-Service Teachers Who Completed the Mental Health Course n=6	
Theme	# of Responses
No ideas	2
External resources	2
Build familiarity	1
Uncategorizable	1
Year 1 Pre-Service Teachers Who Have Not Completed the Mental Health Course n=22	
Theme	# of Responses
No ideas	6
Instructional modifications	5
Build familiarity	4
Creating safe spaces	3
Teacher check-ins	2
Uncategorizable	6

Note: Responses were marked uncategorizable if the responses did not fit a common theme.

Barriers to creating a sense of belonging online for students who are refugees

Twenty-nine participants answered this question, and 16 participants skipped this question. This includes six participants who completed the mental health course, and 23 participants who have not yet completed the mental health course.

There were three themes that emerged in the responses from participants who completed the course. The first theme that emerged was the language barrier, identified by two participants. The second theme was technological barriers, identified by two participants. Some of the technological barriers identified included difficulty focusing in online classrooms, and students who are refugees not having access to reliable technology. The third theme was mental health and trauma-related barriers, identified by two participants. Common responses here were that

students who are refugees might have anxiety participating in class and that they might not want to participate until they feel comfortable.

There were five themes that emerged in the responses from participants who have not yet completed the course. The first theme were various language barriers, identified by 13 participants. On this, participant 12 commented, “*The refugee might be an E.L.L student so they might struggle to understand what is being said or what is happening.*” The second theme was socio-cultural barriers, identified by six participants. Examples included cultural differences, that students who are refugees might fear the teacher and other students not accepting them, and misunderstandings and misinterpretations of body language and other communication cues. The third theme was technological barriers, identified by six participants. Here, it was noted that some students who are refugees might not be able to have access to technology sufficient to fully engage in online classrooms and also indicated that virtual classrooms remove the human connection. The fourth theme was mental health and trauma-related issues, which was identified by three participants. Common responses here included students who are refugees experiencing anxiety, trauma, and a lack of self-confidence. Finally, one participant did not know what barriers might exist for students who are refugees in online classrooms. Table 9 highlights the barriers identified by the participants on creating a sense of belonging for students who are refugees in online classrooms.

Table 9

Barriers to Creating a Sense of Belonging in Online Learning Environments for Students who are Refugees

Year 2 Pre-Service Teachers Who Completed the Mental Health Course n=6	
Theme	# of Responses
Language	2
Technology	2
Mental health and trauma	2
Uncategorizable	1
Year 1 Pre-Service Teachers Who Have Not Completed the Mental Health Course n=23	
Theme	# of Responses
Language	13
Socio-cultural	6
Technology	6
Mental health and trauma	3
I don't know	1
Uncategorizable	8

Note: Responses were marked uncategorizable if the responses did not fit a common theme.

Suggestions for overcoming barriers to a sense of belonging

Twenty-eight participants answered this question, and 17 participants skipped this question. This includes six participants who completed the mental health course, and 22 participants who have not yet completed the mental health course.

Among the six second-year participants who completed the course, there were three themes that emerged. The first theme was seeking out external resources to overcome the barriers to a sense of belonging in online spaces for students who are refugees. This was suggested by two participants. Here, the responses suggested providing students who are refugees with information on how to access Government of Ontario funded mental health supports and asking other professionals for advice. The second theme was building familiarity

with the students who are refugees, which was suggested by one participant. For example, as participant 2 wrote, *“Teachers should take as much time as they need to get to know their students as it can be beneficial for online or in-person learning.”* The third theme was instructional flexibility, which was suggested by one participant. Participant 5 wrote, *“Give students other ways to communicate aside from camera and mic, have the Zoom text chat open, and set time aside for 1 on 1 meetings during work periods.”*

Among the 35 first-year participants who have not yet completed the course, there were six themes that emerged. The first theme was getting to know the student and their family, which was suggested by 10 participants. Example responses included here was that students could share a little about themselves and their background to the class, and that teachers should connect with the parents to establish an open line of communication. The second theme was check-ins between the teacher and the student, as suggested by five participants. The third theme was forming student groups, which was suggested by three participants. For example, by introducing students to each other, particularly those from similar backgrounds or cultures. Participant 13 elaborated, *“Introducing and grouping students with same native language to each other; also, if there is a staff member who also speaks the language, introduce them to the student.”* The fourth theme was instructional flexibility, which was suggested by two participants. Some responses offered here included teachers offering to provide voice recordings of lessons and providing translations of the lessons to students who are refugees. The fifth theme that emerged was seeking out external resources, as suggested by two participants. For example, referrals to school therapists and seeking out cultural liaisons that might exist in the community. Finally, three participants had no suggestions for how to overcome these barriers. Table 10 summarizes the

suggestions offered by the participants for overcoming barriers facing students who are refugees in online classrooms.

Table 10

Suggestions for Overcoming Barriers Facing Students who are Refugees

Year 2 Pre-Service Teachers Who Completed the Mental Health Course n=6	
Theme	# of Responses
External resources	2
Get to know the student	1
Flexibility	1
Uncategorizable	2
Year 1 Pre-Service Teachers Who Have Not Completed the Mental Health Course n=22	
Theme	# of Responses
Get to know the student	10
Teacher check-ins	5
Form student groups	3
No ideas	3
Teacher flexibility	2
External resources	2
Uncategorizable	4

Note: Responses were marked uncategorizable if the responses did not fit a common theme.

What additional information pre-service teachers want to learn

Supporting students who are refugees in online spaces. A total of 26 participants answered this question, and 19 participants skipped this question. This includes six participants who completed the mental health course, and 20 participants who have not yet completed the mental health course.

There were three themes that emerged when participants who completed the mental health course were asked what additional information on creating trauma-informed online classrooms they would want. The first theme was the desire for information on handling specific

situations, as indicated by two participants. For example, handling situations where a student might feel triggered and how to avoid placing students in those situations, and how to navigate the language barrier with students who are refugees. The second theme that emerged was wanting additional information on accessing external supports and resources, which was indicated by two participants. For example, participant 3 wrote, “*I want to learn more about professional mental health resources that can be used to support these students, like abilitiCBT, OHIP counselling, Ontario Tech counselling, and Mindbeacon.*”) Third, one participant was unsure what additional information they might want.

There were five themes that emerged in the responses from the participants who have not yet completed the course. The first theme was a desire to receive additional information on everything and anything, as indicated by eight participants. This included a desire to learn about any information that exists on supporting students who are refugees who have experienced trauma, and how to apply it to in-class contexts. Further, participant 7 wrote, “*Anything because I actually am not sure how to handle it other than providing the child with extra patience, support, and asking the family for assistance.*” The second theme was wanting additional information on handling specific situations, indicated by three participants. For example, wanting information on the best practices for helping students who are refugees succeed academically and how to navigate social situations. The third theme was a desire for additional information on accessing external supports and resources, which was indicated by three participants. For example, how to know and understand what resources are available to help educators support students who are refugees, and resources to help support all students in online classes. The fourth theme was a desire for information on navigating the language barrier, which was indicated by two participants. This included suggestions for additional information on how to teach students

who are struggling with the English language, and how teachers can adjust their expectations given this barrier. Participant 17 wrote, “*Ways to work around the language barrier (i.e. ESL pedagogy, technology, cultural sensitivity workshops, etc.)*.” Finally, two participants were unsure of what additional information they might want. Table 11 summarizes pre-service teachers’ ideas on the additional information they want on trauma-informed practices to support students who are refugees.

Table 11

Additional Information on Trauma-Informed Practices with Students who are Refugees

Year 2 Pre-Service Teachers Who Completed the Mental Health Course n=6	
Theme	# of Responses
Handling specific situations	2
Accessing supports and resources	2
None	1
Uncategorizable	1
Year 1 Pre-Service Teachers Who Have Not Completed the Mental Health Course n=20	
Theme	# of Responses
Everything and anything	8
Handling specific situations	3
Accessing supports and resources	3
Navigating the language barrier	2
Not sure	2
Uncategorizable	2

Note: Responses were marked uncategorizable if the responses did not fit a common theme.

Suggestions for further learning. There were 27 participants who responded to this survey question, including 6 who completed the mental health course and 21 who have not yet completed the mental health course. All of the participants who responded to this survey question responded affirmatively that they believed additional education on trauma-informed practices on supporting students who are refugees should be provided to pre-service teachers.

Specifically, 26 of the participants responded by stating “yes” or some clear variant of it. Meanwhile, one participant responded “sure”.

Six participants elaborated on their belief that further education should be provided on trauma-informed practices, all of whom have not yet completed the mental health course. Among those who elaborated, there were three particularly notable comments. First, participant 12 wrote, *“Yes I do believe so because I think that it is not discussed or taught enough, and a lot of educators struggle to know how to help that student within their class.”* Second, participant 13 wrote, *“I believe that education on trauma-informed care is needed for teachers currently in-service and pre-service teachers.”* Third, participant 22 wrote, *“Absolutely, it’s beneficial for everyone because we never know the history or make up of our students and for us to know them and meet their needs, we need to be equipped with all the potentials for our classrooms.”*

When the question further asked for suggestions on how pre-service teachers should receive this information, four themes emerged in the responses from those who completed the mental health course. Two participants suggested a range of professional development opportunities, such as through case studies or guest speakers. Two participants provided no suggestions. One participant suggested it should be offered through the B.Ed. program. Finally, one participant suggested providing resources to both pre-service and practicing teachers.

Five themes emerged when pre-service teachers who have not yet completed the mental health course were asked how information on trauma-informed practices should be learned. First, nine participants suggested providing this information through a specific course in the B.Ed. program. For example, participant 17 wrote, *“I believe that courses that discuss mental health and well-being, and trauma-informed care should be made mandatory (1 course to focus on teachers and 1 to focus on students).”* Second, five participants suggested professional

development opportunities. It was commonly noted this could be offered through guest speakers, conferences, and other opportunities to learn about it during the ‘Foundational Fridays’ program offered by the Faculty of Education at Ontario Tech University. Third, three participants suggested it should be offered through the B. Ed. program. On this, participant 19 wrote, “... *it should be embedded in every class as triggers are everywhere based on past experiences. We need to be sensitive to this in all aspects of lesson delivery.*” Fourth, three participants suggested providing resources to both pre-service and practicing teachers. Finally, three participants offered no suggestions. Table 12 summarizes pre-service teachers’ ideas on how to receive further information on learning trauma-informed practices to support students who are refugees, particularly in online classrooms.

Table 12

Pre-service Teachers’ Suggestions for Methods of Learning Trauma-Informed Knowledge

Year 2 Pre-Service Teachers Who Completed the Mental Health Course n=6	
Theme	# of Responses
Professional development	2
No suggestions	2
Bachelor of Education program	1
Resources	1
Year 1 Pre-Service Teachers Who Have Not Completed the Mental Health Course n=21	
Theme	# of Responses
Specific teacher education course	9
Professional development	5
Bachelor of Education program	3
Resources	3
No suggestions	3
Uncategorizable	5

Note: Responses were marked uncategorizable if the responses did not fit a common theme.

Chapter 5: Discussion

The intent of this study was to explore the ideas and perceptions of pre-service teachers on creating a sense of belonging, which is a trauma-informed practice, in online classrooms. This chapter will include a discussion and interpretation of the findings from this study, as well as some implications of the study's findings. Then, some limitations of the study and recommendations for areas of future research will be presented.

Interpretation of Findings

Knowledge Acquired During Teacher Education Program

This study used an online survey to investigate how pre-service teachers reflected on the extent of their knowledge on trauma-informed practices and the sources from which they learned that knowledge. Overall, the results of the study show a very low initial level of knowledge on trauma-informed practices, based on the self-report responses from the first-year students who have not yet completed the Mental Health in Schools course. Comparatively, students in the second year of the program and who have completed the course generally reported a moderate level of knowledge on trauma-informed practices. This seemingly attests to the general effectiveness of the mental health course in increasing the knowledge level of pre-service teachers on trauma-informed practices.

In examining the knowledge levels of the 45 pre-service teachers at a more micro level, the second-year students tended to report a higher level of knowledge than the first-year students on trauma-informed practices in general, with elementary and secondary school students, and in online classrooms. As suggested above, this again speaks to the effectiveness of the Mental Health in Schools course in equipping the pre-service teachers with the skills and knowledge base to support elementary and secondary school students who have experienced trauma. This is

important because, as Whitley et al. (2012) stated, it is becoming increasingly important for educators to develop mental health literacy, such as through teacher education courses.

However, the difference in knowledge level between the first year and second-year students lessened when they were asked about the extent of their knowledge of trauma-informed practices with students who are refugees. The pre-service teachers in both groups both commonly reported that they have either no or minimal knowledge on trauma-informed practices with students who are refugees. On the one hand, it is perhaps unsurprising that the 35 first-year students report a lack of knowledge here. It would be seemingly incongruent to have a higher level of knowledge of trauma-informed practices with students who are refugees than what they reported their overall knowledge level of trauma-informed practices to be.

On the other hand, the difference in knowledge level is notable for the six second-year pre-service teachers who have completed the mental health course. It perhaps suggests that, although they generally reported moderate to above-average levels of trauma-informed knowledge overall, they are unable to apply this knowledge to students who are refugees. Another possible explanation for this divergence is that the second-year pre-service teachers did not realize that ensuring a safe learning environment is a trauma-informed practice, as suggested by Guo, Maitra, and Guo (2019). Regardless, the apparent low level of knowledge of trauma-informed practices with refugees, especially, could be consistent with the low support that students who are refugees reported in the study by Thomas, Crosby, & Vanderhaar (2019).

An objective of this research was to understand the knowledge level of pre-service teachers on trauma-informed practices with diverse populations. The self-reported responses by the second-year students indicate that the Mental Health in Schools course effectively provides them with knowledge on trauma-informed practices in general and with elementary and

secondary school students. Despite this knowledge, the six second-year students who participated in this study seemingly struggle to apply this knowledge to diverse populations, such as students who are refugees. This is consistent with the findings of Dippro, Basu, and Duran (2012), who observed minimal teacher education that focused on supporting the complex needs of students who are refugees, and Levi (2019) who noted that teachers lack opportunities to learn about the needs of students who are refugees.

How Participants Received Trauma-Informed Knowledge

With respect to the research objective of understanding how pre-service teachers receive their knowledge on trauma-informed practices, pre-service teachers indicated various methods of receiving this knowledge. Overall, the sources of knowledge of trauma-informed practices reported by the students were generally aligned with their status in the teacher education program. That is, second-year students commonly reported the mental health course, or the Mental Health First Aid (MHFA) training offered as a supplement to the course, as their source of knowledge for trauma-informed practices. This suggests that supplemental training sessions focused on additional skills and knowledge related to mental health might benefit pre-existing teacher education trainings (MHFA International, 2021). Meanwhile, first-year students reported various methods of having received their trauma-informed knowledge, such as courses in both their undergraduate and Bachelor of Education programs, as well as employment and personal experiences.

These divergences also extend to how the two groups of pre-service teachers who participated in this study received their knowledge of trauma-informed knowledge care with students who are refugees. The first-year students, who have not yet completed the mental health course, again drew upon a wide range of knowledge sources. Here, self-learning opportunities

and employment and educational experiences were common trends. In contrast, the second-year students often reported no knowledge of trauma-informed care with students who are refugees.

It is notable that, overall, many of the pre-service teachers reported receiving knowledge on trauma-informed practices through self-learning, such as doing their own reading online and through social media. This was an especially common response when participants were asked how they received their knowledge on trauma-informed practices with students who are refugees. As Kirova (2019) noted an increase in the number of students who are refugees enrolling in Canadian public schools, Diplo et al. (2012) observed teacher concern over a lack of preparedness to support these students. Considering this, it then seems probable that the specific context within which pre-service and practicing teachers find themselves (with a population of students who are refugees and inadequate resources) prompts these teachers to engage in self-learning to acquire this knowledge.

Overall, it appears that two major trends could be discerned here. Among those who have received some knowledge of trauma-informed practices with students who are refugees and in online classrooms, self-learning is the primary source of knowledge. Second, in spite of these efforts, all of the pre-service teachers who participated in this study reported a lack of knowledge on trauma-informed practices with students who are refugees.

The implication here is that pre-service teachers seem to have some level of awareness or desire to support students who are refugees. However, they are seeking this out through sources of knowledge that might not be entirely factual, reliable, and grounded in research. This could then lead to a risk of teachers improperly or ineffectively supporting students who are refugees, because of their reliance on sources of knowledge that they have sought out on their own, such as on social media.

Pre-Service Teachers' Trauma-Informed Ideas

A research objective for this study was to explore pre-service teachers' ideas for creating a sense of belonging in online classrooms for students who are refugees. To address this, the online survey included multiple open-ended qualitative questions that asked pre-service teachers to provide their perceptions and ideas on various situations involving trauma-informed practices. An underlying assumption for this study was that pre-service teachers could have valuable input on this topic, regardless of their level of existing knowledge. This is because teachers tend to have an innate drive and desire to help students. After all, as Colleen Vox stated, "teaching is the greatest act of optimism" (Lemire, 2022).

First, a goal was to understand pre-service teachers' ideas for creating a sense of belonging in online classrooms and how to support students who are refugees. The six second-year students, who completed the mental health course, offered minimal suggestions in both instances. There were no discernible patterns in their responses to creating a sense of belonging for students in online classrooms. However, when it came to supporting students who are refugees, the second-year students offered no ideas beyond suggestions to refer the student and their family to external resources and community supports. This suggests a lack of understanding for mental health related academic supports for diverse populations, such as students who are refugees. Atkins and Rodger (2016) had previously identified this as an area of concern in previous research.

Meanwhile, the first-year students offered varied suggestions in response to the questions on creating a sense of belonging in online classrooms. Common ideas offered here included instructional techniques, strategies aimed at fostering inclusion, teacher check-ins with students, and ensuring student involvement in classroom decisions. Like the second-year students, many had no suggestions when it came to creating a sense of belonging online for refugees. Despite

this, many first-year students suggested additional instructional modifications, building familiarity with the student and their family, and creating safe spaces in the online classroom. The suggestions offered by the first-year pre-service teachers reveal their depth of knowledge regarding the different ways they can provide a sense of belonging in online classrooms, particularly with students who are refugees. This shows that, despite having not completed the mental health course, they are able to emerge with some strategies they think would be helpful for the situation. Some research has suggested that online learning has been an instrument in connecting students who are refugees in the institution as they manage to create dual identities, one as a refugee and the other as an online learner (Brunton et al., 2019). Meanwhile, Imig et al. (2021) recommended teachers seek to understand and appreciate the learner's cultural diversity, the challenges they are facing, and ensure their safety and wellbeing. These are generally aligned with the given suggestions by the first-year pre-service teachers.

Overall, the pre-service teachers who participated in this study offered a range of creative suggestions for creating a sense of belonging in online classrooms. Several first-year and second-year pre-service teachers pointed out that the teacher's instructional techniques are a means of facilitating a sense of belonging. Some pre-service teachers provided suggestions that teachers should strive to operate their online classrooms in a manner similar to how they would run their physical classrooms as much as possible. To do this, some pre-service teachers suggested maintaining classroom norms and having a predictable class schedule and routine so that all students can know what to expect.

Meanwhile, some other pre-service teachers suggested increasing student involvement as a way of creating a sense of belonging. This included suggestions such as including students when planning assignments and developing classroom norms. Some other pre-service teachers

suggested giving students a say on how to complete assignments, such as multiple options for how to complete an assignment. Although existing research does not directly address the potential benefits of teachers empowering students by involving them in classroom and instructional decisions, it does tend to align with theories of trauma-informed practices. Empowerment is one of the trauma-informed principles outlined by SAMHSA (2014). It therefore seems likely that methods of empowering students, like those suggested by the pre-service teachers, would facilitate some sense of belongingness in physical and online classrooms.

A second goal was to understand the extent that pre-service teachers could identify barriers that exist for students who are refugees in online classrooms and provide strategies for overcoming these barriers. Both first year and second year students who participated in this study commonly identified language barriers, socio-cultural barriers, technology-related barriers, and trauma. Each of these identified barriers are consistent with extant research on challenges that students who are refugees encounter adjusting to the Canadian school systems (Calvert, 2018; Drolia et al., 2020; Gagné et al., 2012; Nofal, 2017; Simko et al., 2018). This suggests that, regardless of generally indicating they lacked knowledge of trauma-informed practices with students who are refugees, the pre-service teachers were nonetheless able to identify the common barriers that are regularly encountered by students who are refugees.

The pre-service teachers who participated in this study suggested many barriers of online classrooms for students who are refugees, many of which were supported by research. Both first year and second-year pre-service teachers acknowledged that language can be a barrier. However, some first-year pre-service teachers were cognizant of the many different ways that language can be an obstacle to learning for students who are refugees. For example, this included recognizing that some students who are refugees are English Language Learners (ELL) and

might lack confidence in their ability to speak English in the classroom, as supported in the research by Gagné et al. (2012) and Kirova (2019).

The ability by some first-year pre-service teachers to think holistically about the many ways that language can be a barrier for students who are refugees is intriguing. It might suggest that, in lieu of not yet having completed the mental health course, they are drawing on their knowledge from other teacher education courses that they might have already completed. It is possible, for example, that having taken a B.Ed. course on Language Arts, helped them consider different ways of approaching the language barriers for students who are refugees.

Technology barriers were also commonly suggested by the first-year and second-year pre-service teachers in this study. In particular, many voiced concerns that students who are refugees will lack access to reliable technology to effectively participate in online classes. However, some research has suggested that access to technology is not necessarily the largest barrier to online learning for students who are refugees (Drolia et al., 2020). This also makes sense, considering that some school boards in Ontario have started to offer Chromebooks to students to help ensure equitable access to online learning (Giunta, 2021). Instead, Drolia et al. (2020) posits that the ways in which the online learning platforms are designed is more of an obstacle for students who are refugees. None of the responses from the pre-service teachers who participated addressed this as a technology barrier.

Notably, many of the pre-service teachers commented that the removal of the human connection with online learning is a barrier for students who are refugees. Some intimated that online learning tends to be an isolating experience because of the lack of in-person social interaction, and that this reality could be challenging for students who are refugees. That the isolating nature of online learning is a possible barrier for students who are refugees does not

appear to be directly mentioned in the research. However, this intriguing suggestion raised by some of the pre-service teachers might align with some of the research on a sense of belonging, such as that of Pendergast et al. (2018).

To address the barriers that students who are refugees face in online classrooms, the pre-service teachers who participated suggested various creative and innovative ideas. A common suggestion, particularly among first-year pre-service teachers, was that teachers should strive to increase their familiarity with students who are refugees and their family. Notably, some further explained that teachers should maintain an open line of communication with parents and make an earnest commitment to connecting with the student who is a refugee.

Reflecting back on Baumeister and Leary's (1995) theory that belongingness exists, in part, when an individual feels accepted, the idea of teachers getting to know the student and their family would likely contribute to them feeling a greater sense of belonging in the classroom. After all, teachers who are committed to getting to know their students and their needs would likely give the students the perception that the teacher cares about them. When this occurs, it is conceivable that students would feel an increased sense of belonging in the classroom. Also, taking the time to get to know their students is a simple way that teachers can increase a sense of belonging. It is aligned with the trauma-informed principle of collaboration and mutuality, which states that one does not have to be a therapist to be therapeutic (SAMHSA, 2014).

Another potential benefit of teachers increasing their familiarity with students who are refugees is that it might assuage some of the concerns of refugee parents described by Gagné et al. (2012). There was some evidence that parents of children who are refugees enrolled in Canadian schools are worried that teachers do not understand how best to support their children. It is possible that teachers can learn how to support their child through maintaining an open

dialogue and getting to know the student and their family. Although this would not be a substitute for actual training or education, it is nevertheless an intriguing possibility.

Other suggestions for helping students who are refugees develop a sense of belonging in classrooms were not necessarily as feasible, however. Some of the pre-service teachers who participated were focused on connecting students who are refugees to external resources. It seems that these students' responses were focused on the role of community services. Community supports play a role in the development of a trauma-informed care approach in educational contexts, as it emphasizes collaboration between the school and the community (Berger, 2019).

However, referring students who are refugees to community supports and services is fraught with additional obstacles. Government-funded resources, such as OHIP, were recommended by some of the second-year pre-service teachers. Access to this program for refugees in Ontario, and they are also often subject to a waiting period before becoming eligible to apply. Another resource suggested was MindBeacon, however financial and language considerations might present a barrier. It is likely that many refugee families will lack insurance coverage to pay for MindBeacon's services, which are currently only offered in English and French.

However, the suggestion of one participant to refer students who are refugees to community cultural liaisons is intriguing. There appears to be limited research on the efficacy of community cultural liaisons with students who are refugees in Canadian contexts. However, McBrien and Ford (2012) studied a liaison program in United States elementary schools where trained liaison workers supported students who are refugees, their families, and classroom teachers. The program was generally effective and well-received by the teachers, students, and

parents (McBrien & Ford, 2012). For example, teacher knowledge of supporting students who are refugees increased, and students reported feeling more comfortable in the classroom. However, McBrien and Ford (2012) noted a main concern with the program is a lack of government funding. This would probably be a primary obstacle in any potential implementation of this program in Ontario schools as well.

In examining the types of ideas and suggestions offered, there were some clear distinctions in the responses between the first-year and second-year pre-service teachers who participated. Referring back to the suggestions on supporting students who are refugees in online classrooms, the second-year students frequently offered minimal suggestions on how to help students who are refugees overcome barriers. The common response here was to point the students to external resources. Meanwhile, the suggestions for overcoming barriers raised by the first-year students were wide-ranging. Their suggestions often touched on classroom structure, educational materials used, and connecting with the student's extended social network, particularly their parents. These suggestions appear to be a direct solution to the issues previously identified in the work of Guo, Maitra, and Guo (2019), where teacher familiarity, language, and social exclusion were the main challenges teachers need to address to help students who are refugees develop belongingness. The suggestions raised here by the first-year students were generally feasible solutions that teachers can easily implement to ensure that students who are refugees adjust to online learning and that they can feel a sense of belonging.

Overall, the findings from the pre-service teachers indicate their awareness of trauma-related barriers as being a significant obstacle towards students who are refugees developing a sense of belonging. Despite this, the six second-year pre-service teachers who completed the mental health course and participated in this study offered minimal suggestions or ideas beyond

referrals to external resources. Thus, there seems to be a disconnect between the knowledge level of trauma-informed practices reported by the six second-year pre-service teachers and their ability to apply that knowledge to practical, in-class situations. For example, overcoming trauma-related barriers and creating a sense of belonging in the classroom.

As described above, the first-year pre-service teachers had more varied ideas about how trauma-related practices should be implemented. Reflecting to their own reported various sources of knowledge of trauma-informed practices, it thus seems likely they used this knowledge base to suggest varied ideas for overcoming such barriers. For example, instructional modifications and techniques, building familiarity with the student and their family, and creating safe spaces.

Finally, that many of the ideas and suggestions offered by the pre-service teachers for online classrooms are also strategies that would likely be easily used in physical classrooms. For example, having predictable classroom routines, teachers exhibiting a positive attitude, and checking in with students. Similarly, many of the barriers to creating a sense of belonging online for students who are refugees are also barriers in physical classrooms. The socio-cultural, language, and mental health and trauma barriers identified by many pre-service teachers are also barriers that exist in physical classrooms.

It also seems that many of the ideas raised by the pre-service teachers in this study fall under the general premise that “what is necessary for some, is good for all.” Although the survey questions asked the pre-service teachers for ideas on creating a sense of belonging for students who are refugees, some might simply be good educational practices. Student empowerment strategies can be necessary for those who have experienced trauma, such as students who are refugees, since empowerment is a trauma-informed principle (SAMHSA, 2014). However,

empowerment might be an instructional practice that is beneficial for all students, as suggested by Broom (2015).

What Pre-Service Teachers Want to Know

The final two open-ended survey questions were forward-looking, as they sought to explore what additional information pre-service teachers might want to know about trauma-informed practices. When the pre-service teachers were asked about what additional information they might want on trauma-informed practices, it became evident that pre-service teachers are becoming increasingly aware of what Jones & Wessely (2006) described as the complexities of trauma and its differential impact due to individualized factors.

The second-year pre-service teachers were generally inclined towards wanting to receive knowledge on how to support students. They also wanted to know how to access external supports and resources, which is consistent with the second-year pre-service teachers' prior responses wherein they suggested referrals to external resources as ways of supporting students who are refugees who may have experienced trauma. Although the first-year pre-service teachers were also interested in receiving information on how to handle specific situations, they were often interested in learning everything and anything relating to trauma and the impacts on students.

The pre-service teachers' responses to these questions can also be considered in context of their responses on the extent of their trauma-informed knowledge with students who are refugees. Second-year pre-service teachers generally reported minimal knowledge of trauma-informed practice with students who are refugees, but moderate to above-average knowledge of trauma-informed practices in general. If they only want additional information on specific situations, it could therefore be inferred that these pre-service teachers feel they have sufficient

information on trauma-related practices. However, they are now seeking information to support them in handling individualized and specific situations that might arise in the classroom.

Meanwhile, first year pre-service teachers generally reported no or minimal knowledge of trauma-informed practices across all contexts. This potentially explains their desire for any and all knowledge of trauma-informed practices. Further, it points to their desire to learn about trauma because they presently feel they lack knowledge on this yet are aware that they require knowledge of this as future teachers, as also suggested by Levi (2019).

Overall, however, both first year and second year pre-service teachers pointed to a need for training on handling specific situations and wanting to be equipped with information to best support their students. This arguably reinforces the flexibility with which teachers would approach students who are refugees, implementing the trauma-informed practices individually. These findings also imply a holistic approach to trauma-informed training that not only focuses on a particular group of students, but all forms of trauma that students might have experienced and that teachers may need to be prepared to handle. As Atkin and Rodger (2013) pointed out, the role of teachers in addressing the mental health of students is valuable, as observed in the suggestions offered by the pre-service teachers.

All the pre-service teachers who participated expressed a belief that more information on trauma-informed practices should be provided to pre-service teachers. However, the suggestions on the desired method of delivery of this knowledge varied somewhat. Many of the pre-service teachers stated a mental health course with a focus on trauma should be mandatory in teacher education programs. This is interesting since the accreditation guide by the Ontario College of Teachers (2017) mandates a mental health course to be offered by teacher education programs, there is no mention of trauma-informed practices. Meanwhile, another significant number of the

pre-service teachers suggested a professional development approach to offering knowledge on mental health and trauma-informed practices.

This interest in, and concern for, student mental health and trauma-informed practices is seemingly at odds with the Government of Ontario's (2013) stance that teachers are not expected to directly alleviate student mental health. Furthermore, some of the pre-service teachers who participated in this study felt that mental health and trauma-informed practices should be embedded in every teacher education course. This seemingly conflicts with the Government of Ontario's (2013) position that mental health and trauma-informed training should be separate from mainstream curriculum courses in teacher education programs.

To that end, the Ontario College of Teachers' (2017) accreditation guide outlines that Ontario teacher education programs are required to offer a mental health education course for pre-service teachers. Although this provides pre-service teachers with knowledge on supporting students with mental health concerns and students in distress, there is still a lack of emphasis on trauma. Also, there is no mention of teacher education programs needing to prepare pre-service teachers for potentially having to support students who are dealing with trauma and being mindful of the ways that trauma can impact their learning. This was a concern raised by Smyth (2017).

This indicates a need to review the current policies of the Government of Ontario regarding teacher education programs. The suggestions raised by pre-service teachers in this study present a problem that is worth addressing, which is that they are seeking further knowledge on supporting students who have experienced trauma. Since the teachers are the ones who experience situations first-hand, revisiting the existing policies and better aligning it with their concerns would be beneficial for both teachers and students alike. Savage and O'Connor

(2018) also raised the significance of aligning policies with educational practice to ensure better quality education.

Educational Implications

The findings point to the need for further knowledge and education to be provided to pre-service teachers, and likely practicing teachers, on teacher and classroom-centered strategies for creating a trauma-sensitive learning environment that promotes a sense of belonging for all students. Although many pre-service teachers who participated in this study offered potentially valuable ways of creating a sense of belonging, few of the 45 participants pointed to the role of creating an inclusive classroom. This is important because, as Barrett (2021) noted, ensuring a safe and inclusive classroom is paramount to ensuring students feel a sense of belonging. For example, ensuring that classroom rules are identified by all students in the class and described in a way that is appropriate to their grade level.

Many of the pre-service teachers who participated in this study reported having no or minimal knowledge of trauma-informed care in online learning environments. Although the pre-service teachers generally indicated some level of knowledge on creating a sense of belonging, the pre-service teachers who participated struggled to apply this knowledge to online learning environments. However, they are enrolled in a teacher education program at an Ontario university that places a major emphasis on technology.

It is notable that many pre-service teachers indicate that they are receiving information through self-learning opportunities, such as through what they come across on social media. As noted above, reliance on this knowledge might lead to them implementing ineffective supports in the classroom. Having credible resources for teachers would enhance education departments.

At first glance, this appears to represent an incongruity wherein pre-service teachers in a B.Ed. program with a technology focus struggle to offer ideas on creating a sense of belonging in online classrooms. However, it is probably unsurprising that many of the 35 first-year pre-service teachers lacked knowledge of a sense of belonging and online learning environments. After all, these students had only completed one semester in the B.Ed. program. Thus, they have not yet had the opportunity to complete other courses in the program that provide them with this knowledge. Conversely, the 10 second-year pre-service teachers who participated in this study have completed the courses that provide them with this knowledge. However, only six second-year pre-service teachers participated. This small sample size makes it difficult to draw inferences on the ability of the second-year students to create a sense of belonging in online classrooms.

Although the findings are not representative of the rest of the student population in the B.Ed. program, it is still noteworthy that some pre-service teachers struggle to develop a sense of belonging and implement trauma-informed practices in online classrooms. This comes at a time where some recent research, such as Barrett (2021) and Petrarca & Kitchen (2017), observed increased implementation of technologies such as virtual classrooms in institutions across Canada. Moreover, the online learning environments have also become more commonplace since the COVID-19 pandemic (Vaillancourt, 2021). Given this reality, practicing and pre-service teachers are then choosing to pursue self-learning to gain the required knowledge on how to create a sense of belonging and implement trauma-informed practices in online classes.

Many of the 45 pre-service teachers in this study were unable to offer suggestions on how to create a sense of belonging in online classrooms for students who are refugees. This raises the question of whether pre-service teachers are learning the principle that “what is necessary for

some students, is good for all students”, as referenced in the *Learning for All* document by the Government of Ontario (2013). Although the document does not specifically mention students who are refugees or trauma-informed practices, it does explain the importance of ensuring teachers can create inclusive learning environments. Although the small sample size in this study limits the generalizability, it is still worth mentioning that this might be an area that warrants greater emphasis in teacher education programs.

This exploratory study has further highlighted the importance of ensuring that learning environments are trauma-sensitive, and the pre-service teachers acknowledged a need for additional information on trauma-informed practices to support their future students. This is important because, as Thomas, Crosby, and Vanderhaar (2019) said, children and youth are facing increasing levels of adversity. The principles of trauma-informed care – namely safety, belongingness, and empowerment – will help support students who are facing adversity and trauma (Thomas, Crosby, & Vanderhaar, 2019). This becomes even more important because of the COVID-19 pandemic. Oftentimes, we feel inclined to think of trauma as something extreme, such as abuse and assault. However, the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on education have been an adverse experience and traumatic for many children (Vaillancourt et al., 2021).

Limitations

The interpretation of findings and recommendations from this study are not without limitations. A survey was chosen because of its flexibility, low cost, and that it was much less time consuming to conduct. Although many useful responses were elicited from the participants in this study, some focus groups or in-person interviews might have solicited more detailed responses. As Jain (2021) pointed out, interviews are often preferred for qualitative research

because they allow for richer and potentially more insightful responses. On the other hand, however, the current responses provided sufficient information for an exploratory study.

There are also limits to the generalizability of this study. There was a low number of responses from the pre-service teachers, particularly second-year students, who consented to participate in this survey. This makes it challenging to generalize the findings to other pre-service teachers in the same B.Ed. program. Also, since all participants were enrolled in the same teacher education program and the sample size was small, the findings are not able to be representative of the views of a wide range of pre-service teachers across Ontario or Canada.

There is also a possible limitation in the interpretation of the qualitative results. Holmes (2020) discussed researcher positionality, where the perceptions, beliefs, and ways of knowing of the researcher might influence the interpretation of a qualitative study. Although positionality is an important part of knowledge development, Holmes (2020) contends that it still influences the tone, attitude, and general direction of the results of the study, thereby reducing its validity and generalizability. For the codification of the themes, the researcher relied on their own understanding and interpretation of what the participants meant in their responses to be able to categorize the participant responses into themes. The themes were also selected based on the researcher's views of commonalities. However, several steps were taken to reduce bias. The development of themes and interpretation of data was checked over at least three times on three different dates to ensure consistency. Further, the themes were reviewed with the researcher's supervisors to ensure credibility.

Future Research

A number of recommendations for areas of future research can be derived based on this study. Future research in this area should strive to include a larger participant base, to the extent

possible, to be able to draw better conclusions or inferences from the data on this topic of growing importance in education. A larger participant base will hopefully produce a higher response rate that ensures the data gathered also applies to populations in other settings. This study could be conducted with different population groups from different educational institutions and teacher education programs and with different knowledge levels of online learning.

Also, this study only focused on one specific population of students who are at-risk and might struggle to achieve a sense of belonging in schools. This study might be applied to other groups of students who are often marginalized and vulnerable and would therefore be likely to also struggle to achieve a sense of belonging in school. Doing this would provide specific knowledge and awareness for pre-service teachers and other educational professionals on how to deal with trauma-informed education and create a sense of belonging not only with students who are refugees, but to other groups of students as well. As Bouchard and Berg (2017) described, children's sense of belonging in schools is becoming an increasingly important topic of research, particularly with at-risk student populations. For example, students who are Black, Indigenous, and people of colour (BIPOC), students from gender and sexual minorities, and students with disabilities and exceptionalities.

There is great potential for follow-up and future studies. The first-year B.Ed. students who participated in the survey did not complete the mental health course yet. However, these participants complete the course in the second year of their B.Ed. program. This provides an opportunity for a future study that explores whether their responses, ideas, and perceptions change after completing the mental health course. Finally, exploring the effectiveness of the ideas for creating a sense of belonging that was suggested by the pre-service teachers in this study presents another intriguing area of future research.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

“A home is not a mere transient shelter. Its essence lies in its permanence, in its capacity for accretion and solidification, in its quality of representing, in all its details, and the personalities of the people who live in it.” (Mencken, 1926)

This thesis explored the ideas and suggestions of pre-service teachers for creating a sense of belonging, which is a trauma-informed practice, for students who are refugees. Even though many of the pre-service teachers who participated in this study generally said they lacked knowledge of trauma-informed practices with students who are refugees, they were still able to come up with many creative and innovative ideas. There should be a sense of optimism that these pre-service teachers recognized many of the barriers that exist in Ontario classrooms for students who are refugees and were able to come up with ideas to try to overcome these barriers. Moreover, the pre-service teachers in this study also expressed a desire for additional information on supporting students who are refugees in online learning environments.

Belongingness is a fundamental human motivation and children are inclined to want to develop a sense of belonging and feel accepted by their peers at school (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). Given the adverse childhood experiences that children who are refugees often experience, they often want to belong and form friendships with other children their age (Guo, Maitra, & Guo, 2019). Since there are often challenges in students who are refugees achieving belongingness, it is important that educators do what they can to help facilitate a sense of belonging in both physical and online classrooms for students who are refugees. In helping these children feel accepted and valued in the classroom, doing so will improve their academic outcomes and mitigate the effects of the traumas they have experienced thus far. Even though not

all children will necessarily come to school ready and prepared to learn, they all come to school seeking a desire to belong.

Ultimately, fleeing from an unsafe situation in their home country and arriving in Canada is often a complex, traumatizing experience for refugees. For these refugees, Canada has become their new home. Even though Canada offers refugees a greater sense of security and safety, With the fears and uncertainty that often accompanies arriving in and adjusting to the culture of a new country, it is vital to do what we can to provide them with a stable, safe physical environment that can allow for positive relationships to develop.

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