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## Perceptions of K–5 Teacher Challenges in Supporting Military- Connected Children Overseas Who Experience Trauma

Lachanda Garrison  
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# Walden University

College of Education and Human Sciences

This is to certify that the doctoral study by

Lachanda Cabantal Garrison

has been found to be complete and satisfactory in all respects,  
and that any and all revisions required by  
the review committee have been made.

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Walden University  
2025

Abstract

Perceptions of K–5 Teacher Challenges in Supporting Military-Connected Children

Overseas Who Experience Trauma

by

Lachanda Cabantal Garrison

MA, Mount Holyoke College, 2019

MEd, Troy University, 2004

BS, University of Maryland Global Campus, 2003

Project Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Education

Organizational Leadership & Development

Walden University

November 2025

## Abstract

Teachers serving U.S. military-connected students (MCS) overseas regularly address student trauma in the classroom that stems from relocation and separation events due to parents' or guardians' military service. The problem addressed in this study was that Grade K–5 teachers struggle to support overseas who experience trauma. The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore Grade K–5 teachers' perceptions of the challenges to support MCS overseas who have experienced trauma. The study was guided by three principles from Soma and Allen's trauma informed model, which emphasizes understanding trauma as an experience, prioritizing social and emotional skill development, and supporting school staff. Research questions explored Grade K–5 teachers' perceptions of the challenges they encountered when supporting MCS overseas who experienced trauma and their ideas regarding the resources needed to enhance their capacity to serve these students. Data were collected through semistructured interviews with 10 K–5 teachers who supported MCS overseas. Emergent themes were identified through open and axial coding. Findings revealed that overseas teachers recognized the distinct strengths and complexities of MCS but were challenged to support students' trauma-related experiences effectively. Additionally, the findings demonstrated that teachers identified a need for more professional supports to serve these students enduring trauma. A professional development project was created to provide teachers with strategies to support MCS who experience trauma. This study has implications for positive social change by equipping teachers overseas with targeted strategies and resources to nurture the social, emotional, and academic well-being of MCS experiencing trauma.

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## Dedication

This page is dedicated to all U.S. military-connected children—past, present, and future. You are not invisible to me, and this research represents my pledge to continue to amplify your voices and champion your well-being. This page is also dedicated to the teachers worldwide who educate, support, and deeply care for military-connected children and their families. Your unwavering commitment and dedication to those who serve our country are seen, and I offer my sincerest gratitude.

## Acknowledgments

“Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up.” Galatians 6:9 (NIV)

My entire doctoral journey is summed up in this final capstone. The doctoral journey was not easy, and it required many sacrifices. But in the end, it was the right and good thing to do. I now have a physical testament that began with the hope of adding a bit of goodness into the world.

I grew up as a military-connected child, living in many places and attending many schools throughout my academic career. Throughout my journey as a military-connected student, teachers supported me during tough transitions, and one teacher in particular still comes to mind. Ms. Jenkins saw me. She loved and cared for me, which resonates with me nearly 40 years later. Thank you, Ms. Jenkins.

As a military-connected wife, mother, and teacher, my mother-in-law poured into me. Caryn Jordan, a beloved teacher of military-connected children, gave me the best advice on how to be the most effective teacher for my students. She believed that all children could learn, and as teachers, we must model learning with intentionality and compassion. She cared deeply for her students and their families as she cared for her own. Caryn’s passion and joy for teaching continue to inspire me.

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## Section 1: The Problem

### **The Local Problem**

The problem addressed in this study was that Grade K–5 teachers who work with military-connected students (MCS) overseas struggle to support MCS who experience trauma. This study focused on K–5 teachers who faced challenges in supporting MCS socially, emotionally, and academically due to traumatic events their students experienced. In particular, this study looked at K–5 teachers who worked in overseas elementary schools.

One aspect of military culture that MCS may experience is transitioning or moving to different locations within and outside the United States. According to Rossiter and Ling (2021), MCS can lead adventurous and unique lives because of the opportunities to experience different countries and cultures. Whether in the United States or overseas, part of the relocation process for military families is where their children will attend school (Ormeno et al., 2020). If available at the assigned location or duty station, many MCS overseas attend a U.S. federally operated school or a school in the local community within the host country.

The U.S. government operates two federally run school systems. One of those school systems is responsible for educating U.S. MCS overseas (Department of Defense Education Activity [DoDEA], 2023). This pre-K–12 school system supports military service members and their families by providing MCS with a high-quality education. Within this school system, there are approximately 160 schools scattered worldwide in three regions: Europe, the Pacific, and the Americas (DoDEA, 2023). This school system

serves over 66,000 children and employs roughly 12,000 teachers, administrators, and additional staff worldwide (DoDEA, n.d.).

Regardless of where MCS attend school, there are challenges that K–5 teachers encounter, particularly with MCS who have experienced trauma. Exposure to trauma can affect student learning, behavior, and social functioning (Soma & Allen, 2020). Trauma is an emotional or physical response to one or more harmful or life-threatening events or circumstances with lasting adverse effects on the mental and physical well-being of an individual (National Center on Substance Abuse and Child Welfare, 2024). According to Soma and Allen (2020), trauma is described as an event, a series of events, or experiences an individual encounters physically or emotionally. The effects of these encounters impair the individual's ability to function mentally, physically, socially, emotionally, academically, or spiritually (Soma & Allen, 2020).

One example of a traumatic event that affects many MCS is frequent relocations. According to Soma and Allen (2020), moving can be a source of trauma for children. Although moving provides opportunities for MCS to travel and reinvent themselves, multiple moves also have negative aspects (Rossiter & Ling, 2021). Multiple moves disrupt support networks and the continuity of social, emotional, and academic care of MCS (Rossiter & Ling, 2021). For MCS, multiple relocation transitions during their childhood are common, as well as attending many schools throughout their educational careers (Military Child Education Coalition [MCEC], 2020). On average, MCS attend six to nine different school systems throughout their K–12 academic careers (Rossiter & Ling, 2021).

There are consequences of multiple relocations that influence MCS. Many of these consequences can be traumatic for MCS and affect them adversely. Some of these traumatic consequences of relocation include the stress of going to a new school, leaving old friends, making new friends, dealing with the lack of extended family nearby, and navigating many unknowns at once. While relocation can have positive aspects for MCS, such as travel opportunities and experiencing different countries and cultures, the potential trauma students may experience, including relocation and separation from their service member, are often overlooked. Teachers and caregivers may struggle to identify and address the relocation transitional challenges regarding MCS. Kaepler and Lucier-Greer (2020) shared that the outcomes of these transitions and their influence on the daily lives of MCS directly correlate to their military experiences.

Another significant part of military life includes the separation of MCS from their military serving parent. These periods of separation can be sources of stress and trauma for MCS (Hinojosa et al., 2021). Temporary assignments away from the family, often called deployments, are a standard part of military life (Frederick & Siegler, 2022). A deployment is a temporary assignment where the service member is assigned to another duty location to provide additional support to a unit, humanitarian aid, or a combat-related mission or area (Frederick & Siegler, 2022). Family members stay behind at the current duty station as their service member is away for months to years.

Rossiter and Ling (2021) demonstrated that deployments pose a variety of consequences for military families. MCS face many challenges as they try to engage in school while separated from a parent or caregiver (Rossiter & Ling, 2021). Some of these

challenges can be traumatic for MCS. Students who worry about their parents' safety, who lack access to their parents, and who miss their parents can make it hard for MCS to learn in school as they are coping with the separation of a parent (Rossiter & Ling, 2021).

Although many K–5 teachers overseas who support MCS may know about the different hardships and experiences of their students, many teachers do not have the resources, tools, or skills to support MCS who experience trauma. Also, there is no coordinated effort to train or support teachers of MCS. Rossiter and Ling (2021) stressed that practitioners who support military-connected children (MCC) know and understand the effects of military service better to meet the needs of the children in their care. Ormeno et al. (2020) also found that military families face unique stressors as they navigate and access care to meet the unique needs of MCS. Ormeno et al. found that understanding military culture is critical in addressing the unique stressors military service members and their families face.

At the local level, there were examples of K–5 teachers challenged with supporting students overseas who experienced trauma arising from frequent moves, separation from the service member, and constantly making new friends. In particular, teachers shared their struggles engaging with students. Specifically, in a staff meeting, a teacher shared that they struggled with having tough conversations with students. Social and emotional learning (SEL) programs that support students who experience trauma but do not address hardships students encounter can be detrimental (Pemberton & Edeburn, 2021). It appears that teachers who teach students from diverse backgrounds, especially

in diverse communities, needed greater awareness of how different student experiences can be a source of trauma (Pemberton & Edeburn, 2021).

### **Rationale**

According to Ormeno et al. (2020), military families display mental health disparities at a higher than average rate in comparison to their counterparts. Herzog et al. (2020) shared that most of the challenges military service members and their families face, including their children, are related to traumatic events. Some of these traumatic events for MCS are consequences of high mobility and parental absence (Frederick & Siegler, 2022). Because of these events, MCS face disruptions socially, emotionally, and academically (Frederick & Siegler, 2022). Some of these disruptions include strained friendships, gaps in learning, and stress from adjusting to new locations and schools (Ormeno et al., 2020).

Military-connected teachers overseas (MCTO) are left to navigate these disruptions as they try to educate and engage MCS who may have experienced trauma (Frederick & Siegler, 2022). According to Frederick and Siegler (2022), MCTO are uniquely positioned to support MCS. However, resources for MCTO to support MCS who experience trauma are not distributed fairly. During a faculty meeting, a first-grade teacher in a military-connected school overseas shared that some schools within the same school system but located in the United States offered training to teachers to support MCS who experienced trauma. In contrast, her school and district did not provide equivalent resources and training needed to support MCS overseas who experienced trauma. The teacher shared that trauma-based resources and training could benefit her as

a teacher by providing skills needed to support her students who struggled with social and emotional responses related to trauma. Some of her students found it difficult to cope with change and adjust to parent separation. Behaviors displayed by students that were a concern for the teacher included extreme bouts of anger, difficulty with making and keeping friendships, and an inability to complete tasks without frustration. The teacher also shared that they faced challenges with supporting students with strategies to help them regulate their emotions, including coregulation. Students' social and emotional problems, stemming from their exposure to trauma, seemed to have negative influences on student academic outcomes in reading and mathematics.

At the same school, a K–5 specialist teacher shared that a student with prior behavioral concerns would often abruptly leave the classroom without permission. Teachers struggled to manage the situation without specific training or guidance to support the student's needs. Some of the concerns shared by the specialist teacher were that when the student felt threatened or not confident about a particular learning topic, the student would take off to the playground to avoid participating in the lesson. Throughout the years, teachers of this student asked repeatedly for support, training, and resources, but none of these requests were satisfied. Because of the continued lack of support, the specialist teacher further shared that the student continued to hit other students, run out of the classroom, and defy school and classroom rules from kindergarten to second grade. The specialist teacher also recalled that this student's second-grade teacher finally received some support for the student. The specialist further shared that the second-grade teacher partnered with this child's parents and implemented additional strategies. In the

end, the student qualified for special education services and needed a full-time aide due to the child's extreme social, emotional, and academic needs.

Limited studies addressed the supportive roles of the school environment on the social, emotional, and academic outcomes of MCS (Frederick & Siegler, 2022). In 2020, the Military Child Education Coalition (MCEC, 2020) conducted a study with nearly 80 open-ended responses about military life, experiences, and needs regarding MCS. According to the results, parents and guardians did not believe that educators of MCS were meeting their students' social and emotional needs, including trauma (MCEC, 2020). However, educators of MCC believed they are meeting the needs of MCS (MCEC, 2020). Poulou and Denham (2023) revealed that teachers' positive expressions of emotions and reactions directly influence and predict students' social and emotional competence and academic outcomes. The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore Grade K–5 teacher perceptions of the challenges to support MCS overseas who experienced trauma.

### **Definition of Terms**

*Military-connected children (MCC):* Children whose parents actively serve in the U.S. Armed Forces, including all service branches, the guard and reserve components, and veterans (MCEC, 2020).

*Military-connected students (MCS):* K–12 students whose parents actively serve in the U.S. Armed Forces, including all service branches, the guard and reserve components, and veterans (MCEC, 2020).

*Trauma*: An event, series of events, or experiences an individual encounters physically or emotionally. These encounters are often harmful or life-threatening. The effects of these encounters impair the individual's ability to function mentally, physically, socially, emotionally, academically, or spiritually (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services [SAMHSA], 2014).

*Resilience*: The ability of an individual to bounce back from hardships, find ways to cope with challenges, and develop positive ways to deal with adversity (Levin et al., 2021).

*Social and emotional learning (SEL)*: A coordinated and comprehensive framework of evidence-based programs and practices for developing students' social, emotional, and cognitive skills, fostering positive behavior, cultivating healthy relationships, and ultimately leading to improved academic performance (Mahoney et al., 2021).

### **Significance of the Study**

MCS frequently experience significant life disruptions due to frequent relocations, parental deployments, and exposure to stressful events because of the military lifestyle (Rossiter & Ling, 2021). These experiences can lead to trauma, significantly influencing the social, emotional, and academic well-being of MCS. To effectively support these MCS, educators must possess a deep understanding of the unique challenges they face (Rossiter & Ling, 2021).

In the local school system, there was a gap in practice about the specific challenges encountered by teachers who support MCC overseas. By investigating the

perceptions of K–5 teachers, this study aimed to fill this critical gap in practice. The findings of this study have the potential to influence how teachers can address MCS experiencing trauma. By providing valuable insights into the specific challenges teachers faced supporting traumatized MCS and by educating teachers on specific strategies, this research could inform future teacher practices and the interventions teachers initiate and implement to support students. Additionally, this study may influence school policies and practices by highlighting the need for increased support and training for teachers working with MCS. Furthermore, by raising awareness of the unique educational needs of MCC, this research has the potential to bring awareness to military families.

A better understanding of the challenges faced by military-connected teachers overseas could help MCS manage the effects of trauma and reach their healthiest potential. Ultimately, this research aimed to contribute to positive social change by improving the educational experiences and overall well-being of MCC.

### **Research Questions**

Taylor (2021) showed that exposure to trauma or stressful events over a prolonged period directly correlates to adverse educational outcomes for students. MCS and the military-connected community experience unique stressors (Ormeno et al., 2020). Teachers of MCS struggled with providing MCS with the appropriate care to cope with some of these traumas and stressors, including frequent moves, separation from family members, and so forth, that ultimately affected students socially, emotionally, and academically. The following research questions guided my research as I explored how

K–5 teachers perceived the challenges they faced with supporting MCS overseas who experienced trauma.

RQ 1: What are Grade K–5 teacher perceptions of the challenges they encounter in supporting military-connected children overseas who experience trauma?

RQ 2: What are Grade K–5 teacher perceptions of the supports, resources, and training needed to support military-connected children overseas who experience trauma?

## **Review of the Literature**

### **Conceptual Framework**

The conceptual framework for this basic qualitative study was based on Soma and Allen's (2020) trauma-informed resilient school model. Soma and Allen's model aimed to provide educators with an understanding of trauma and resilience, explored how trauma affects the educational experiences of children, and outlined strategies for creating supportive learning environments for traumatized children and the educators who serve them. According to Levin et al. (2021), an individual can experience trauma from a single event or reoccurring events. Luthar and Mendes (2020) identified that up to 60% of all children experience a traumatic event. In Fall 2022, the National Center for Education Statistics reported that over 49.6 million students attended U.S. K–12 public schools (Taylor, 2021). If up to 60% of children experience a traumatic event, over 30 million U.S. school-age children are dealing with the effects of trauma. With the prevalence of childhood trauma affecting over half of the children in the United States, there is an

increasing demand for the implementation of trauma-informed approaches to support children (Luthar & Mendes, 2020). Herzog et al. (2020) stressed that without a framework of trauma-informed care, there is a potential for retraumatizing individuals. Soma and Allen's framework outlined concrete steps to support all school-based professionals in addressing the growing demand for trauma-informed care, practices, and implementation for school-age children affected by trauma while also minimizing retraumatization.

This research study concentrated on three of the 10 foundational principles or steps outlined in Soma and Allen's (2020) model: (a) understand trauma as an experience; (b) prioritize social and emotional skill development; and (c) support and invest in school staff. Brown et al. (2020) emphasized the critical need for trauma-informed teachers within schools, highlighting their significant role in recognizing and responding to the needs of students exposed to traumatic experiences. Building on the emphasis placed on trauma-informed educators by Brown et al., a deep understanding of trauma is essential for teachers to support students who have experienced such events effectively. The initial principle of the framework, understand trauma as an experience, guided my exploration of how K–5 teachers supporting MCS overseas defined, understood, and identified trauma affecting their students.

Soma and Allen's (2020) next principle, which prioritizes social and emotional skill development, led me to explore K–5 teachers' familiarity and experience with SEL practices to support MCS overseas who experienced trauma. Soma and Allen confirmed a direct link between school-based SEL and the improvement of student academic

achievement (Soma & Allen, 2020). Social emotional learning is how individuals regulate and manage their emotions (Soma & Allen, 2020). Results of the MCEC's (2020) Military Kid's Now 2020 Survey indicated that only 41% of parent and student respondents perceived school professionals as capable of meeting the social and emotional needs of MCS. However, implementing SEL in schools heavily relies on teachers (Ferreira et al., 2020). A common barrier teachers face in implementing SEL is the difficulty of integrating SEL into the regular curriculum (Ferreira et al., 2020; Soma & Allen, 2020).

The last principle of Soma and Allen's (2020) model that grounded this study was to support and invest in school staff. According to Kim et al. (2021), a lack of trauma-informed training can lead teachers to overlook the underlying distress conveyed through students' behavior actions. Because of the increasing number of challenging behaviors that teachers experience from students, educators are vulnerable to burnout, fatigue, and secondary trauma (Soma & Allen, 2020). To effectively support teachers working with traumatized students, it is essential to prioritize the development of their skills, actively seek their input on their specific needs, and recognize their valuable contributions to both students and the school community (Soma & Allen, 2020). Building the capacity of teachers to positively influence MCS who experience trauma is essential for the development of trauma-informed schools (Kim et al., 2021). This last principle in the conceptual framework will provide a structure to assemble K-5 teachers' perceptions of the support, resources, and training needed to ensure that both teachers and traumatized MCS thrive at school.

This conceptual framework provided a foundation for the study by addressing the challenges K–5 teachers faced in supporting MCS overseas who have experienced trauma. The framework guided the synthesis of teacher perceptions into actionable recommendations regarding the supports, resources, and trainings needed to enhance K–5 teacher capacity. Finally, the conceptual framework provided a valuable lens for examining the experiences of K–5 teachers overseas, shedding light on their understanding of trauma and resilience, on how trauma influences the overall educational experiences of MCS, and on their insights for creating supportive learning environments for traumatized children.

## **Review of the Broader Problem**

### **Introduction**

According to Burkholder et al. (2020), a literature review systematically synthesizes knowledge about a topic before research occurs. The literature review is a comprehensive synthesis of existing knowledge, providing a contextual framework for the study and identifying knowledge gaps of critical concern within the field (Burkholder et al., 2020). Burkholder et al. (2020) also shared that a literature review offers an opportunity for the researcher to grasp foundational concepts related to the topic, share what they know and do not know about the research topic, and demonstrate how they used their gap in knowledge to deepen their understanding of the topic.

The literature review for this basic qualitative study explored the traumas of K–5 MCS overseas, the challenges trauma placed on them, and the supports K–5 teachers needed to support traumatized MCS. A thorough review of existing literature identified

similarities and differences regarding childhood trauma and common traumatic experiences MCS faced, including the social, emotional, and academic effects of traumatic childhood experiences. Additionally, the literature review examined pedagogical practices, supports, resources, and trainings necessary for K–5 teachers to support MCS who experienced trauma.

I intentionally utilized resources, strategies, and processes to effectively and efficiently find research related to this basic qualitative study. Research explicitly examining the relationship between trauma and MCS remains relatively limited. However, one of the most beneficial resources I used for this literature review was the Walden University library. The Walden University library provided access to many peer-reviewed journals and articles. Specifically, I found articles related to my research topic using Google Scholar connected to the Walden University tool. Through the Walden Library and the embedded Google Scholar tool, I reviewed policy reports and articles from databases, including ERIC, EBSCO, SAGE Journals, and ProQuest. I analyzed topics that included *childhood trauma*, *trauma and military-connected children*, *trauma and social-emotional impacts*, *trauma and its academic impacts*, and *best practices, tools, resources, and training to mitigate traumatic experiences*.

## **Trauma and School-Age Children**

### ***Defining Trauma***

Finding one universally agreed-upon definition of trauma was a challenge, as the experiences of trauma and their effects can vary across individuals. Trauma can differ and is defined based on an individual's response, context, and setting (Koslouski et al.,

2023; Temkin et al., 2020). For those in helping professions like education, there is a need for more in-depth studies to comprehend trauma and its complexities and implications fully. Identifying a consistent definition of trauma that educational leaders and stakeholders can agree on is essential to mitigate the prevalence and consequences of childhood trauma, especially for school-age children (Brown et al., 2020). Nevertheless, existing research indicated that organizations providing support to traumatized children must possess a shared comprehension of trauma, its manifestations, and its enduring influence on individuals to provide the best care possible (Koslouski et al., 2023).

A clear understanding of trauma is essential for providing effective support to military school-age children. Soma and Allen (2020) defined trauma as any experience that leaves an individual feeling hopeless, helpless, and stuck. This experience can prompt an individual to fear for their life, safety, and survival, as well as for that of a loved one (Soma & Allen, 2020). Trauma can stem from adversity exceeding an individual's capacity to cope with long-term effects (Brown et al., 2020; Koslouski et al., 2023). Brown et al. (2020) stated that prolonged trauma experiences have a cumulative effect with profound consequences, especially for children who experience trauma during their developmental years. Koslowski et al. (2023) further explained that trauma is defined by an individual's response to the traumatic event versus the event itself. This study defined trauma as an event, a series of events, or experiences an individual encounters physically or emotionally; these encounters are often harmful or life-threatening. The resulting effects of these encounters impair an individual's ability to function mentally, physically, socially, emotionally, academically, or spiritually

(SAMHSA, 2014). Taylor (2021) and Luthar and Mendes (2020) used SAMHSA's definition of trauma to ground their research addressing school-age children who experience trauma, and the care needed to support them. Understanding trauma starts with recognizing that there are different types of stress and trauma that school-age children may need support to cope with to reach their fullest learning potential.

The diverse range of traumatic experiences school-age children can face highlights the need for a nuanced understanding of trauma to support school-age children effectively. Specifically, school-age children could be dealing with acute stress, acute trauma, toxic stress, chronic trauma, and post-traumatic stress disorder (Soma & Allen, 2020). According to Soma and Allen (2020), *acute stress* is the typical response to challenging experiences and trauma that can last between 4–6 weeks. *Acute trauma* occurs from a single life-event like moving. *Toxic stress* occurs from adverse experiences, intense and repeated activation of an individual's response system over an extended period without protective factors such as support from trustworthy and caring adults (Downey & Greco, 2023). Examples of toxic stress are neglect and poverty. *Chronic trauma* occurs from multiple upsetting events over a prolonged period. Bullying is an example of chronic trauma. Post-traumatic stress is a combination of chronic trauma and toxic stress. Downey and Greco (2023) expressed that *post-traumatic stress, also known as complex developmental trauma*, is caused by extremely stressful or terrifying events over an extended period, longer than acute stress, causing a significant dysregulation of the students' central nervous system. Because there are varying levels of stress and trauma, it helps teachers supporting students experiencing trauma to have a

definition that captures these varying levels. This study predominantly focuses on how the experiences of MCS displayed in school settings overseas may overlap with or contribute to post-traumatic stress.

Because the term trauma can have varying definitions, levels, and practical applications, educators often misunderstand trauma due to differing understandings. However, the lack of a standardized definition of trauma should not hinder schools from focusing on and responding to the national call to action in providing care to traumatized students.

### ***Trauma and School-Age Children***

Trauma does not discriminate. Childhood trauma, regardless of socioeconomic status, has far-reaching consequences for school-age children, affecting their academic performance and overall well-being. It disrupts the lives of children from all ethnicities, geographic locations, and socioeconomic statuses, including those from affluent backgrounds (Brown et al., 2020; Luthar & Mendes, 2020). The consequences of trauma on school-age children are particularly concerning. Koslouski (2022) stated that trauma experienced as early as 1<sup>st</sup> grade can significantly increase a student's likelihood of not completing high school. Atallah et al. (2023) underscored the detrimental effects of childhood trauma on learning outcomes for school-age children. Wassink–de Stiger et al. (2022) highlighted the consequences of trauma on the development and academic performance of school-age children, emphasizing the growing attention this issue receives from researchers, scientists, and educators nationwide. Because of the increasing prevalence of childhood trauma and its influence on school-age children (Herzog et al.,

2020), there is a national call for equipping schools to better support children who experience trauma (Davis et al., 2022).

Early childhood trauma can significantly hinder a child's development. The negative consequences of trauma experienced early in life influence school-age children, affecting multiple domains of functioning (Koslouski, 2022). Trauma, thus, increases the chances of impairing school-age children's cognitive, social, emotional, and behavioral functioning (Downey & Greco, 2023). Taylor (2021) stated that the effects of trauma can create deficits that significantly influence how students function cognitively, socially, emotionally, and behaviorally in a school setting. Trauma can profoundly and pervasively affect school-age children's cognition development, emotional and behavioral regulations, attachments, and overall psychological well-being, threatening student's ability to learn (Brown et al., 2020; Taylor, 2021). According to Koslouski (2022) and Atallah et al. (2023), trauma can disrupt cognitive or brain function, leading to attention, memory, and language challenges, ultimately making learning difficult.

Trauma-related functioning challenges in school-age children can be manifested in different ways. Koslouski et al. (2023) identified several social functioning challenges associated with trauma, including excessive dependence on others or difficulties in forming and maintaining healthy relationships. School-age children who experience emotional functioning challenges may struggle with regulating emotions, with extreme or exaggerated responses to everyday stressors, with social and societal anxiety, with depression, and with suicidal ideations (Koslouski et al., 2023; Taylor, 2021). Behavioral functioning challenges may consist of changes in appetite, of unexplained absences, of

aggressive behaviors, of reduced attention, and of social withdrawal (Koslouski et al., 2023). Trauma's effects on a school-age child's ability to function while learning include difficulty completing tasks, mastering content, and meeting academic success (Luthar & Mendes, 2020; Taylor, 2021). Brown et al. (2020) noted that these difficulties can lead to further negative outcomes, such as lower grades and standardized test scores.

A lack of understanding of trauma-related behaviors in school-age children can lead to harmful consequences, including punitive actions that exacerbate the trauma and perpetuate a cycle of negative outcomes (Koslouski, 2022). Koslouski further noted that trauma-related behaviors in school-age children are often misunderstood, misinterpreted, and misdiagnosed, leading to significant challenges in the student-teacher relationship. The consequences of misunderstanding trauma-related behaviors can be severe, with punitive responses leading to increased stress and added trauma for students (Koslouski, 2022). Some of these extreme punitive responses have led to higher numbers of suspensions and expulsions from school (Berger & Martin, 2020). Berger and Martin (2020) emphasized that some teachers and schools may inadvertently overlook the experiences of traumatized students, resulting in punitive approaches to disruptive and defiant behaviors. In extreme cases, some schools implement zero-tolerance policies that, for students experiencing trauma may contribute to the school-to-prison pipeline; this is especially true for school-age children of color (Brown et al., 2020). According to Luthar and Mendes (2020), a greater understanding of trauma among teachers can lead to a decrease in the mislabeling of trauma-related behaviors as deliberately defiant,

consequently reducing the likelihood of punitive responses. Ultimately, the consequences of misunderstanding trauma-related behaviors can affect student academic performance.

When school-age children experience childhood trauma, there is a strong potential for the disruption of learning. When children experience trauma, their primary focus shifts to safety and survival (Soma & Allen, 2020). Luthar and Mendes (2020) emphasized that trauma-induced stress can disrupt learning in school-age children, often manifesting as hypervigilance that affects their ability to concentrate on academic content, rather than safety-related concerns. A constant state of hypervigilance and fear makes it difficult for school-age children to concentrate on academic tasks, such as reading, writing, and problem-solving (Levin et al., 2021).

### ***Trauma and Military-Connected Students***

The negative consequences of childhood trauma on school-age children are profound. Childhood trauma can negatively affect student's mental health, academic performance, and overall well-being (Soma & Allen, 2020). However, Clements-Nolle et al. (2020) stated that the negative consequences of childhood trauma of MCS are exacerbated and significantly higher than their non-military connected counterparts. Sullivan et al. (2021) found that MCS displayed higher-than-average mental health concerns with an increased risk of distress, mental health diagnoses and hospitalizations, struggles with academic achievement, substance abuse, and potential for child maltreatment. There are significant differences in the experiences and stressors MCS face because of the military lifestyle and culture (Briggs et al., 2020; Frederick & Siebler, 2022). Two key differences include geographical relocation and parental separation

(Skomorovsky & Dursun, 2022). Both of these aspects of military life pose outcomes that can be traumatizing for MCS.

MCS are highly mobile due to the multiple geographical relocations they endure as part of the military lifestyle. On average, MCS attend six to nine schools throughout their K–12 academic career (Frederick & Siebler, 2022; Rossiter & Ling, 2021). The consequences of these relocation events can be drastic, often resulting in significant educational and social transitional challenges (Frederick & Siebler, 2022). According to Rossiter and Ling (2021), some educational and social transitional challenges include gaps in accessibility to academic services, necessary resources, and disruptions in social supports and networks. MCS also face the likelihood of inadequate information being provided to the incoming school (Frederick & Siebler, 2022). Accurate information is crucial for teachers and staff at the receiving school to provide MCS with the proper support and place them in suitable classes. Parental separation and frequent moves increase stress levels and negatively influences the overall well-being of MCS (Skomorovsky & Dursun, 2022).

Another unique stressor that can distress MCS is separation from the military-serving parents. Parental separation or absence occurs when the military-serving parent must perform their duties at a different and temporary location of the military-connected child (Frederick & Siebler, 2022). These temporary work locations are often called deployments for U.S. military personnel. The frequency, length, location, and safety of deployments, which separate military-serving parent from their children, vary and may affect the sense of security of MCS in various ways. According to Ormeno et al. (2020),

deployments place significant hardships on families and put them at a higher risk of mental health diagnoses, negatively influencing MCS, and affecting their academic performance. MCS can suffer from deployment-related stress that manifests as fears, sadness, and mood and behavior disorders (Ormeno et al., 2020). Academically, MCS who experience a parental deployment are more likely to receive lower grades in school than their civilian counterparts (Ormeno et al., 2020).

### ***The Need for Trauma-Informed Care***

According to Taylor (2021), there are several terms associated with trauma-sensitive practices, such as trauma-informed, trauma-focused, or trauma-specific. Taylor (2021) stated that the best way to support school-age children who have experienced trauma is through a trauma-informed approach (Taylor, 2021). However, like the definition of trauma, there is not one agreed-upon standard of practice that defines trauma-informed approaches (Luthar & Mendes, 2020). Levin et al. (2021) defined trauma-informed approaches as the practices of those who have an understanding of trauma, toxic stress, and their related effects. Levin et al. (2021) also shared that being trauma-informed means having a mindset of curiosity. Levin et al. (2021) further elaborated by sharing that a mindset of curiosity asks why a student is displaying certain behaviors versus what is wrong with this child. Wassink–de Stigter et al. (2022) defined a trauma-informed approach as a broad range of integrated school-wide trauma-informed strategies and programs. This study referred to an overall trauma-informed approach and practices as trauma-informed care.

There is a consensus that trauma-informed care in schools must include and have the attention of all the adults within the school, from non-educational staff members to teachers and school leaders (Luthar & Mendes, 2020). Taylor (2021) stressed that a trauma-informed care system is the best way to support students who have experienced trauma. There are many benefits to having a whole school trauma-informed care framework. Herzog et al. (2020) stressed that having a trauma-informed care framework is necessary as it can help with mental health misinterpretations while also reducing the possibility of retraumatization for school-age children.

### **Social Emotional Development to Support Traumatized School-Age Children**

#### ***An Overview of Social and Emotional Learning (SEL)***

SEL can significantly benefit school-age children, especially those who have experienced childhood trauma. Ferreira et al. (2020) defined SEL as the development of skills that enable students to effectively navigate social tasks and interactions by cultivating emotional regulation, appropriate behaviors, and productive thoughts. These skills empower students to recognize and manage their emotions, confidently establish and achieve personal goals, and be responsive to their needs of others (Ferreira et al., 2020).

By prioritizing SEL, educators and educational leaders equip students with the skills to thrive relationally and emotionally. Silke et al. (2024) emphasized that effective SEL implementation in classrooms should foster strong relationships and emotional intelligence in students. Cultivating positive relationships with teachers and classmates is particularly crucial for students who have experienced trauma, contributing to a positive

and healing classroom environment (Downey & Greco, 2023). Furthermore, when school-age children develop a deep understanding of their emotions, they are more likely to build the knowledge and skills needed to navigate the social and academic demands of the classroom (Hoffmann et al., 2020). The development of emotional awareness enables students to confidently navigate the classroom environment as they become more aware of how different learning situations make them feel (Hoffmann et al., 2020). According to Hoffmann et al. (2020), successful SEL programs and practices incorporate strategies that encourage students to reflect on and become aware of their emotions and how these emotions influence their lives academically and socially. One strategy that is particularly useful to students includes a body scan (Soma & Allen, 2020). According to Soma and Allen, the body scan begins with students scanning their bodies, starting at the top of their heads and down to their feet. The body scan strategy encourages students to sit still for a moment and take inventory of any sources of tension they may be experiencing in their bodies. The information received from a body scan allows students to address any tension and to identify its source so that they can implement a coping strategy if necessary (Soma & Allen, 2020). SEL strategies, like the body scan, support students in developing emotional intelligence through self-awareness.

Ultimately, SEL significantly enhances student academic performance by encouraging positive relationships and cultivating emotional intelligence within a school setting. Recognizing the benefits of SEL, many schools across the United States have implemented SEL programs and practices (Skoog-Hoffman et al., 2024). Skoog-Hoffman et al. (2024) found that many states have established policies and guidelines to support

school SEL implementation, often including funding provisions. State-led SEL initiatives aim to equip schools with the necessary resources to effectively integrate SEL into their curriculums, fostering learning environments where all children can thrive socially, emotionally, and academically.

### ***Benefits of Social and Emotional Learning for School-Age Children***

Benefits of SEL include developing students' abilities to manage or regulate their emotions and be responsive to their needs and those of others. According to Hoffman et al. (2020), emotional regulation is the process by which students influence the type of emotion they experience, when they experience it, and how they express it. Students demonstrate effective emotional regulation by recognizing the need for and implementing practical coping skills and advocating for themselves and others when additional support is needed (Hoffmann et al., 2020). A key to students benefiting from SEL is empowering them to understand their emotions better to self-regulate, cope, and thrive.

SEL skills become transferable in an academic setting by empowering students to understand themselves and cope when learning or navigating the social environment becomes challenging (Mahoney et al., 2021). Ferreira et al. (2020) stressed that emotional regulation encourages emotionally strong and flexible people who can handle difficult and complex situations prosocially. When learning is successful or challenging, students feel, and express emotions based on the learning experience or environment (Mahoney et al., 2021). Emotional regulation can mitigate negative behaviors when students face unpleasant learning experiences or emotions through strategies like deep breathing techniques or pausing before reacting (Hoffmann et al., 2020). Also, emotional regulation

development can help students better navigate future unpleasant or challenging learning experiences and spaces (Hoffman et al., 2020). By acknowledging their emotional state, students can assess whether their feelings are appropriate for specific learning situations and more effectively regulate and express emotions felt. Providing students with emotional regulation skills is necessary and critical for academic readiness and achievement (Hoffmann et al., 2020). As students become better at regulating their emotions, they can focus on the lesson, accomplish tasks, and take learning risks (Brown et al., 2020). The ability for students to be aware of their feelings and make decisions about them is one of the many benefits of SEL.

Another benefit of SEL is students' ability to be responsive to their needs and those of others. Students do not learn alone. Learning is a social and emotional process (Ferreira et al., 2020). Learning requires collaboration between students, their teachers, and peers (Ferreira et al., 2020). Empathy provides students with opportunities to be responsive to their needs and the needs of those around them Silke et al. (2024). Students can better advocate for their learning needs and healthily resolve conflicts with classmates by being responsive through empathy. Silke et al. (2024) defined empathy as understanding and sharing others' perspectives, mental states, and emotions. In simple terms, empathy is the capacity to feel and care about the feelings of others. Students who develop the capacity for empathy may develop confidence, care, and cooperation to participate in collaborative and social environments (Silke et al., 2024). Empathy is often considered a sub-component of SEL practices and programs (Silke et al., 2024). Silke et al. (2024) shared that empathy plays a significant component in the self-awareness

competency. According to Ferreira et al. (2020), empathy development through SEL has the potential to enable students to become more empathetic, encouraging healthy participation in school and with academic tasks. Empathy may enable students to respond to themselves and others with more intentionality and consideration rather than impulsively reacting.

### ***Competencies of Social and Emotional Learning***

Teacher capacity for social and emotional competence is needed to navigate their own emotions they experience while teaching. Poulou et al. (2023) shared that teaching is intensely emotional, with feelings that range from rage to joy. Mahoney et al. (2021) stated that social and emotional competence is the ability to integrate cognitive, affective, and behavioral processes to thrive in diverse contexts, achieve personal goals, and cultivate positive outcomes. Social and emotional competence can help teachers better understand how their emotional reactions in the classroom influence their daily interactions and the quality of relationships with students (Poulou et al., 2023). Teacher self-efficacy, responsiveness to student needs, and overall well-being are other significant outcomes of social and emotional competence (Poulou et al., 2023). However, intentional structures and frameworks are needed to help educators further develop their social and emotional competence for themselves and their students.

The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) designed an SEL competency framework (Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning, n.d.). Skoog-Hoffman et al. (2024) referred to the effectiveness of CASEL's social and emotional competency framework in their research. This

competency framework emphasizes what individuals should know and be able to do regarding SEL (Mahoney et al., 2021). CASEL's framework emphasizes inter- and intra-personal skills and attitudes and the importance of making ethical decisions in social and personal contexts (Mahoney et al., 2021). According to Mahoney et al. (2021), CASEL's competency framework includes five core components: self-awareness, self-management, responsible decision-making, relationship skills, and social awareness that positively influence students' attitudes and behaviors toward peers, teachers, and the school community. Self-awareness is the ability of an individual to recognize their thoughts and emotions (Todd et al., 2022). Self-management is the ability to regulate emotions, manage thoughts, and monitor behaviors (Todd et al., 2022). Responsible decision-making is the ability of an individual to make productive and responsible choices (Todd et al., 2022). Relationship skills are needed for individuals to form and sustain healthy, gratifying relationships (Todd et al., 2022). Lastly, social awareness is the ability to empathize with others, especially those who are different socially, culturally, economically, etc. (Todd et al., 2022). Incorporating SEL competencies in schools can positively influence teacher and student attitudes and behaviors, leveraging academic gains and perceptions of learning.

## **Investing in Teacher Staff to Support Traumatized School-Age Children**

### ***Teachers as Socialization Agents of School-Age Children***

The prevalence of childhood trauma requires action. As more than half of all children in the United States suffer from the consequences of being exposed to childhood trauma, the need for mental health literacy for teachers is becoming essential (Luthar &

Mendes, 2020). Mental health literacy refers to the knowledge and skills teachers need to understand and manage their own mental health and the mental health of others (Luthar & Mendes, 2020). One aspect of teachers' mental health literacy consists of teachers understanding their role in the socialization process of students. Socialization is the lifelong process in which individuals learn how to act, interact, and participate in society effectively (Poulou et al., 2023). According to Luthar and Mendes (2020), the socialization of individuals can happen at home, within their community, and in culture. Luthar and Mendes shared that the outcome of socialization is the development of an individual's values, beliefs, and overall ways of being. Because schools are a significant system of care where the socialization of students occurs, teachers play a central role in developing students' social and emotional outcomes (Luthar & Mendes, 2020; Poulou et al., 2023).

A teacher's role in developing students' emotional socialization shapes their understanding and expression of emotions. Teachers serve as emotion socialization agents, especially for young school-age children (Poulou et al., 2023). An *emotion socialization agent* intentionally or unintentionally models emotions as they express them publicly, influencing the emotional responses of those around them. Poulou et al. (2023) shared that teachers, as emotion socialization agents, influence students' emotional expression by demonstrating which emotions are appropriate and what circumstances evoke certain emotions. Students constantly observe their teacher's expressions of emotions in the classroom and use them as cues to guide their behavior. Students' ability to monitor their behavior and respond appropriately due to understanding emotions as

cues is vital. According to Poulou et al. (2023), students who are dealing with trauma may not have the appropriate tools to support their behaviors, especially when facing challenges. Teachers require proper training and development, cultural competence, and tools for their well-being to positively influence students' emotional socialization (Poulou et al., 2023).

### ***The Need for Teacher Foundational Professional Training and Development***

Teachers who support school-age children dealing with childhood trauma should be equipped with proper professional training and development. Kim et al. (2021) stated that teachers who receive trauma-informed training are better equipped to build classroom environments where they can healthily respond to students who have experienced trauma. Trauma-informed professional training and development has been shown to help teachers create emotionally safe and caring learning spaces. Koslouski (2022) stated that proper trauma-informed training supports teachers in building caring, secure, and predictable learning environments, which has proven to positively benefit students who experience childhood trauma. Furthermore, a trauma-informed classroom and learning environment is characterized by establishing consistent and caring relationships, prioritizing SEL, valuing diverse cultures, and fostering empowerment and effective collaboration (Koslouski, 2022). According to Atallah et al. (2023), many teachers throughout the United States receive limited trauma-informed training. Trauma-informed training is needed for teachers as the number of children exposed to trauma continues to grow.

An understanding of trauma and its signs and symptoms is paramount.

Foundational trauma-informed training supports teachers' understanding of trauma and brings awareness to the signs and symptoms of trauma within themselves, colleagues, and students (Koslouski, 2022). When teachers are aware, they can help facilitate healthy responses for themselves and those around them. Foundational trauma-informed training for educators is crucial to ensure positive student outcomes and the exacerbation of negative consequences (Koslouski, 2022). The likelihood of positive student outcomes is possible when foundational trauma-informed training prioritizes teacher understanding of trauma and stress (Koslouski, 2022). Foundational trauma-informed training encourages teachers to change their perspectives and attitudes toward their students, especially for those students dealing with the effects of trauma, making teachers trauma-sensitive (Kim et al., 2021). For trauma-informed professional learning and development to be most effective in schools, it must happen more than once, provide implementation support with teacher feedback, and ensure school leaders have a regularly revisited and revisable trauma-informed plan and policies to meet the continuing needs of teachers and students (Koslouski, 2022). Negative consequences of teachers not having intentional, regular, and ongoing trauma-informed professional learning include misinterpretations of behavior, punitive actions, and the potential for retraumatization (Atallah et al., 2023). A misunderstanding of student behavior could be due to a lack of understanding of trauma, mental health conditions, or cultural differences (Koslouski, 2022).

Misinterpreting student behavior can lead to inappropriate disciplinary actions, such as suspensions or expulsions, which can harm students' academic achievement and

overall well-being (Atallah et al., 2023). The lack of foundational trauma-informed training can also create adverse social environments for students. For example, if a teacher struggles with challenging behaviors in the classroom, it could lead to learning disruptions, conflicts between classmates, and a lack of support for struggling students (Atallah et al., 2023). If educators do not understand how to respond appropriately to students who have experienced trauma, their actions could unintentionally retrigger past trauma, leading to significant emotional and psychological harm (Herzog et al., 2020; Kim et al., 2021). Foundational trauma-informed training must be systemic, consistent, and sustainable for teachers to robustly integrate and apply practices that lead to positive student learning outcomes and socialization experiences.

Systemic, consistent, and sustainable trauma-informed training can prepare teachers to employ trauma-informed care and practices with fidelity. A systemic, consistent, and sustainable trauma-informed program encourages teachers to develop an understanding and awareness of trauma to address student behaviors appropriately and to effectively embed trauma-informed practices within their curriculum (Downey & Greco, 2023). Koslouski (2022) stated that if school leaders want to develop a comprehensive and systemic approach to managing trauma, they should provide the time and resources for regular staff training, a clear focus on practice changes, and broad organizational changes. A systemic trauma-informed program ensures that all staff members who have access to and responsibility for students should receive training in understanding, recognizing, and accessing the appropriate resources to support students who experience trauma (Downey & Greco, 2023). Berger and Martin (2020) shared that singular trauma-

informed professional learning and development events can result in staff member reluctance to implement trauma-informed principles; it may also encourage a lack of program sustainability. A sustainable trauma-informed program should be consistent, with three to four sessions over the school year (Koslouski, 2022). Also, a sustainable framework should embed hands-on teacher support with implementation, especially within the academic curriculum, which could occur through coaching or mentorship (Koslouski, 2022). Many trauma-informed training programs fail after teachers only receive one training session for the year (Taylor, 2021). Teachers who only participate in singular professional development events are often left alone and expected to implement and embed the trauma-informed practices from the one training into their curricula without direction, feedback, or guidance (Taylor, 2021). Ongoing support, including regular coaching, consultation, and opportunities for collaboration and reflection, is crucial for teachers to effectively integrate trauma-informed practices into their classrooms (Koslouski, 2022).

### ***The Need for Teacher Understanding of Military Culture***

Teachers who support MCS dealing with childhood trauma need an understanding of military culture and how it influences their students. Many of the challenges that military families, including MCS, face are related to trauma (Herzog et al., 2020). Rossiter and Ling (2021) stated that an understanding of military culture is essential as school staff and leaders may not have an adequate understanding or knowledge of the military lifestyle and how it contributes to the different stressors MCS experience. Although there is limited research on MCS, Rossiter and Ling (2021) stated that the

resilience and well-being of MCS are at risk due to the unique aspects of the military-lifestyle, such as relocation and separation. MCS, in general, are exposed to a large number of stressors due to uncertainties with relocation and separation, putting them at a higher risk of concern physically, emotionally, psychologically, and behaviorally (Rossiter & Ling, 2021). These concerns influence students' overall health and well-being making it hard for them to function socially and academically while at school. Herzog et al. (2020) highlighted that organizations that support military families and children must have an awareness of the signs and symptoms of trauma, along with the knowledge, tools, and resources to respond using a trauma-sensitive approach. Teacher training could support MCS in better dealing with the stressors of military life, as constant changes and uncertainties may increase the likelihood of academic concerns and behavior challenges (Rossiter & Ling, 2021). Ormeno et al. (2020) stated that as MCS deal with the effects of relocation and separation, teachers should have access to training, tools, and resources to help support MCS cope.

### ***The Need for Teacher Well-Being Supports***

Intentionally embedding teacher well-being and care when implementing a school-wide trauma-informed program is paramount. Davis et al. (2022) shared that teachers play a significant role in implementing school-based trauma-informed programs, practices, and policies. Because of teachers' integral role throughout the implementation process, decision-makers who influence school support and resources should take thoughtful care to center the well-being and care of teachers (Davis et al., 2022). The work of teachers is highly interpersonal, creating opportunities for them to establish

strong connections and meaningful relationships with students (Davis et al., 2022). Daily, intentional interactions foster teacher-student connections, creating opportunities for teachers to learn about their students and any potential childhood traumas (Davis et al., 2022). Because teachers work so closely with students, with the possibility of being exposed to students' traumatic experiences, teachers must have an awareness of how student trauma influences them personally and professionally.

Childhood trauma affects not only the students who experience it but also the adults or caregivers who may experience the trauma secondhand. Traumatic experiences may also influence teachers by exposing them to secondary traumatization (Wassink-de Stigter et al., 2022). *Secondary traumatization* is the experience of traumatic stress symptoms due to an awareness or knowledge of someone else's experience with a traumatic event (Koslouski et al., 2023). Symptoms of secondary traumatization include feeling numb, withdrawing from others, including students, and compassion fatigue (Downey & Greco, 2023; Koslouski et al., 2023; Wassink-de Stigter et al., 2022). Teachers may also experience additional symptoms such as loss of sleep, mental health struggles, and exhaustion (Koslouski & Stark, 2021). Secondary traumatization influences teachers' lives professionally and personally, ultimately influencing every domain, including emotional, social, physical, behavioral, and spiritual (Koslouski et al., 2023). Secondary traumatization left unaddressed often leads to teacher burnout, reduction of work performance, interpersonal challenges, and, ultimately, leaving the profession (Koslouski & Stark, 2021).

The inability to retain teachers and the ongoing teacher shortage have serious and harmful consequences influencing the quality of education students receive. A concerning trend in education is that the increasing number of teachers leaving the profession outpaces the decreasing number of qualified candidates entering it (Koslouski & Stark, 2021). Koslouski and Stark (2021) emphasized actively prioritizing prevention strategies to address teacher burnout, which could improve teacher retention rates and benefit both teachers and students. An effective trauma-informed program must not only focus on supporting students but also on providing support and resources for teachers to address their own emotional needs and prevent secondary traumatization (Koslouski et al., 2023). Koslouski & Stark (2021) stated that a school-wide program to support teacher secondary traumatization should establish a collaborative and team-based component to help teachers cope with secondary trauma. Koslouski et al. (2023) further shared that creating an intentional safe space for teachers to discuss secondary traumatization provided a barrier against the negative consequences of secondary traumatic stress. By addressing the well-being of teachers, schools can better ensure their students are supported, creating an authentic, trauma-informed, and supportive learning and work environment for all.

### **Implications**

Implications for possible projects based on the literature review and the results of the data collected may address the needs of Grade K–5 teachers who are challenged to support MCC overseas who experience trauma. Possible projects that I considered to address teacher challenges were a professional development program or a white paper.

The professional development project can directly address teacher training needs to manage MCS experiencing trauma, while the white paper would provide school leaders with recommendations to support teachers of MCS. Both focus on providing functional solutions for addressing the study's problem.

A 3 day professional learning program, informed by my data analysis of semi-structured interview responses and a review of the literature on best practices, was identified as the most appropriate option. A professional development program can offer teachers of MCS who experience trauma with the knowledge and skills to support students who require trauma-informed care.

### **Summary**

Section 1 addresses the project study problem. Additionally, Section 1 includes an overview of the local problem, rationale, the study significance, research questions, and a thorough review of the literature. Section 2 of the project study will address the research methodology, design, and data collection protocols. The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore Grades K–5 teacher perceptions of the challenges they experienced in supporting MCS overseas who experience trauma.

## Section 2: Methodology

### **Research Design and Approach**

The purpose of this project study was to explore Grade K–5 teacher perceptions of the challenges they experienced in supporting MCS overseas who experienced trauma. The methodology section in this study outlined the research design and approach, including participant selection, data collection methods, and data analysis procedures. This study used a basic qualitative research design. Ravitch and Carl (2021) stated that research design is the blueprint for qualitative research. A thoughtful qualitative research design ensures that the study is conducted in a systematic, rigorous, and ethical manner and that the data collected is relevant and meaningful (Ravitch & Carl, 2021). In essence, this study was not just about collecting data, but about carefully planning and executing the entire research process (Ravitch & Carl, 2021). According to Burkholder et al. (2020), a qualitative research design allows in-depth data collection in a natural setting and is sensitive to the context and experiences of the participants. In this case, the focus was on the perspectives of Grades K–5 teachers working overseas. Individual semi-structured interviews were conducted to address the following research questions:

RQ 1: What are Grade K–5 teacher perceptions of the challenges they encounter in supporting military-connected children overseas who experience trauma?

RQ 2: What are Grade K–5 teacher perceptions of the supports, resources, and training needed to support military-connected children overseas who experience trauma?

I chose a basic qualitative design for this study as it focused on a single phenomenon: the perceptions of Grade K–5 teachers regarding the challenges of

supporting traumatized MCS overseas. Qualitative research is not simply about collecting data but also understanding the human experience from the perspective of the studied individuals (Ravitch & Carl, 2021). Qualitative research involves exploring participants' unique interpretations, beliefs, and lived experiences to understand better the social and cultural contexts within which they exist (Ravitch & Carl, 2021).

As qualitative researchers plan and develop their research, they must consider the structure or design of their study. Considering the structure of qualitative research supports researchers in creating a sophisticated study that fosters rigor and validity (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Ravitch & Carl, 2021). Qualitative research structures or design approaches are many. According to Creswell and Poth (2018), five qualitative design approaches exist. For my study, the qualitative approaches I considered included basic qualitative design, case study, ethnography, and phenomenology.

A case study centers on a bounded unit that utilizes multiple sources of information for data collection (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Ravitch & Carl, 2021). A bounded unit is a single entity with specific boundaries (Ravitch & Carl, 2021); for example, math students in a specific classroom who have experienced a particular mathematical phenomenon versus all math students at that grade level. When considering the types of data collection tools, case studies may use interviews, observations, or meeting minutes and agendas (Ravitch & Carl, 2021). Because my research utilized only one source of data collection, interviews, a case study did not fit the intentions of my research.

Another qualitative design that I considered is an ethnography approach. An ethnographic study requires researchers to embed themselves within the cultural environment of those experiencing a particular phenomenon to explore that phenomenon (Ravitch & Carl, 2021). This type of research approach may require the researcher to spend an extended amount of time within the culture of the study participants (Ravitch & Carl, 2021). Like case studies, ethnographic research may use multiple sources of data collection, such as interviews, artifacts, and field notes (Ravitch & Carl, 2021). Ethnographic design did not fit my study as I did not need to embed myself into the culture of my participants.

The last qualitative research design that I considered was a phenomenological study. A phenomenological research design aims to understand the lived perceptions of individuals who all experienced a single phenomenon (Ravitch & Carl, 2021). This design uses individual interviews to discern an overall shared experience. Although a phenomenological design approach may use a single form of data collection, this approach does not align with my study as it focuses on the lived experiences of the study participants. After considering the possible qualitative design approaches I could use for my project study, a basic qualitative design approach was the best fit for my research intentions as it used one data collection source and focused on a specific population.

## **Participants**

### **Criteria for Selecting Participants**

After a researcher selects the best qualitative design approach for their study, they must reflect on the population of participants that will provide the most robust data.

Burkholder et al. (2020) shared that the process of selecting participants for a study is essential for researchers to consider once they have chosen their research design approach. According to Burkholder et al. (2020), sampling logic or purposeful sampling benefits qualitative researchers in finding participants who can fully address the research questions. Purposeful sampling is a non-probability sampling type focused on identifying those who can best provide data for the study (Burkholder et al., 2020). Two pertinent concerns that purposeful sampling must address are establishing criteria for selecting participants and ensuring that the chosen participants meet the set criteria (Burkholder et al., 2020).

For my study, the potential participant pool included a large school system that educates pre-k through Grade 12 MCC with schools located within the continental United States and countries in Europe and the Pacific. The population of potential participants for this study was over 200 individuals, which was sufficient to find 10 willing and interested participants. According to Ravitch and Carl (2021), the sample size of the participant pool must also be considered when selecting the right participants. Ravitch and Carl (2021) stated that the sample size is set by what the researcher wants to know and what is at stake, useful, and credible. Also, the researcher must consider the number of interviews they are able to reasonably and effectively conduct, and the time and capacity available to analyze the data received (Ravitch & Carl, 2021). I established criteria that allowed me to concentrate on my sample size while providing me with responses that were relevant, insightful, and knowledgeable regarding the phenomenon in

my study. The following participant selection criteria were used to identify and verify the 10 participants who provided the rich context for the study:

1. All study participants must be U.S. citizens.
2. All study participants must be a U.S. certified elementary school teacher (Grades K–5).
3. All study participants must have experience teaching MCS (Grades K–5) outside of the continental U.S.
4. All study participants must have at least one year experience with teaching U.S. MCS (Grades K–5) overseas who experience trauma.

### **Gaining Access to Participants**

There are several ways researchers can gain access to study participants. Creswell and Poth (2018) illuminated that researcher access to study participants is based on the research design. Because my study was a basic qualitative study, I focused on a specific group of participants who worked for the same organization and who met the established participant criteria. Deciding how to gain access to participants must be strategic and thoughtful with an intentional plan (Ravitch & Carl, 2021). I used a purposive sampling approach to gain access. Rubin and Rubin (2012) highlighted the importance of social networks in qualitative research, particularly in participant recruitment. I used social media and emails to identify my study participants. I used a combination of these methods. For example, I shared my recruitment flyer on different social media platforms such as Facebook. Many teachers within this organization were a part of different Facebook or other social media groups. I also received permission from different social

media group administrators to share my recruitment flyer before seeking participants from the different groups. The recruitment flyer clarified the title of the study, participant criteria, plans for protecting participant personal information and data shared, and the structure of the overall interview process including the estimated time commitment and researcher contact information. The recruitment flyer also included a Google Form link for the potential participants to confirm that they met the established criteria and to provide information to schedule an interview. After I reviewed the submitted Google Forms, those who were a good match for my study were sent an email within five business days with the consent form and to confirm the day, date, and time for an interview.

My plan for gaining access to participants for the study was approved by the Walden University Institutional Review Board (IRB). I received IRB approval on April 25, 2025 (Walden approval no. 1156224). As a part of the IRB review process, all components dealing with study participants, from plans to gain access to participants to participant consent and protection, were evaluated (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This process ensured that the study was ethical and protected the participants throughout the entire research study (Creswell & Poth, 2018). By gaining permission to conduct this study, I was granted approval to seek and select participants for the study.

### **Establishing a Researcher-Participant Relationship**

Building a relationship with study participants is essential for a substantial study yielding data with depth, authenticity, and rigor. Rubin and Rubin (2012) stressed the importance of trust as one of the most significant ways a researcher establishes a

relationship with the participant or interviewee. According to Rubin and Rubin (2012), participant trust creates more open interviews, encouraging participants to be more willing to share their experiences, perceptions, and thoughts, providing rich and insightful data. Trust is built when a researcher embodies honesty, transparency, good faith, acceptance, fairness, and kindness (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). I established trust from my first encounter with my study participants by demonstrating empathy, by actively listening, by being curious, by asking probing questions, and by genuinely trying to understand their perspectives and experiences. I created an advertising flyer that was designed and structured in an appealing and welcoming way for participants. The flyer invited potential participants to share their knowledge, and it assured them that they would be seen and heard. Rubin and Rubin (2012) shared that research participants often enjoy talking about their experiences and enjoy the social aspect of the interview process. From my personal experience, I enjoyed being an interviewee for research purposes as those experiences made me feel seen, heard, and valued because of my experiences around a shared topic. I created a safe and welcoming space for participants to share their experiences freely. During the interview process, I used a responsive interview approach (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). A responsive interview approach starts with ensuring the interview environment is welcoming, reducing participant stress by addressing questions or concerns, being transparent about what will occur, and confirming participant protection of personal information and data shared (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). In essence, a responsive interview is a dynamic and interactive process where the researcher actively listens to the participant, responds thoughtfully, and guides the conversation while

allowing for the participant's unique perspectives and experiences to emerge (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). My approach focused on building rapport with participants, creating a comfortable and trusting environment, and eliciting rich and meaningful data. While ordinary conversations aim to maintain social connections and relationships, research interviews prioritize making relationships by answering and gathering data relevant to the research questions (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Although building rapport was essential in my conversations and interviews, the primary function of the research interviews was to create a trusting environment that encouraged participants to share in-depth and meaningful information.

### **Measures of Participant Protection**

As a researcher, it is vital to have intentionally planned measures in place to protect participant rights, personal information, and data shared. Rubin and Rubin (2012) stated that researchers must ensure participants are not harmed due to their study. Research study participants consent to making themselves vulnerable, sharing their experiences and perceptions, and expecting confidentiality (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). However, this is only possible if the researcher behaves ethically (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Researchers must understand the significance of being ethical and how it influences the effectiveness and outcomes of their study. Creswell and Poth (2018) shared that being an ethical researcher means ensuring safeguards are in place to protect participants. For my study, I began by obtaining IRB approval. The purpose of the IRB was to review my study to ensure that it would not cause harm to my study participants (Burkholder et al., 2020). After I received IRB approval and participant consent, I used the following

measures to protect my study participants ethically: I (a) informed participants about the purpose of the study; (b) provided participants with a detailed description of the study; (c) protected participants' confidentiality regarding personal information and information shared; (d) used a responsive interviewing approach that demonstrated empathy; and (e) made sure all data were handled appropriately and secured correctly.

### **Data Collection**

The qualitative data collection instrument I used for my study was an individual semistructured interview. Because my research used a basic qualitative design with 10 study participants, interviews were my single source of data collection. Burkholder et al. (2020) stated that interviews are a predominant data collection form for qualitative research. According to Rubin and Rubin (2012), interviews are a key research method in which researchers can speak with those who know about a particular problem of interest. Interviews provide researchers with rich information from study participants (Burkholder et al., 2020). In-depth conversations provide researchers with a valuable window into the thoughts, feelings, and experiences of others, allowing them to gather rich and nuanced data (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Researchers gain insights into perspectives that may differ from their own, thereby fostering a deeper understanding of how others perceive the world (Rubin & Rubin, 2012).

### **Data Collection Instrument**

I used individual semistructured interviews to explore Grade K–5 teachers' perceptions of the challenges they experienced in supporting MCC overseas who experienced trauma. Semistructured interviews balance the need for focused inquiry with

the desire to capture the richness and complexity of individual experiences (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Using semistructured interviews additionally provided a framework for the conversation while allowing room for exploration and discovery. Rubin and Rubin (2012) explained that semistructured interviews are a key type of in-depth interview used in qualitative research. According to Burkholder et al. (2020), researchers who utilize semistructured interviews must intentionally design and embed their research, interview, and probing questions. Semistructured interviews use a preplanned set of questions for structure but also allow for flexibility and follow-up questions (probes) to explore topics in more depth and gain a richer understanding of the participant's perspective (Burkholder et al., 2020). A semistructured interview approach allowed me to construct interview and probing questions that related to my research questions and to gather information about Grade K–5 teacher perceptions of the challenges they experienced supporting MCC overseas who experienced trauma. Research questions are the heart of the data collection process, especially in qualitative research. My research questions focused on the scope of the data collection. The interview questions were aligned to each of my research questions to allow me to collect data which supported how I answered my research questions.

RQ 1: What are Grade K–5 teacher perceptions of the challenges they encounter in supporting military-connected children overseas who experience trauma?

RQ 2: What are Grade K–5 teacher perceptions of the supports, resources, and training needed to support military-connected children overseas who experience trauma?

The interview and probing questions for RQ1 sought information on the study participants' understanding of trauma, perceptions of what trauma looks like, and examples of trauma MCS overseas experienced. Additionally, the interview and probing questions were written to address how trauma influenced MCS socially, emotionally, and academically. The interview and probing questions for RQ2 sought information on the supports, training, and skills teachers believed they needed to better support MCS overseas who experienced trauma.

### ***Interview Protocol***

The individual interviews in this study used a semistructured approach to explore Grade K–5 teacher perceptions of the challenges they experienced in supporting MCC overseas who experienced trauma. Each semistructured interview consisted of ten questions addressing the two research questions of my study. Seven questions addressed RQ1, and three questions addressed RQ2. Creswell and Poth (2018) shared that researchers must follow ethical and deliberate research procedures during the data collection and interview process. By following defined procedures, I intended to ensure the integrity of the data, protect participant rights and well-being, and produce credible and trustworthy research findings. My qualitative research procedures included tools, such as an interview protocol and interview questions. I developed an interview protocol to guide the data collection process. The interview protocol helped me to stay within the study boundaries, intentionally structure questions to guide the conversation, complete each interview within the established time constraints, and provide respectful dialogue (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The beginning of each interview started with repeating the

study's purpose and confirmation of consent. For all interviews, I recorded each session using a digital platform, captured my thoughts and insights in a research journal, and ensured the collected data accurately reflected the participants' perspectives.

The interview protocol for my study contained logistical details, an introductory script to welcome and build rapport with participants, interview questions aligned with my framework, and a closing script to thank participants and share follow-up procedures (Burkholder et al., 2020). My interview protocol was divided into three sections, addressing the key concepts of my conceptual framework: (a) understanding trauma as an experience; (b) social and emotional skills development; and (c) support and investment in school staff. The first concept focused on Grade K–5 teachers' understanding of trauma. Using interview questions about the concept of understanding trauma allowed me to gain insights into how teachers define trauma, to explore what they recognize as signs and symptoms of trauma experienced by MCS, to gather their perceptions of how trauma experienced by MCS influences them, and to investigate the challenges they face in supporting traumatized MCS. The concept of understanding trauma guided me to understand how teachers interpret trauma in MCS and the challenges they face in supporting them.

The second concept was focused on the significance of social and emotional development in support of MCS who experience trauma and on how teachers embedded social and emotional practices into their curriculum. The third concept allowed me to collect data about teachers' thoughts, recommendations, and suggestions regarding the

supports and investments needed to develop staff to successfully support MCS who experienced trauma.

At the end of the interviews, I thanked each participant for generously sharing their time, energy, and experiences with me. After transcribing and coding the collected data, I conducted member checks. Member checking allowed me to share my initial findings, check in with each participant to determine if they would like to add anything to the collected data, to confirm their perspectives have been captured correctly, and to address any problematic aspects of the interview.

### **Keeping Track of the Data**

Researchers need a plan to keep track of the data collected from their study participants. Researchers must also consider their influence on the data collected. Ravitch and Carl (2021) noted that keeping a research journal is a frequent practice among qualitative researchers. In a research journal, I recorded my thoughts, questions, struggles, reactions, perceptions, and processes experienced throughout my study (Ravitch & Carl, 2021). For participant data collected, I tracked the data, starting with the interview transcriptions captured on an online platform. I used the online platform, Zoom, to audio record and transcribe the interviews. After the interview sessions were recorded and transcribed using Zoom, I saved each interview transcription as a word document to organize and make edits for accuracy. I stored the recordings and transcriptions in a research folder on my computer that is password protected. I also stored printed copies of all documents, including the transcriptions of the interviews, in a locked cabinet in my home.

## **Role of Researcher**

In a qualitative research study, the researcher plays the most significant role. According to Burkholder et al. (2020), the researcher is the primary instrument in the study. Researchers must be mindful of their role and its potential influence on the data. They must acknowledge that they are not neutral observers but active participants whose perspectives and actions can influence the research process and its outcomes. Creswell and Poth (2018) recommend that researchers use a reflexive approach as they continuously address and reflect on their role as researchers. Reflexivity is an active and continuous process of acknowledging biases, positionality, and assumptions to inform self-awareness, reassessment, and reflection throughout the research cycle (Ravitch & Carl, 2021). Ravitch and Carl (2021) recommended using reflexivity in data collection through researcher memos, research journals, dialogic engagement, and researcher interviews. I responded to my role as a researcher through my research journal, dialogic engagement, and research memos. My research journal helped me keep track of my thoughts, questions, and plans as I navigated the qualitative research process. The form of dialogic engagement I used was regularly meeting with my chair to discuss my role as the researcher, glean feedback, and reassess steps and methods in the research process. This type of engagement with my chair provided me with ongoing opportunities for dialogic engagement. During the interview process, I also used research memos to keep track of discrepancies, impressions, and insights I had during the interview process (Ravitch & Carl, 2021). During my role as a researcher, I also intentionally answered my research questions to identify and address any biases. More importantly, I also rehearsed and

piloted my interview protocol with teacher and educator colleagues, family, and friends to make changes and better understand the interview process for study participants (Burkholder et al., 2020; Ravitch & Carl, 2021).

In my study, I interviewed Grade K–5 teachers who were currently supporting MCS. My goal was to learn more about the challenges these teachers experienced supporting Grade K–5 MCS overseas who experienced trauma.

My experience included working in an overseas elementary school servicing Grades K–5 MCS for many years. I was a classroom teacher and instructional coach. I was not in a supervisory role as a teacher or coach. However, I did serve on school leadership teams and was a teacher leader. In these capacities, I led many professional learning sessions for educators overseas who supported MCS. My professional learning sessions encompassed understanding trauma and providing strategies for supporting MCS who experienced trauma. Some biases that I needed to be aware of were my assumptions about Grade K–5 teachers' understanding of the challenges MCS face and their knowledge of trauma and its signs and symptoms in MCS overseas. By recognizing and addressing my biases, I minimized the risk of misinterpreting my study participants' responses and produced more credible and trustworthy findings (Burkholder et al., 2020). Also, I have not taught in this school system for over two years, which helped remove my proximity from the organization. My role as a researcher was to objectively, honestly, and deeply understand my study participants' perceptions of the challenges they experienced in supporting MCC overseas who experienced trauma. I accomplished this by using individual semistructured interviews with participants who

volunteered to participate in this study. Understanding my participants' perceptions and experiences allowed me to collect unbiased, rich, and robust information from which I reported my findings accurately.

### **Data Analysis Results**

According to Ravitch and Carl (2021), data analysis plays a significant role in qualitative research, as the data may not always provide clear-cut answers. Throughout the data collection process, qualitative researchers are responsible for analyzing, interpreting, and synthesizing the data to draw evidence-based conclusions and reporting their findings accurately and with credibility. The general process for data analysis consisted of preparing and organizing the data collected, coding the data to unveil themes, and representing the data in various forms, such as figures, tables, or dialogue (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Rubin and Rubin (2012) pointed out that data analysis is a step-by-step process of gathering the raw data collected from interviews to extract meaningful insights and draw clear conclusions that answer the research questions.

I initiated the data analysis process by organizing and preparing the transcription of each interview. I used Zoom, a web-based platform, to audio record my interviews with study participants. Zoom generated a transcript of the audio-recorded interviews. I simultaneously listened to the audio recording of each interview while I read over the transcriptions to ensure they were accurate. I fixed any errors the platform may have misunderstood or not captured. I edited each transcript for accuracy using Microsoft Word. By carefully reviewing and correcting the transcriptions, I ensured the data were accurate and reliable, which was crucial for the trustworthiness and credibility of my

research findings. I initiated data analysis after accurately editing all transcribed interviews.

After I reviewed and corrected any errors with the transcription, I utilized a process of member checking to gain study participant feedback. According to Creswell and Poth (2018), member checking is when the researcher invites the study participants to review the data and provide feedback on the researcher's interpretations. Creswell and Poth (2018) shared that member checking is essential in ensuring research credibility. Member checking in qualitative studies usually includes sharing the data, data analysis, interpretations, and conclusions with the participants so they can weigh in on the accuracy and credibility of the event or interview (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Member checking involves more holistic sharing of research materials with participants, allowing them to provide in-depth feedback on the entire research process. I utilized member checking by sharing my initial findings and the revised interview transcription with the study participants to confirm that I accurately captured their thoughts, stories, and experiences. I also asked the study participants if there was any additional information they wanted to add to the data collected. One participant responded by stating that the findings resonated with them.

### **Coding Process**

A critical aspect of data analysis in qualitative research is the coding process. After reading and reviewing the data, qualitative researchers "describe, classify, and interpret the data" by coding or categorizing the transcribed interviews (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Creswell and Poth (2018) stated that coding or categorizing the data plays a

foundational role in qualitative data analysis. All subsequent steps of data analysis stem from the coding process. Coding starts with researchers making sense of the data, identifying significant patterns and themes, and developing a deeper understanding of the phenomenon in the study (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

For my study, I used a three-step coding process. In particular, I used Saldana's (2021) three-step process. According to Saldana (2021), the first step is open coding, which is assigning meaningful labels, words, or phrases to specific portions of text to identify and categorize underlying concepts and themes within the data. Before I analyzed the transcripts, I made preliminary codes based on the framework, research questions, and interview questions to initiate and guide the coding process. However, I also understood that coding data and data analysis are iterative. I was flexible and added, deleted, and modified codes as new concepts arose. During the first cycle, I coded portions of the transcript by highlighting a similar word or phrase across the interviews, related to the preliminary codes, or developed new codes. I categorized the coded words and phrases during the second step to make the data more meaningful. In the last step, I reduced the coding and identified the emerging themes of the study (Saldana, 2021). As I identified and categorized the prominent codes, I looked for common themes that emerged from the data.

### **Research Accuracy and Credibility**

Qualitative researchers strive to ensure their research is high quality and worthy of being believed and trusted by its readers. In qualitative research, the term trustworthiness is used in place of validity to refer to the accuracy of the findings

(Ravitch & Carl, 2021). A trustworthy qualitative study confirms that the researcher conducted their study ethically and responsibly throughout the research process, including the study's design, data collection procedures, analysis of the data, and reporting of their findings. Qualitative researchers also establish trustworthiness by accurately aligning their conclusions with their study participants' experiences (Ravitch & Carl, 2021). According to Ravitch and Carl (2018), there are four standards qualitative researchers can use and reflect on to assess trustworthiness. The four standards of trustworthiness include credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Ravitch & Carl, 2021). I evaluated the trustworthiness of my research using the four standards for qualitative research.

Credibility in qualitative research is a standard that researchers must meet for their study to be believable. According to Burkholder et al. (2020), credibility confirms that the findings reflect and correspond to the data collected. There are several tools that qualitative researchers can use to establish credibility, including peer debriefing, negative case analysis or discrepant cases, triangulation, and member checking (Burkholder et al., 2020). I used member checking for my study to establish credibility. As stated earlier, member checking is the process of having study participants review the transcript, provide feedback for accuracy, and have an opportunity to add additional thoughts to the interview conversation (Burkholder et al., 2020).

Transferability is another qualitative research standard that researchers use to establish trustworthiness. Ravitch and Carl (2021) shared that transferability in qualitative research is how applicable the findings are to other situations without the

original study losing contextual richness. For example, a teacher reads a study about effective teaching practices and reflects on how the findings in the study could relate to them as a teacher and their students. Transferability is possible when a researcher explicitly describes the setting and assumptions of the study so the reader may consider applicability within their setting (Burkholder et al., 2020). I ensured my study was transferable by including detailed descriptions of the setting and detailed perceptions shared by my study participants. These descriptive details will help future readers of my research consider how my findings relate to their environment.

The standard of dependability relates to consistency within qualitative research. Burkholder et al. (2020) stated that dependability ensures that the study has ample evidence of consistency throughout the entire study. The data collection tools, data analysis processes, and the reporting of the findings demonstrate consistency (Burkholder et al., 2020). According to Ravitch and Carl (2021), qualitative researchers demonstrate dependability by reflecting on why they chose particular research methods, how selected methods aligned with their research questions, and what design approach makes their study rigorous. I ensured dependability in my research by keeping meticulous details of my research processes and decisions in my research journal and seeking peer review from my doctoral committee to ensure my findings were credible and consistent.

The last standard of trustworthiness is confirmability. Confirmability ensures the research findings are grounded in data versus researcher biases (Ravitch & Carl, 2021). Several tools, such as triangulation, peer reviews, and reflexivity, can strengthen confirmability. Among these, reflexivity is critical. According to Ravitch and Carl

(2021), reflexivity is the ongoing process a qualitative researcher uses to glean insights into their own biases and better understand the rationale behind their decision-making throughout the research process. To iteratively address confirmability, I used reflexivity throughout the data collection, analysis, and reporting phases. Confirmability aims to establish that the research conclusions are logically derived from the data, allowing other researchers to follow the logic of the findings (Burkholder et al., 2020). Confirmability is achieved by acknowledging subjectivity, recognizing biases, and basing methodological decisions on reflexive processes (Ravitch & Carl, 2021).

### **Discrepant Cases**

Qualitative researchers must be aware of and acknowledge the possibility of discrepant data. In qualitative research, a discrepant case is a data point that contradicts the themes or initial interpretations of the research findings found in the rest of the data collected (Ravitch & Carl, 2021). Because qualitative researchers must not force data to fit what they believe to be true (Ravitch & Carl, 2021), looking for negative cases, also known as outliers or discrepant cases, is essential. Creswell and Poth (2018) emphasized the importance of discrepant cases, stating that not all evidence will fit or contradict a code or theme. Because of the possibility of this type of contradictory evidence or data, qualitative researchers must be aware of and report when discrepant cases appear in the study. I intentionally looked for and planned to report any discrepant cases in my research. If discrepant cases arose, I ensured the results were reported and analyzed within the context of the overall findings. The significance of looking for discrepant data is to challenge preconceived notions I had and learned from them (Ravitch & Carl, 2021).

Although I did not identify any discrepant cases, the process of looking for discrepant cases helped me improve the rigor and trustworthiness of my research findings.

### **Findings**

The problem that initiated this study was that Grade K–5 teachers who worked with MCS overseas struggle to support MCS who experienced trauma. The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore Grades K–5 teacher perceptions of the challenges they encountered in supporting MCC overseas who experienced trauma. Specifically, this study intended to address and answer the following research questions:

RQ 1: What are Grade K–5 teacher perceptions of the challenges they encounter in supporting military-connected children overseas who experience trauma?

RQ 2: What are Grade K–5 teacher perceptions of the supports, resources, and training needed to support military-connected children overseas who experience trauma?

For this study, I interviewed 10 participants. I assigned an alphanumeric code to each participant to safeguard their identity, privacy, and confidentiality. Participants recognized and acknowledged the unique characteristics of MCS that differed from those of their Stateside peers who were not military-connected. However, teachers overseas frequently encountered challenges in effectively managing the trauma experienced by MCS because of the influences of relocation overseas and separation events, which are significant aspects of the military lifestyle. Participants shared that MCS respond to the effects of the military lifestyle in social and emotional ways, especially during transitional periods. Many participants shared their strategies, or sometimes lack thereof, for navigating the challenges of responding to their students' social and emotional

displays. All participants shared the need for specific professional development, support resources, and support staff to help them serve their MCS who struggle with the effects of the trauma they experience due to the military lifestyle.

This section will discuss the themes that emerged from the data collected. The following themes stemmed from the one-on-one interview sessions I conducted: (a) teachers overseas acknowledge the distinct characteristics of MCS overseas, yet encounter challenges in effectively supporting the trauma-related experiences these students endure; (b) teachers overseas face challenges in supporting and guiding MCS overseas who display social and emotional trauma-related responses, especially during transitional periods; and (c) teachers overseas who work with MCS overseas describe specific professional supports needed to serve their students better. The development of these themes began with the rigorous process of coding the interview data. This initial coding led to the bundling and collapsing of data through open and axial coding into broader conceptual categories. From these collective analysis processes, I systematically organized participant statements gathered from the interviews to synthesize the three main themes for this study, aligning them with the research questions (see Table 1).

**Table 1***Perceptions of Grade K–5 Teacher Overseas—Categories and Themes*

Categories of data	Themes
<p>Unique aspects of MCS &amp; trauma-related experiences</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Unique aspects of MCS</li> <li>• Relocation</li> <li>• Separation</li> </ul>	<p>Teachers overseas acknowledge the distinct characteristics of MCS overseas, yet they encounter challenges in supporting the trauma-related experiences these students endure.</p>
<p>Trauma-related social-emotional responses</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Social responses</li> <li>• Emotional responses</li> </ul>	<p>Teachers overseas face challenges in supporting and guiding MCS overseas who display social and emotional trauma-related responses, especially during transitional periods.</p>
<p>Trauma-related professional supports</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Professional development</li> <li>• Support resources</li> <li>• Support staff</li> </ul>	<p>Teachers overseas who work with MCS overseas describe specific professional supports needed to serve their students better.</p>

**Theme 1: Challenges in Effectively Supporting MCS Trauma-Related Experiences**

Teachers overseas are honored to serve MCS, whose diverse backgrounds, perspectives, and experiences enrich the learning environment. Many of the participants interviewed were readily able to share the different characteristics of MCS overseas that make them unique. However, the data used to derive this first theme showed that although teachers are generally proud to educate and engage MCS overseas, Grade K–5 teachers still faced challenges supporting the trauma-related experiences of MCS. This theme was acquired from the categories based on the unique aspects of MCS and their trauma-related experiences transitioning overseas, including relocation and separation.

***Unique Aspects of MCS***

Teachers overseas shared their general experiences with MCS and what makes teaching this population unique. I asked the study participants, “Please tell me about your general experiences teaching MCS overseas. What are some of the unique aspects of teaching this student population that you observed?” All participants were able to provide thoughtful responses to the prompt. Some of these responses, acknowledging the overall diverse backgrounds of MCS overseas, included Participant 2 sharing, “...the unique experiences are that the students are from all different walks of life and backgrounds and are very diverse.” Participant 5 added, “I would say one thing that has been consistent across all my experiences working with military-connected children is that they are very well-traveled.” Participant 5 added the following insights about MCS by sharing, “I would say culturally aware because obviously they’ve been all over. They seem to be very adaptable.” Participant 1 stated, “I have students, diverse students, from I think we

have 10 different languages, that are represented within our classroom.” Participant 10 said, “I found that they are unique in that they are exposed to so many different cultures and opportunities that our stateside students don’t have.” Participant 10 elaborated on the effects of MCS exposed to different cultures and opportunities by adding, “... [the exposure] gives them a perspective and a way to interact with people who are different than them, or who have different viewpoints, for the most part, in a more non-judgmental way.”

Participant 1 discussed some of the unique academic aspects of MCS by sharing, “...we have a lot of diversity, so we have students that are gifted. We have students that are general education. I have students that are multi-language learners, and I have students on IEPs and 504s.” Participant 1’s comment highlights that MCS may have varying academic strengths and needs that may not always be known until the child arrives in the overseas classroom and school. Participant 5 added, “It does affect their academics too for a lot of them, and I think part of it sometimes, I wonder, is just coming from a school that is on one pacing guide and then moving.” Because MCS may move from different states to different countries, their exposure to academic content may not align with their peers at their new school or with the incoming school’s academic pacing. Participant 8 commented, “Then the other aspect is, of course, the academic expectations and how they change, or even the rules, or the dress code. I mean, they’re little kids, and they don’t understand the whole picture.” Participant 7 agreed:

...academically, I think one difference with military kids is it depends on where you were stationed prior, and I don’t think that is very fair. I think that sometimes

lack of education could be from lack of where they were, and then also in the same breath, it could be they're so accelerated because of where they were. So, I think it's such a mixed bag. When kids come in that are military, it's all ranges.

Many participants reflected and celebrated the unique strengths of MCS.

Participant 6 shared, "I enjoy working with military children, because there is often a family structure that you can contact and connect to that believes in characteristics like honor, and they want their children to be successful." Within the military community, an established communication protocol allows teachers to contact parents or, when necessary, a military-serving parent's supervisor. Consistency and stability were topics that came up with participants. Participant 7 stated, "The military was consistent. It was the same uniform, same training schedule, same field exercise...that was the same."

Participant 8 mentioned, "When you're talking about the military community, we have a little bit more stability. Whereas it seemed like maybe the stability in the civilian world wasn't as strong as the income or the housing situation, and sometimes even the family dynamics." Participant 5 affirmed, "I can say all my students have at least one working parent. They have a home, they have healthcare." Participant 7 passionately expressed, "I think military kids are like the coolest kids. I think that they have been thrown in this life without really a lot of choice, and they literally come in smiling and happy and love their experience for the most part." Participant 1 agreed, "I have also observed that students that are military-connected tend to persevere. Because they have no choice but to live with this life situation. Therefore, I've seen students that are able to have determination and grit and perseverance as a result."

### ***Relocation***

Although most participants acknowledged and celebrated MCS overseas for their dynamic contributions to the learning environment, participants also shared trauma-related experiences that MCS endure due to the military lifestyle and the challenges in supporting MCS as teachers overseas. One of these trauma-related experiences and categories for Theme 1 was relocation. MCS overseas are highly mobile, moving from state to state, from the United States to overseas locations, from overseas locations back to the United States, or from one overseas location to another. Long-term military family relocations are called a Permanent Change of Station or PCS. Participant 3 shared, “I see a big change this time of year during that season, what we refer to as a season when they’re [MCS] having to what we call PCS, move to another duty station.” Participant 1 added, “But I’ve also seen challenges with students who are PCSing and leaving. Who are having a hard time saying goodbye to friends and having a hard time readjusting to lifestyle of heading back to either another country and or America.” Participant 3 further shared about a student living in the hotel, beginning the PCS transition process, and its effects on the student.

This was one of the students which is in our [Advanced Academic Programs and Services] AAPS program, are very gifted, always [a] very sensitive student. So that was one of the things, too. So just more like lying on the floor, [for example] the slightest thing [like] he didn’t get to show his work, or he did something that was not appropriate while he was up demonstrating his work. He was asked to sit down, and normally he would recover from being disciplined.... Then he

proceeded to go to the floor and just lay on the floor like a lot and just lay there and not get up.

The effects on MCS who experienced a PCS posed challenges for teachers overseas, especially students who were typically engaged and followed classroom expectations. Participants 7 and 4 mentioned the challenging situations they witnessed with struggling MCS during a PCS transition. Participant 7 shared:

One thing about the constant move: I think sometimes you find kids that are like, “Why, bother. I’m not gonna like it; we’re gonna move anyways. Why make friends? Why do this?” So that to me, whenever I hear that, I always think you have a very hard shell, but it’s a way to protect yourself. So those kinds of kids, I’m always thinking, like how can I soften your shell? How can we find ways for you to not feel like that, because it’s such a protected barrier.

Participant 4 added:

Because even if they were used to being in a military environment, well, then, add that to being in a different country and you could see how some of the stressors and emotions really got to be heightened as they made this move to be in a place that maybe wasn’t as easy or as comfortable as what they were used to, and then, especially having to navigate a new environment, a new friend group, and doing this without having close family around.

Another challenge for overseas teachers stemmed from the struggles family members endured during a PCS and the subsequent effects these struggles had on MCS.

For some overseas locations, many young military families, in particular, may not have the resources needed to navigate their new duty station effectively. Participant 7 shared:

So, a lot of young soldiers with young kids with young wives under 30 that can't leave their house [due to having one vehicle]. I think that creates a lot of big feelings being away from their own family. And I think if your mom is not feeling wonderful and isn't able to leave their house, the isolation, the loneliness...it trickles down to the kids in a very very impactful way and for academics it trickles down to like my mom doesn't want to read with me. With no judgment, being a military spouse, you know that that feeling is very legitimate.

As a consequence of the trauma-related experiences of relocating overseas, MCS also faced the challenges of leaving old friends and navigating the process of making new connections. Participant 1 mentioned, "I've seen challenges with students coming and trying to make friends and getting stabilized." Participant 3 shared, "They [MCS] let you see how that impact [of moving] is because they develop close bonds. And then when they lose those bonds...some of the more socially aware students, they realize right away what they're about to lose." Participant 4 stated, "Sometimes it's like they're guarded because they might leave soon. They're guarded to make friends." Sometimes, it is not only hard for MCS to make new friends, but some may also struggle connecting with other adults as they transition overseas. Participant 7 expressed, "But I do think there's some big challenges for them, like big challenges with friendship, big challenges with even building relationships with adults." However, Participant 5 highlighted the opposite regarding MCS and their ability to make connections overseas. Participant 5 said,

“They’re [MCS are] very unique, I would say, in their ability to fit in quickly and build community around them.” Participant 7 agreed and added, “Another thing that makes military kids different, but kind of unique, is that they all kind of get each other’s experience.”

### *Separation*

The other prevalent trauma-related experience MCS face, and another category of Theme 1, is separation. MCS overseas often struggle with being separated from their military serving parent, extended family, and friends. I asked the participants to address the separation category by prompting them: “Tell me about a situation where you felt a military-connected student was experiencing more than the typical adjustment responses. What indicators or observations made you think they were experiencing something atypical?” and “Tell me about an experience where you felt a student’s actions might be related to the unique stressors of military life overseas, such as deployments or frequent moves.”

There are various reasons for the separation of MCS overseas from their military-serving parent. One of the most common separation events is called a deployment. A deployment temporarily relocates a service member from their assigned duty station to a designated location, often a different country, for a defined period to conduct a specific mission, training, or operation. Participant 5 shared:

[MCS are] dealing with a lot of things that maybe you don’t see children in the States dealing with that are not military-connected. Because a lot of them have parents that are often deployed. They might be on a mission somewhere for a

month. And so, they're used to having just one parent at home and seeing dad or mom go for a while.

Deployments often significantly affect the family members left behind. Families may temporarily alter their everyday routines, and a period of functional preservation becomes the standard until the military-serving parent returns. Participant 7 elaborated:

...you see certain population of kids that when their dad [on deployment] is gone all rules are gone, all structures gone, all dinner is gone. All homework is not happening...like we're gonna stop, drop, and wait till dad gets back to kind of resume. And again, I think it goes back to moms being in a place where they can cope with this. Because this life is not for the weak of heart, and when we stop, drop, and wait...everybody sleeps in the bed, let's take 2 days off and cry, and let's all be together when dad goes.

Participant 10 shared how a MCS felt they had to take on the role of "dad" and its effect on him. Participant 10 stated:

And I said, "What's happening?" He's like, "Well, dad deployed." So here we are. And he was one of 6 kids. His mom was pregnant again. And mom was not doing well at all with Dad deployed and then being overseas. And so here was this 11-year-old little boy, who felt that he had to take on the role as Dad. And so, he was up, because mom was just mentally not in a place where she could take care of the children. He had to step in that role and so he felt that he couldn't.

Although deployments are a common aspect of the military lifestyle, MCS display the effects of this type of separation in different ways. Participant 1 shared:

While they're provided [the stability of housing and health care], [MCS] still face many challenges. And so that includes the separations of the military dependent, often travels, goes TDY, gets deployed. Depending on their schedules, they may not get to see their family members because they're working different shifts. And all of that has an, I'll say, a negative impact on students' well-being.

Participant 8 shared the academic effects of MCS facing a parent deployment:

I got a new student...she's dual military, so her mother is the one that's active duty attached to the ship, and her father is active duty attached to a shore command. She has two younger siblings. They just moved here from more of a family-based connected duty station, where they had grandparents and aunts and uncles, to a new country. Immediately her mom deployed, and [the student] expressed that in shutting down and crying. Although she is a very intelligent child, she does not perform day to day during those transition times.

Participant 9 added:

I had a 5th grade boy. He was probably one of my star pupils. Just always asked what he could do, what he could help out with. And then, all of a sudden, it was the last part of 5th grade and he all of a sudden came back after Christmas, and he was a different person. He was, you know, tried to get in trouble a lot. He wasn't turning...he wasn't participating in class. He would pick on other kids.

When MCS move overseas, they are often separated from extended family members stateside, who often provide the military serving family with essential support and consistency. The effects of this type of separation are noticed by overseas teachers as

students navigate their new learning landscape. Participant 7 shared, “[For MCS] being away from extended family is another hard thing.” Participant acknowledged, “Well, one of the unique stressors of military life overseas is moving. Students feel disconnected from their families....” Many participants shared how they acknowledged the absence of extended family, how the absence affected their students, and how they tried to support MCS overseas and their families back home. Participant 9 shared:

I could see that with kids when they would be hesitant to try new things just because all of it was new with being overseas and not being around families. As a music teacher, a big one was they didn’t have the opportunity to have Grandma Grandpa come visit the school or attend their concerts. So, one thing, because of the uniqueness of emerging technology was being able to record concerts and put them on Facebook. So, Grandma or Aunt Edna could celebrate those opportunities that they wouldn’t have had even when I started teaching overseas. And so that was a challenge, because it was harder for them to celebrate their successes.

It was observed by some participants that this separation from extended family made it hard for MCS to take risks in the learning environment. Participant 9 mentioned, “I could see that with kids, when they would be hesitant to try new things just because all of it was new with being overseas and not being around families.” Participant 10 elaborated:

Because even if they were used to being in a military environment, well, then, add that to being in a different country and you could see how some of the stressors

and emotions really got to be heightened as they made this move to be in a place that maybe wasn't as easy or as comfortable as what they were used to, and then, especially having to navigate a new environment, a new friend group, and doing this without having close family around.

Ultimately, all participants shared how dynamic MCS overseas are and how their experiences shaped the learning environment. However, trauma-related experiences, such as relocation and separation that MCS face due to the military lifestyle, must be considered and delicately navigated by MCTO to ensure these students could learn and thrive.

## **Theme 2: Challenges Supporting MCS Social and Emotional Trauma-Related Responses**

Participants described challenges in navigating the social and emotional responses of MCS, which stemmed from trauma-related experiences such as relocation and separation. While all participants shared strategies, tools, or resources they employed to support struggling MCS, many indicated a need for enhanced support to assist these students effectively. The data analyzed for this second theme revealed that for K–5 teachers supporting MCS, in overseas settings, it is particularly challenging when students' social and emotional responses influenced the classroom learning environment. This theme was acquired from the categories based on the social and emotional responses to the trauma-related experiences of MCS. This theme also presented the specific challenges teachers encountered and the strategies, tools, and resources they utilized to

support MCS overseas as they navigated the traumatic experiences of the military lifestyle.

Designed to elicit responses, the interview protocol probed the participants about the challenges they faced in navigating the social and emotional responses of MCS overseas. The initial prompt asked participants to “Tell me about any challenges you encountered in trying to support military-connected students, especially considering the potential for trauma.”

A second prompt further explored the unique stressors of military life: “Tell me about an experience where you felt a student’s actions might be associated with the unique stressors of military life overseas, such as deployments or frequent moves. What challenges did you face in addressing that situation?”

A final series of prompts focused on strategies for prioritizing social and emotional wellness. The prompts used were: “Tell me how you prioritize the development of social and emotional skills alongside the academic needs of MCS who experience trauma” and “Tell me about some of the social and emotional learning (SEL) strategies or programs that have been most effective in supporting MCS overseas who might be dealing with the effects of trauma (and any challenges you may have in implementing these strategies or programs)?”

### ***Social Responses***

Relocation and separation experiences are aspects of the military lifestyle that can pose challenges for some MCS, particularly during overseas transitions. For students who lack the necessary coping mechanisms, these experiences can result in trauma. Given that

MCS spend a significant portion of their day in school, trauma-related experiences may manifest as challenging social responses in the classroom. Social responses are external displays of how MCS interact with others and the world around them. In conjunction with trauma-related experiences, MCS displaying challenging social responses can cause learning disruptions, make it difficult to foster a stable learning environment, and increase classroom management burdens on Grade K–5 teachers. Challenging social responses significantly demand that teachers be responsive, often without the necessary professional preparedness or institutional support to assist struggling MCS overseas.

Participant 3 shared how one student's social response was to avoid the classroom and go to the nurse's office because of an upcoming PCS. Participant 3 stated:

I have a similar student that asks to go to the nurse a lot. And there's nothing wrong and it's hard because you don't know what to say or do. But they're constantly asking to go to the nurse, and then, even though I might say, "Oh, your parents will be here shortly." Schools out by the time they get here. School will be over. So, I can't send you to the nurse. But then, even in the morning, I'm like, okay, you can't go to the nurse. But then they'll go during recess, and then they'll go during lunch, and then the nurse kind of does a lot of things with him like a counseling type thing. It is a very interesting environment to teach. And I think that the reason why I find my class so interesting is the fact that because of the constant change in movement and just the impact of military life on young students.

Participant 3 attempted various interventions to support the student's avoidance behaviors attributed to an upcoming PCS. This scenario highlighted a significant professional dilemma for educators: how to balance providing access to support services, such as a school nurse or counselor, with the need to prevent students from using these visits to avoid the classroom. The difficulty of making such a determination compounds with the primary educational objective of ensuring that all students are present while at school and appropriately engaged to learn.

Participant 4 shared:

So, most recently I had a little girl in my classroom that she is very attached to her parents. You know, great parents, very loving parents. And her mother recently entered officer school, and the father is active duty. And then the mother had to go off to officer school for 7 weeks. I think 6 weeks and then stay another extra week. And so, we talked about what this would look like. The parents gave me a heads up, which was very good.

Participant 4 elaborated on the types of support provided to a MCS overseas, dealing with the separation from their military serving parent. Participant 4 mentioned:

As issues came up or as she was feeling clingy or just needing extra hugs or whatever she would need, we could definitely give that to her in the classroom. We were able to have some special time for her in the cozy corner, that she could go over there. We let her bring in special stuffed animals that she could have with her. During the day, we wrote cards and notes to her mother. We sent pictures to her mother directly from school whenever she wanted to.

Participant 4 added, “We would try to talk about how she wasn’t the only one, that there were other parents that were gone. And all the kids were able to say, ‘Yeah, you know my dad’s on the ship or my mom’s on the ship, and they’re not here right now, or they’re on a long trip,’ or something like that.” Participant 7 agreed and shared how MCS often relate to one another when provided class time opportunities to speak about their experiences. Participant 7 shared, “Another thing that makes military kids different, but kind of unique, is that they all kind of get each other’s experience. So, a lot of them understand about training, about field exercise, about being away from a parent, about being away from their family, about traveling.” However, even with creating a classroom space where MCS can share their experiences and relate to one another, teachers still face challenges in supporting MCS who are struggling socially. Participant 4 continued, “But there’s so few times in the school day where you can just kind of have those one-on-one conversations. I think it would have been nice for her to have somebody...and really talk to and connect with someone besides the teachers or the classmates.”

For some participants, the challenging social responses they witnessed from MCS resulted from isolation. This isolation often stemmed from separation from extended family, the geographical remoteness of their new location, or the lack of on-post housing that dispersed the military community. Participant 7 mentioned, “I think that’s the number one stressor, that [families] here are isolated because there’s no on-post housing. You could live 30 minutes in any direction from the post. So, you have to rely on the community next to you, where there’s like one little grocery store, one cafe, one pizzeria, one gelato shop.” In many cases, when military communities are isolated, resources and

support become limited. Participant 10 elaborated, “It was difficult because we were in a geographically remote location. At this location, there was not a Family Advocacy Program. There was no child protective services. There was a cultural barrier as well.” Given the varied dynamics across different military locations, teachers often had to support MCS overseas creatively.

Participant 9 realized that students were separated from one another because of the spread-out housing dynamic at the military location overseas, as on-base housing was not available for military families. Participant 9 recognized that students were socially isolated and sponsored a student council group to host events for MCS to connect with one another.

Participant 9 shared:

I was the student council sponsor at one school, and the kids wanted to have dances. They wanted to have movie nights. They wanted to have popcorn parties. They wanted to do a lot of social things. I think one of the big reasons for that was because they didn’t live on a base, because at this particular school, they couldn’t live on base. They lived in town, so they were living in multiple areas all over the island. And so, a lot of the kids felt very isolated.

Although Participant 9 experienced some success hosting social events to bring and connect MCS overseas, many students struggled at these events, especially the dances. Participant 9 revealed:

Then I realized it was because their elementary kids they don’t know how to dance. They didn’t know how to function. I was like, all right, well, let’s plan

[another dance] for the next two months, like test one. And so, all right, we know some kids are gonna come that have no idea how to dance. How can I help with that? All right, well, since I was the music teacher, I was like, we're going to learn things like the Cha-Cha Slide. We're going to learn the Y.M.C.A. We're going to learn the Macarena. We're going to learn the Electric Slide. I incorporated that into my curriculum to teach them, because it was great. It taught them choreography, it taught them direction, it taught them being on the beats, it taught them being in the right tempo. I mean, there was a lot of things that I could apply to the standards at the time. But I made sure that all our kids knew how to do some of those basic group dances. Learn things, like the Hokey Pokey, because that had really fallen out of fashion at the time. But some of those group participants participatory dancing, so when they came to the dance, they knew how to do it.

Participant 9 observed that MCS, particularly those in Grades K–5, required substantial support, guidance, and opportunities to develop positive social skills. Meeting these needs often necessitated innovative strategies from Grade K–5 teachers to assist struggling MCS overseas in their social development. However, Grade K–5 teachers overseas may not always have the time, support, or resources to implement this type of intervention.

Grade K–5 teachers overseas employed a variety of strategies and interventions to support MCS exhibiting challenging social responses to traumatic experiences like relocation and separation. These methods include redirection, reflection, establishing a

nurturing learning environment, fostering open conversations, and creating innovative opportunities for social engagement. However, many participants indicated that to be more effective in these roles, they required additional school-level support and resources to address the effects of trauma-related experiences of MCS overseas.

### *Emotional Responses*

Emotional responses are related to the internal feelings of MCS and their capacity to understand, regulate, and manage them. While many people experienced emotional reactions to moving or being away from loved ones, relocation and separation are recurring events in the military environment that significantly affected both those who are relocating or leaving for a time and those left behind. Grade K–5 teachers must be particularly perceptive to shifts in the behavior of MCS to understand the negative displays of emotional responses. Much like challenging social responses, challenging emotional responses can have similar effects on the classroom environment, including disruptions of learning for all students, making it difficult to foster a stable learning environment, and increasing classroom management burdens on teachers. Challenging emotional responses from MCS ultimately required teachers to respond to the needs of MCS overseas, regardless of their professional preparedness or institutional support.

Participants shared a range of emotional responses from struggling MCS overseas, from withdrawing to inappropriate outbursts due to trauma-related events connected to the military lifestyle. However, a recurring observation from most participants was that the behavior of MCS shifted quickly and uncharacteristically from the students' previous way of being. Participant 2 discussed a student who was sad

because their dad went away for military training and shared, “This student was normally very outgoing, very vibrant, very outspoken, laughing all the time, and so I noticed a change in their demeanor.” Participant 2 added, “I asked her what was wrong. And she was sad about her dad not being at home with her family,” and “I just explained to her that you know sometimes adults have to go off and work and do things for their family.” Participant 2 opened the lines of communication with the struggling student to learn more about the shifts in behavior to support this student better.

At some military locations overseas, units deploy quickly. Participant 1 shared how some MCS in an overseas community responded to an unexpected and quick deployment of their military serving family members. Participant 1 stated:

Some of the kids were exhibiting, obviously, sadness. Some of the students were exhibiting anxiousness, some of the students were internalizing, and I saw some withdrawal behavior versus externalizing and showing crying or nervousness or anxiousness. That experience was difficult for those kiddos. While it was short-term, the military families weren’t gone that long, it still had a great impact on those students.

Participant 2 also shared about a MCS overseas who struggled as their PCS date approached. Participant 2 mentioned:

...the closer we got to his PCS date, the more outbursts this particular child had. Outbursts include getting angry at his peers for illegitimate reasons. His outbursts include throwing things in the classroom. His outbursts include disrupting class

instruction. If I was working whole group, if he disagreed with something, then he would shout out and he would get upset.

Participant 2 also shared how the coping skills they worked on with this student and the class stopped working the closer it got to the moving date, and the challenges they faced in supporting this student. Participant 2 elaborated:

Some coping strategies that we already had in place for him previously, they were working, but then they stopped working the closer we got to that PCS date because of the stressor of having him leave what he knows...a safe, comfortable environment for him, to transition to an unknown environment...it was a challenge because even with the tools and strategies that I was offering the child; we were still having an increase of outbursts and dysregulation.

Participant 4 expressed how young MCS may struggle with their emotions as they may not know how these strong emotions manifest in their behavior and responses. Because of their age and experience, they need to develop the coping skills to be resilient. Participant 4 shared about a student who struggled with their emotions that manifested in physical responses. Participant 4 mentioned, “We could give her hugs, and every once in a while, she’d be like, ‘Oh, my stomach hurts.’ Like that was her kind of go-to, that her stomach was hurting. But it wasn’t that she was sick. It was that she was having some big feelings....” Participant 4 further shared:

I’ve taught younger students, and even though someone might think, “Oh, they won’t be affected by having being moved. They’ll be resilient having a parent on deployment.” It’s not true, because I’ve seen them be very agitated and emotional,

and act out to where they are destroying school property, trying to hurt themselves, having tantrums, having big feelings, emotions.

Many Participants agreed and shared examples of how some students would respond to the emotional upheaval that MCS were navigating due to trauma-related experiences.

Participant 6 stated:

I would say, signs are behavior that would be abnormal for a child their age. Signs like running out of the classroom, to me, that shows that that child is in distress. I've seen students be aggressive toward peers, hitting, name calling, and unnecessary aggression, maybe during a free time, like recess and lunch.

Participant 9 shared the emotional responses of MCS to deployments. Participant 9 added:

Just withdrawn. Maybe not wanting to do the activities in class that they always love doing. Let's say their favorite thing was dancing to our morning meeting song. Now, all of a sudden, they don't want to do the dance. I did have a student ask or begin to start asking if they could stay inside and read during recess time. And that's a huge flag, right? Because all kids love to go outside for recess. Sometimes there was behavior things maybe they would start to act out a little more where we would have to do corrective actions in class a little more. But I would say the biggest thing is just the withdrawal a little bit or more. That's the main thing I would see.

Participant 8 shared an emotional response regarding a MCS overseas struggling with their mom deploying. Participant 8 stated:

Every single time her mom has a shift in schedule, it shows on her demeanor. It's almost like her light gets a little bit dimmer. She comes in, she doesn't want to do very much. She doesn't want to socialize. She has a hard time expressing her feelings. I'm not sure if it's because at home she's not encouraged to talk about how she feels. But it's like she can't put the words to it. So, she just cries or shuts down. So, it can be very challenging.

Despite using various strategies to assist MCS overseas, such as opening lines of communication, providing coping skills, and providing extra love and support to struggling students, participants consistently reported that the emotional responses of MCS present unique challenges. These unique challenges are due to the unpredictable and rapid shifts in the behavior of MCS, which are often uncharacteristic of the previous behavior. These dynamic circumstances, usually stemming from trauma related to rapid deployments or imminent PCS dates, can overwhelm students to the point that previously functional coping skills may no longer work. Ultimately, this places a significant demand on teachers to be responsive and adaptable in an environment where they may lack effective strategies, tools, and resources to support struggling MCS overseas.

### **Theme 3: Challenges Supporting Teachers with Trauma-Related Professional Supports**

Participants shared similar ideas regarding the need for intentional professional learning and support opportunities, particularly concerning the trauma-related

experiences of MCS. All participants reported not receiving formal training on the unique characteristics and the potential effects of military life on MCS, especially overseas. Most of the participants also indicated a lack of specific tools, resources, and strategies to support MCS struggling with the effects of relocation and separation. The findings revealed that participants' experiences, long-term interactions with MCS, and the proactive pursuit of professional learning opportunities have collectively expanded their capacity to assist MCS. This theme identified the need for intentional and effective professional learning, resources, and staff. The categories of this theme, focused on professional supports, were (a) professional learning; (b) support resources; and (c) support staff.

The goal of the intentionally designed interview protocol was to elicit responses from participants about the types, quantity, and ideas for professional supports needed to assist MCS overseas, dealing with the effects of trauma-related experiences. The initial prompt asked participants to "Tell me about any training or prior experiences that have prepared you for dealing with MCS overseas who might be experiencing trauma." The second prompt asked participants, "What training or professional learning would best equip you to effectively support MCS overseas who experience trauma?" The third prompt asked participants, "What additional resources or training do you believe would be most beneficial in enhancing your ability to prioritize and support with social and emotional skill development of military-connected children overseas who experience trauma?" I also asked two follow-up prompts, "What format of training would be most helpful to you? (e.g., in-person trainings, mentorship, virtual professional development

sessions, etc.) and “How often would you need updated, current, and relevant training to support MCS who experience trauma?”

### ***Professional Learning***

Participants provided similar responses to the initial prompt, “Tell me about any training or prior experiences that have prepared you for dealing with MCS overseas who might be experiencing trauma.” The findings revealed that all participants lacked formal professional development on the unique challenges of MCS. Participant 1 shared, “In regard to training, I have never received formalized training on SEL or relating to supporting students who have experienced trauma.” Participant 8 agreed, “There is no training for any of the teachers, as it relates to trauma.” Participant 2 mentioned, “I didn’t have any training.... Recently, they have implemented some social-emotional learning standards that align with the curriculum...that just got instituted, implemented, I think, this year, maybe last year.... But, prior to that, I didn’t receive any training.” Participant 5 shared, “To be honest with you, I don’t feel like I’ve had that type of training...not targeted specifically for military-connected children.”

Many participants discussed how they relied on their experience to support struggling MCS. Participant 8 mentioned, “Unfortunately, [there is] not a lot of training, but a lot of life experience and learning on the fly.”

Participant 10 elaborated:

My children were military-connected children. So, coming from that perspective, I know what worked for my students when they were going through maybe separation from one of their parents, being deployed. Or even when 9/11

happened, my daughter was in school. So, coming from that perspective, I know just having basic compassion from the people in the school does way more than maybe most people realize.

Participant 1 agreed, “On my own time, I have gone and done research and have employed the tools and strategies that I use within my classroom.” Participant 8 stated, “If you want training in [the organization], what I have found in the last 12 years, 13 years, is you have to go get it on your own. So, the things that I know, or the things that I do, are based on personal experiences as a child, as a wife, as a mom, and as a teacher. It is a little overwhelming sometimes, because you don’t always know how to handle every situation.” Participant 4 added, “So almost all of my training or studying has been self-promoted. It’s just been because of what I have observed in the classroom. And what I’ve noticed really works and helps these kids. And so, it’s just been my own study or what I’ve been interested in.” Participant 9 shared, “There wasn’t any professional development. A lot of it was just stuff on my own that I would be like, oh, let me do some research here and see how can I handle...help kids with certain issues that they were going through.”

The participants answered the prompt, “What training or professional learning would best equip you to effectively support MCS overseas who experience trauma?” by unanimously recognizing the critical need for specific training to support traumatized students. All participants had something to share regarding the training or professional learning they needed. Participant 10 shared, “I think maybe just starting from scratch with how maybe social and emotional wellness for military-connected students might be

different than non-military-connected students back in the States. I think that might be good for educators, or me at least, to see the contrast. If you see the contrast, maybe you would pick up on the subtleties with the students quicker.”

Participant 9 elaborated:

A lot of it was just on the job.... But there was very, very little that was provided to help kids. And I think that is a problem in our organization.... [The problem] is that there is no set structure. ...Every school that I've been to overseas...it's like you're almost starting off from scratch when [new] people come in. It's like you have to relearn things. Of course, every area is different in their needs for what trauma happened, for what kids experienced. But at the same [time], there was no set system in place.... But again, none of the professional development training that I've ever sat in specifically dealt with kids, military-connected kids, and their unique challenges, and how to help them be successful. It was more aligned on the education, the academic side, but not on their social and emotional well-being. That's still, I think, a relatively new term within my organization that hasn't been really explored, especially overseas.

Participant 2 suggested:

I would like to have someone who has experience, is an expert, has worked with military-connected families. I would not appreciate any training from outside of military connected students because I don't think it's applicable because, as you said, it's a very unique situation. So, I would like for someone who has worked with military connected students as an expert and has experience going through

this and has effectively and successfully been able to help these students. And to pass that information on to other teachers.

Participant 4 emphasized:

As I've said there has been a little bit in training like where they would touch on the growth mindset or most recently, the learning pit and what they called SEL. But not that much, and I think it's kind of interesting, because you know, it's even been published or put into writing, saying, "Yeah, our teachers are used to working with military-connected kids" which we are but even saying that we've been trained to work with military-connected kids, and with the different or the special needs that they might have. And I don't think that that's true. I think that we could have a lot of training on the trauma of deployment, the trauma of moving, of starting up someplace different every 2 to 3 years. And I think that there could be a lot more training given there, even if they had optional training like book clubs or professional development credit training. I think that that would really be helpful. But there just isn't anything like that.

Participant 5 stated, "I think...trauma-informed teaching practices so that I know, for example, how to identify those signs when I see them. I think I need more training and just de-escalation strategies. Like when a child is up here [emotionally heightened], how to help them to regulate their emotions."

8 out of 10 participants shared that in-person professional learning opportunities would be best in supporting them with their MCS overseas who have experienced trauma. Many also shared how a blend of professional learning formats could benefit ongoing

professional learning throughout the school year. Participant 7 shared, “I think people coming into other people’s classroom and being able to see through peer coaching or through just being able to observe what SEL could look like, not that you have to do it that way.” Participant 1 added, “So, we use the framework, or rather, the CASEL framework, so it’s helpful. But we haven’t had any training on the CASEL framework, so that would be beneficial while we are rolling out this framework to have some professional learning opportunities surrounding what that looks like within the classroom.”

Participant 4 elaborated:

I think all of it. I mean, if it’s in-person training, I think that it would be helpful if it was age specific. Because I think that trauma and talking about trauma and how it’s portrayed, or how it’s like exhibited in a younger child versus an older child is different. And then also, just how you’re able to really understand what they’re going through is different. Like about the difference between talk therapy versus play therapy and things like that. But then coaching would be great also virtual professional development...book clubs, discussions like more discussions even just as a faculty about what is going on like instead of talking about scores and data and stuff like that. You know, we could talk about different ways to build resiliency and flexibility in kids but just having good professional development from people that have been in a similar situation.

Participant 6 shared how school climate could dictate the professional learning offered:

That varies so much on the composition of the staff and the attitudes of the administrators. I've been in some schools in [the organization] that the staff was very cohesive, and you enjoy training together as a whole group. So, in person training would be great.... If you don't have that positive school setting, then a Zoom meeting or virtual training would be better. So, I think virtual training would be better.

However, Participant 9 disagreed, stating, "I think trying to get away from virtual or any asynchronous training. It's just not going to be effective."

Participant 9 shared ideas for how in-person ongoing professional learning could look:

Definitely, mentorship and coaching, to have that ongoing. Because teachers are overwhelmed with so many things that they have to do. So, to have dedicated people and be like, "Hey, this is a focus for the year." It's not going to be a one-and-done. It's ongoing. How did you reflect on it? What went well? What didn't go well? What challenges do you still face? And be able to talk about it with your peers, whether it's content-specific or grade-level. It doesn't really matter. But just an opportunity to say, these are some of the differences that I have. [It would be good to] hear about it from other people, their challenges, and to be able to give feedback. To have someone dedicated to say, "Hey, you know, point that out!" Because I think that is a big issue with teachers. They're asked to implement all of these initiatives. But then they're not given feedback. No one's coming in

the classroom and saying, “Hey, I really enjoyed this.” Or “Hey, you did a really outstanding job, and this is why it was outstanding in supporting your students.”

Participants shared various ideas for how often professional learning should be available. Participants 2 and 8 shared how quarterly professional learning is ideal to build teacher capacity around supporting MCS overseas, experiencing trauma. Participant 6 stated, “Twice a quarter. Twice a quarter, if you have the resources and materials, twice a quarter. Even if it’s just let’s role play, let’s get some feedback. How is it working for you? Let me give you some more suggestions.” Participant 10 shared, “I think there should be one very detailed initial training, and then just a refresher. The refreshers could be virtual or online, self-paced. So, initially, a thorough one. Then, maybe yearly, after that, just a refresher.” Participant 3 mentioned, “I think it should be part of our professional development that we meet once a week in a committee, and we have a committee.”

### ***Support Resources***

Participants shared their perspectives on the available resources with the prompt that asked, “What additional resources or training do you believe would be most beneficial in enhancing your ability to prioritize and support with social and emotional skill development of military-connected children overseas who experience trauma?” Many participants shared that their resources are lacking or very limited.

Participant 6 elaborated:

We don’t have any resources at this time. At our school there is nothing. So, we need to start with some resources. There are so many programs that have been

created that [the organization] can purchase, that will give each teacher a kit to facilitate social emotional learning. It is discussed briefly, in some of our training sessions. However, it is very abstract, and it is kind of glanced over. At this point it's basically said, "whenever you have time". Of course there's no time being built into the schedule. So, when would you have time? Right? So there needs to be training, and there needs to be something bought and put in every classroom that the teacher can hold, and the teacher can explain to the kids, and the teacher can visually show how to encourage social emotional learning.

Participant 4 added, "Some of the difficulties that I've had, and it's happened from year to year, and I try to be as vocal as I can about it. But then, at the same time, I realize that resources are stretched thin. [These stretched resources include] getting counseling support, the MFLC support, and [some] kind of therapy and the talking about support with them.

Some participants shared the limitations in accessing the resources they need to support struggling MCS. Participant 2 shared, "The challenge is that you don't really know who to contact or where to go or where even to request support."

Participant 1 agreed:

I think it's really important that we know what's available. Because there's a lot, there are a lot of different resources available through the military, and we aren't aware as teachers, we're not notified that these resources are available in order to support the students. So, I think making sure that all teachers are aware of the

resources within the military community that could help students who face trauma.

Participant 5 disagreed:

But where I work, I feel like we do a good job of supporting [struggling MCS] because we do have all these resources that we can use including counselors.

Something that in the States, again, I worked in a big school and there was one counselor for everybody. But here we have two school counselors, and we have three MFLC (Military and Family Life Counselors) which are specifically for military families. So definitely having those resources is crucial for them, for these [MCS].

Participant 1 added their positive experience with the resources available and in spite of having formal training with support MCS who experience trauma. Participant 1 shared, “I utilize the resources we have available. So, both the military resources, the MFLCs, the psychs, and the counselors. I utilize their knowledge and expertise to help make instructional decisions surrounding social-emotional learning. But I haven’t had formalized training.”

All participants had ideas on the resources they would like to support better MCS who experience trauma better. Participant 2 shared:

I think they’re on the right track with the standards that [the organization has] implemented. I wish that [the standards] would be more integrated into the daily curriculum. Right now, it feels like [the standards are] an aside. It feels like the curriculum is in the middle, and then the SEL [is] next to it. And in a perfect

world, for me, they would be intertwined all day and not myself trying to say, oh, let me see where I can fit this into the curriculum. So, in a perfect world, I would like 1) for them to rewrite the curriculum; and 2) to have it more integrated...social-emotional learning integrated into the actual curriculum.

Participant 2 added, “I think professional learning opportunities for teachers [should be] based on research strategies. Professional learning opportunities around the CASEL framework that support SEL. I think, again, making sure that teachers are aware of the resources and how to utilize the resources appropriately and effectively for the diverse population that we support.”

Several dynamics affected the resources available from school to school to support struggling MCS. Participant 8 confirmed, “...the lack of resources educationally differs from location to location.” The base’s location is an important dynamic. Since these schools support MCS worldwide, resources are different based on location and whether the area is remote. Schools in remote locations often struggled with access to resources. Participant 10 shared, “...if you’re in one of those geographically remote places, you’re sharing resources with another school that’s three or four hours away. Or there’s a cultural barrier there that you can’t do what you would normally do to get the resources you need right away.”

Some schools have access to more resources that are readily accessible to them.

Participant 8 elaborated:

...the resources that I have are my colleagues. Everybody brings something different to the professional table. So, when you have a situation, you don’t

know...go to your colleagues, such as the EI teacher, the counselors. Because EDIS (Educational Development Intervention Services) is located in our school building, I oftentimes just go over there because they're part of the hospital, but they're housed in our building. So, I'll go over and talk to the school psychologist, and I'll say, "Hey, I have a student who's exhibiting these behaviors. What are some things that I can research, or what are some strategies that I can put into place? We'll have those open conversations.

However, Participant 1 stressed. "[As an organization, we need to make] sure that teachers are aware of the resources and how to utilize the resources appropriately and effectively for the diverse population that we support."

Most participants mentioned and recognized that communication is one of the most critical resources they needed. Communication is necessary between students, teachers, and families to better support the well-being of MCS experiencing trauma.

Participant 8 explained:

So, I think as long as teachers are working together with parents, with the teachers, and with the students, that triangulation relationship, it just gets so strong. So, I just kind of focus on making sure that we're all communicating. And we have access to the same things. We're using [a] common language. And if somebody has a problem or a question, we address it. We don't just let it fester.

Participant 8 further added:

...it would take a triangulation of communication and partnership between parents, teacher, student, and then, even, if possible, adding in the school-aged care

facility to ensure that we're all using similar language. That we're all having similar expectations. That we're, ultimately, making sure that the kid is safe and being able to express themselves in a safe and healthy manner.

Participant 3 shared:

To have an actual conversation about what that is, by having professionals come in and tell us. This is just something that I'm noticing as a teacher, and that we talk about. Like we just run to each other during our planning periods and say, "Oh, wow! This is intense." So, but it's never a conversation. You have to focus right back on the test scores, the writing, the school action plan, the district action plan which understandably is related to test scores and test things. So, instruction, actual training by a professional who understands military-connected students and the traumas and exactly a program how social, emotional learning can, you know, some training, real training and conversation.

Participant 9 mentioned, "I think part of what would be helpful is how to plan for [the] emerging needs of our students. Whether it is having time for them to share their perspectives or [for] them to talk...whether it's an after-school club where they can meet, or at lunch where they can talk about that." Participant 4 stated, "Well, I think, for sure, more training and just more discussion." Participant 6 shared, "We got to talk about things. We got to act out different scenarios."

### ***Support Staff***

Several different support staff were available at schools serving MCS overseas. Most schools or school complexes had at least one counselor, school psychologist, and

nurse. All participants mentioned their experience or familiarity with the Military and Family Life Counselor (MFLC) at some point during the interview process. Participants' experiences with support staff assistance ranged from very helpful and accessible to severely limited due to being in small or remote locations overseas. Participant 10 mentioned:

Going back to that geographically remote location. When your resources are very hard to get to, that's a challenge because I'm not trained to do a lot of the things that an on-site school counselor can do, or an on-site MFLC could do, or an on-site even a chaplain. In one of these places, our school psychologist was at another remote school. That was a 3, 3-and-a-half-hour drive away. So, if there's an emergency or something that needed immediate need, we, as the staff that don't have training, are sitting there trying to help this child that needs immediate help. We don't have time to wait for this qualified person, for lack of better terms, to get there. That was a huge challenge, even getting resources such as maybe a book to help them read through their feelings. Just small things like that seem kind of...when you're at a normal location that seems readily available, and you wouldn't even think twice about it. When you're at these remote locations, little things like that add up. And you realize, unfortunately, you usually realize at the wrong time, which is when you need it, that you don't have it. That was one of the biggest, I think. Challenges.

Schools that are not as remote or serve larger populations of military personnel and their families may have access to the Educational Development Intervention Services

(EDIS). EDIS typically has additional support staff, like occupational, physical, and speech and language therapists, to provide families with early interventions and special education services. However, these EDIS support staff are not at every location overseas.

Participant 8 discussed:

If you, for example, are working in a school that is considered level two. You may not have access to the school psychologist. You may not have access to the SPED assessors or the SLP assessors. I'm working in a level three school. So, we do have access to the EDIS that has the psychologist, the speech assessors. We have all of those things.

Most participants agreed that support staff were integral in helping them support struggling MCS overseas. Support staff were heavily relied on by all participants and utilized if available or accessible. The concerns participants expressed regarding support staff were the consistency of support and the level of expertise. Participant 3 discussed the lack of collaboration from their school's MFLC, stating that they did not understand the MFLC's role, purpose in the schools, or the rationale behind the strategies and protocols used with MCS. According to Participant 3, the MFLC's role was not addressed at the school level, nor was the best way to use, incorporate, or maximize the MFLC's skills in the classroom setting.

Participant 3 elaborated:

I would like a trained professional that's in the building...someone like an MFLC. But...we actually discussed [the students], and we did lessons together, and [discuss] actual lessons to do [with students as] the teacher. Like right now, the

MFLC person comes in once a month for an hour, and they do lessons and things with the kids. But I don't talk or do anything, and then they leave, and that's what [the students] get. And then [the MFLC will] have lunch [with MCS]. So, [the MFLCs] do have a program. But it's not, they don't refer to it as social-emotional learning. Nor do they refer to it as anything [or discuss] the reason why she's there is because of [the students] being military-connected. So, I would like for [there] to be more [of] a professional in the building [who also works with and is able to discuss with teachers what they are doing, why they are doing it, and how the teacher can better support struggling MCS...because I think it's getting pretty intense [with struggling MCS].

Participant 4's experience with support staff included not receiving services for struggling MCS because of the location of their classroom. Because the participant's classroom was located at the far end of the school campus, many support staff were reluctant to walk to their classroom to support struggling MCS. Participant 4 shared, "My classroom is located in a place that is kind of further away from the rest of the school, and so people complain about the, and by people, I mean like counselors or other people in the school, complain about making the trip up to where my classroom is." Participant 4 also discussed how different MFLCs, whose assignment to a particular school may last for only one school year, may not have the same level of expertise.

Participant 4 mentioned:

And then we started getting MFLC in, but some of them are better than others.

Also, some of the MFLCs are not as equipped with dealing with younger kids.

They don't quite know how to connect with the younger kids. And so, then that is difficult, because they will come into the classroom, and they just don't even know how to talk or act with these younger kids.

Participant 6 disagreed:

I believe that the MFLC program, the Military Family Life Counselors, is a great addition to our schools. We've had some very knowledgeable counselors come to our school who are really concerned with connecting with the students, and I believe those counselors have made a great impact. I invite those counselors into my classroom, and I give them time to teach lessons. I think it's important.

The discussion of this topic provided valuable insights from participants. Findings revealed that professional learning supports are not considered a luxury but are essential for teachers to effectively support MCS overseas, navigating the military lifestyle. This theme also revealed that teachers want professional support with strategies that are readily implementable to address the social, emotional, and academic effects of trauma on MCS. Participants reported a lack of formal training on the unique characteristics of MCS and the potential effects of trauma. K-5 teachers specifically expressed a need for trauma-informed training tailored to MCS, including learning about MCS through real-world scenarios and role-playing, clear communication protocols, and support staff that are consistent and accessible.

### **Discussion of the Findings**

This section presents the following themes, drawing connections between the study's data and existing literature: (a) teachers overseas acknowledge the distinct

characteristics of MCS overseas, yet they encounter challenges in supporting the trauma-related experiences these students endure; (b) teachers overseas face challenges in supporting and guiding MCS overseas who display social and emotional trauma-related responses, especially during transitional periods; and (c) teachers overseas who work with MCS overseas describe specific professional supports needed to serve their students better.

### ***Theme 1***

The first theme revealed that teachers overseas acknowledge the distinct characteristics of MCS overseas, yet encounter challenges in effectively supporting the trauma-related experiences these students endure. Participants believed that MCS overseas bring a richness to the classroom, as many of these students are well-traveled, possessing life experiences that have contributed to their resilience and unique understanding of the world. However, Nicholson et al. (2025) stated that because MCS often mirror the structure and discipline associated with the military lifestyle, they have become an invisible minority in education. Participants acknowledged that relocation and separation, significant aspects of the military lifestyle, can affect many MCS overseas at varying levels as they navigate constant change. Participants also acknowledged that these relocation and separation events ultimately affect MCS overseas while at school. Although acknowledged, a deeper understanding of the effects of military life and consistent support by school staff and leaders is necessary to efficiently and intentionally support the needs of MCS at school (Nicholson et al., 2025), especially considering the potential for trauma. Participants understood that having a more profound understanding

was needed to support their struggling MCS overseas. However, due to the unique nature of the military lifestyle, some MCS overseas needed a strong support network to cope, experience resilience, and thrive (Hill & Blue-Banning, 2023). All participants, with different skills, training, and experience levels, implemented strategies to support struggling MCS to the best of their ability. Nicholson et al. (2025) shared that it is common for homegrown efforts to support struggling MCS as practical and research-based practices and programs are often slow or sporadic for teachers to access, utilize, and implement in their classrooms.

### *Theme 2*

This second theme revealed that teachers overseas face challenges in supporting and guiding MCS overseas who display social and emotional trauma-related responses, especially during transitional periods. Nicholson et al. (2025) showed that focusing on students' social and emotional responses is vital as the first signs of distress in MCS are often displayed socially and emotionally, rather than academically. According to Nicholson et al. (2025), these social and emotional displays ultimately affect academics by causing disruptions in learning. Participants observed that challenging social and emotional responses to trauma-related experiences in MCS are indicative of their difficulty coping with aspects of the military lifestyle, particularly relocation and separation. Opie et al. (2024) stated that MCS have a higher tendency to display behavioral and psychosocial concerns compared to children in civilian families. These displays or adverse outcomes can persist throughout childhood (Opie et al., 2024). Because MCS are already dealing with stressors persistent with the military lifestyle, the

direct or indirect effects on their mental health are exacerbated and can impede their overall development (Martin et al., 2025). Through sustained engagement, experiential knowledge, and sensitivity to this demographic, participants have learned to identify specific behavioral indicators of distress in MCS overseas, such as sudden changes in conduct, social isolation, and withdrawal. However, participants acknowledged that navigating MCS' challenging social and emotional responses poses difficulties for them due to insufficient tools, strategies, resources, and supports.

Research literature confirmed that schools often lack the foundational structures, systematic processes, and capacity to provide effective and efficient supports for the needs of MCS (Nicholson et al., 2025). Participants discussed strategies they incorporated to support challenging social and emotional responses from MCS overseas, including morning meetings and implementing social and emotional practices. According to Nicholson et al. (2025), school personnel often found success in supporting struggling MCS by creating learning environments that were safe and welcoming, frequently utilizing grassroots efforts. However, Frederick and Siebler (2022) suggested a formalized and comprehensive approach to supporting struggling MCS through a Multitiered System of Support (MTSS). Frederick and Siebler (2022) defined MTSS as a “public health framework for service provision in schools that combines tiered levels of academic, behavioral, and mental health support.” Many participants mentioned the need for more structured and consistent support to care for MCS overseas, dealing with trauma-related experiences successfully.

### *Theme 3*

This third theme revealed that teachers overseas who work with MCS overseas described specific professional supports needed to serve their students better. Participants believed that consistent, systemic, and intentional professional learning, resources, and support staff were necessary to help MCS overseas, especially those dealing with the effects of trauma-related experiences. Nicholson et al.'s (2025) research stressed the need for the training and professional development of school personnel focused on the military life, its effects on MCS, and the potential struggles MCS may encounter as they navigate their constantly changing world. The authors also stressed the importance of communication and its role in making the transitions MCS experience more transparent, enabling a proactive approach (Nicholson et al., 2025) to support struggling MCS. Participants expressed the need for improved communication processes and protocols for teachers to communicate with students, parents or caregivers, and other school personnel.

Participants acknowledged the presence of support staff at their schools. However, depending on the school's location overseas and the support staff's motivation and abilities, there was a potential for inconsistent care. Hill and Blue-Banning's (2023) research indicated that the lack of continuity of care in education settings poses challenges in meeting the health needs of MCS. Participants mentioned the presence of a Military and Family Life Counselor (MFLC) at their school. The MFLC Department of Defense (DoD) program was created to equip schools with a short-term, school-based staff member to provide counseling services and support to MCS and their families to cope with the unique stressors of military life (Nicholson et al., 2025). According to

Nicholson et al. (2025), the MFLC program was the Department of Defense's response to the prevalent concerns and effects of military life on MCS and their families. However, Participants discussed that the MFLC's length at a school, accessibility, expertise, and willingness to collaborate with staff were often inconsistent from school to school, ultimately creating gaps of support for struggling teachers and MCS. These inconsistencies are not unique to MFLCs but potentially exist in other support staff, including school counselors, psychologists, etc. However, when support staff services were consistent, participants felt better prepared and supported knowing someone was available to partner and collaborate with them to support their struggling MCS overseas.

The conceptual framework for this study centers on three of the ten foundational principles or steps outlined in Soma and Allen's (2020) model: understand trauma as an experience, prioritize social and emotional skill development, and support and invest in school staff. Soma and Allen (2020) demonstrated that the ten foundational steps can provide schools supporting students experiencing trauma with a comprehensive model of care. Soma and Allen's (2020) model of care emphasizes the importance of understanding trauma, the need for social and emotional skills and development, and the vitalness of teacher supports and training. Overall, this conceptual framework, if tailored to MCS and military life, could provide a model for recognizing the uniqueness of MCS and their potential for trauma, responding to their social and emotional responses to trauma-related experiences, and addressing the need for consistent and intentional professional supports.

The three themes showed that Grade K–5 teachers believed in the unique perspectives MCS bring to the learning environment. Participants acknowledged aspects of the military lifestyle and how that lifestyle could pose coping and thriving challenges for MCS, often displayed at school. Participants agreed that these challenges of military life revolve around relocation, especially overseas, separation from their military serving parent due to deployments or training, and separation from extended family and loved ones due to relocation. Participants shared that they encountered challenges in supporting MCS when these students struggled with the certain aspects of military life, especially when the social and emotional responses from MCS were challenging or disruptive to the learning space. Participants expressed the need for consistent, institutional, and sustainable professional learning, resources, and support staff specifically focused on the MCC, military life, its effects on MCS, and practical strategies and tools for helping struggling MCS who may be experiencing trauma.

### **Conclusion**

I addressed the two research questions in this study by exploring Grade K–5 teacher perceptions of the challenges in supporting MCS overseas who experienced trauma. The research questions addressed teacher perceptions regarding the uniqueness of MCS and their trauma-related experiences due to the military lifestyle, challenges with complex social and emotional responses, and their experiences, needs, and ideas for professional supports to better help struggling MCS dealing with trauma-related experiences.

RQ 1: What are Grade K–5 teacher perceptions of the challenges they encounter in supporting military-connected children overseas who experience trauma?

Theme 1 revealed that teachers overseas acknowledged the distinct characteristics of MCS overseas, yet encountered challenges in effectively supporting the trauma-related experiences these students endured. Participants shared that they faced challenges supporting MCS overseas due to the military lifestyle. Participants described these challenges as not having the training, resources, or support staff needed to effectively meet the needs of struggling MCS, especially if they were dealing with trauma-related experiences.

Theme 2 revealed teachers overseas faced challenges in supporting and guiding MCS overseas who displayed social and emotional trauma-related responses, especially during transitional periods. Participants shared that they often struggled to help MCS overseas cope with trauma related to the effects of relocation and separation. Participants explained that struggling MCS overseas may lack the vocabulary to articulate their experiences, awareness to recognize their emotional state, or the necessary coping skills, which can make supporting them challenging.

RQ 2: What are Grade K–5 teacher perceptions of the supports, resources, and training needed to support military-connected children overseas who experience trauma?

Theme 3 revealed that teachers overseas who worked with MCS overseas described specific professional supports needed to serve their students better. Participants reported a deficit in professional learning opportunities, support staff, and resources,

recognizing a specific need for training on the signs of trauma in MCS. Participants described how this lack of support hindered their capacity to consistently and effectively address the unique challenges of MCS.

The findings indicated a need for a professional learning program to better equip Grade K–5 teachers overseas who support MCS experiencing trauma. I developed a professional learning opportunity specifically focused on the unique needs of MCS to address the challenges participants identified in supporting these students overseas. The professional development project provides real-world scenarios and strategies for identifying and responding to the unique aspects of the military lifestyle, such as relocation and separation. This project focuses on three key areas: understanding the effects of military life on MCS, recognizing the signs and symptoms of trauma, and providing immediate, implementable tools and strategies for trauma-related events. Section 3 will present a plan for professional learning for overseas K–5 teachers, based on the study’s findings.

### Section 3: The Project

#### **Introduction**

This project, a 3 day professional learning session, was developed to address the three themes identified in the study: (a) teachers overseas acknowledge the distinct characteristics of MCS overseas, yet encounter challenges in effectively supporting the trauma-related experiences these students endure; (b) teachers overseas face challenges in supporting and guiding MCS overseas who display social and emotional trauma-related responses, especially during transitional periods; and (c) teachers overseas who work with MCS overseas describe specific professional supports needed to serve their students better. The one-on-one interviews I conducted with teachers revealed the need for professional learning sessions that will focus on three key areas: understanding the effects of military life on MCS, recognizing the signs and symptoms of trauma, and providing immediate, implementable tools and strategies for trauma-related events that MCS experience.

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore Grade K–5 teacher perceptions of the challenges they experienced in supporting MCS overseas who experience trauma. This basic qualitative study aimed to understand how Grade K–5 teachers overseas perceived the effects of military life on MCS. It also explored the professional learning these teachers need to better support MCS overseas, especially MCS struggling with relocation and separation, which is a significant part of the military lifestyle. Through one-on-one interviews, I examined Grade K–5 teachers' understanding of trauma in MCS, their perceptions of social and emotional skills development, and the

professional supports they need to support their students successfully. Three themes emerged, revealing that teachers recognized the unique needs of MCS overseas and the challenges they face due to the lack of specialized training and support required to help struggling MCS as they navigate the military lifestyle in a holistic, healthy way.

In this section of the study, I reviewed the project I developed, a 3 day professional learning series for Grade K–5 teachers overseas designed to enhance their understanding of the effects of military life on MCS, improve their ability to recognize the signs and symptoms of trauma, and equip them with immediate, implementable tools for trauma-related events that MCS overseas experience. Teachers will explore the military lifestyle and its effects on MCS through real-world scenarios. Teachers will also investigate the signs and symptoms of trauma through role-playing and collaboratively develop and explore research-based strategies, tools, and resources. My goal for this project is to increase teachers' knowledge and awareness of the military lifestyle so that they can more effectively and efficiently support MCS overseas, especially those who may be experiencing trauma.

Section 3 outlines a description of the project plan, detailing the project's goals, content, rationale, resources, implementation, and potential barriers. I will conduct a second review of the literature to support this plan and deepen the understanding of the study's themes. The section concludes with a project evaluation plan and a discussion of the project's potential for social change and implications.

### **Project Description and Goals**

In this study, I explored Grade K–5 teacher perceptions of the challenges they experienced in supporting MCS overseas who experienced trauma. The interviews revealed that teachers struggled with supporting MCS overseas who were experiencing trauma because of the effects of the military lifestyle. Teachers described the need for a better understanding of the military lifestyle and its effects on MCS overseas, and consistent and comprehensive trauma-informed professional learning opportunities specifically designed with MCS in mind. The result is a 3 day professional learning project for teachers who want to better understand the military lifestyle and its effects on MCS overseas, along with strategies, tools, and resources to support them as they navigate supporting struggling MCS overseas. This project was based on the three themes revealed by the participants in this study: (a) teachers overseas acknowledge the distinct characteristics of MCS overseas, yet encounter challenges in effectively supporting the trauma-related experiences these students endure; (b) teachers overseas face challenges in supporting and guiding MCS overseas who display social and emotional trauma-related responses, especially during transitional periods; and (c) teachers overseas who work with MCS overseas describe specific professional supports needed to serve their students better.

This professional learning project aims to enhance teachers' overseas understanding of MCS trauma experiences while providing and exploring strategies, tools, and resources necessary to support MCS as they navigate the consequences of the military lifestyle. The 3 day professional learning series includes three daily learning

sessions, which embed research-based trauma-informed and adult learning practices to encourage teacher transformational growth and learning. The 3 day professional learning sessions include a slide deck presentation, real-world scenarios and role playing, inspiring video and audio clips of MCS sharing their experiences, and hands-on and cooperative learning opportunities. Before this professional learning project is initiated, I will provide teachers with a basic agenda for the 3 day event, a materials list, and the seating arrangement for the first part of the day. This 3 day professional learning series will occur on three consecutive days at the beginning of the school year, before students arrive.

### **Day 1**

At the start of Day 1, teachers will be welcomed to the professional learning session as they register and receive their learning materials. Teachers will then head to their seats to prepare for the welcome activity before the launch of the first learning session. The welcome activity will be a reflective activity that leverages adult learners' experience. The activity starts with teachers writing one word they associate with MCS and a question they hope to answer, written on individual sticky notes. After the teachers write down one word and a question of hope, they place their sticky notes on designated chart paper. This activity will set a collective and collaborative tone of vulnerability in an anonymous and non-threatening way.

The Day 1, Session 1 activity will center on the lived experiences of MCS. The purpose of this activity is to help teachers build a shared understanding of the unique characteristics and potential stressors of MCS overseas. The activity aims to push

teachers beyond a surface-level understanding of MCS. This activity will use a small group scenario-based learning approach. The small groups will encourage peer-to-peer learning. The intentionally designed scenarios allow teachers to reflect on the unique stressors of MCS, such as relocation and separation, directly connecting with the themes revealed in the study. For this activity, the materials needed are the scenarios and chart paper for collaborative work. 4-5 teachers will engage in this small-group activity to allow each teacher to share their voice and encourage meaningful discussions. The expected outcome of this activity is for the teacher to develop empathy and a deeper understanding of how military life, especially overseas, can create a challenging environment for MCS.

The Day 1 Session 2 activity will help teachers make connections between the military lifestyle, challenges, and the potential trauma that it can have on MCS. The purpose of this activity is to use quotes from research and videos of different-aged MCS, and possibly their family members, to share their experiences for teachers to reflect on. The Day 1, Session 2 activity will encourage teachers to analyze and reflect on their prior assumptions and to critically examine why their observations from the scenarios in the activity from the preceding session align with research and the real life experiences of MCS. This activity connects my study's purpose, problem, and themes to the lived experiences of MCS. This activity also aligns with my study's conceptual framework, understanding trauma, by connecting the perceptions and experiences of MCS, which can potentially pose challenges and be a source of trauma. The materials for this activity

include a reflection sheet and writing tools. The expected outcome of this activity will make the research and shared experience relevant and personal to the teacher participants.

The Day 1, Session 3 activity will incorporate first-loop learning experiences through scenarios focused on teachers practicing de-escalation skills in the classroom. The purpose of this activity is to allow participants to apply the knowledge gained, with participants paying special attention to their initial responses. Throughout the 3 day professional learning project, I will use a research-based professional learning approach called triple-loop learning. This process uses a reflective focus to encourage a transformative experience. The Day 1 Session 3 activity will use a single-loop approach, where teachers are encouraged to analyze, address, and respond to an observable classroom challenge in pairs. The activity will include scenarios that describe a single classroom challenge, and the teacher and coach will brainstorm some trauma-informed de-escalation strategies. At the end of the Day 1 Session 2 activity, the participant pairs will each share their discussions and strategy with the whole group. The materials needed for this activity include the scenarios, a reflection sheet, and writing tools. The expected outcome for this activity is for teachers to have more confidence in their ability to provide trauma-informed support and reflect on their behaviors and reactions.

At the end of Day 1, teachers will participate in a 3-2-1 closing activity. The purpose of the closing activity is to create a space for reflection by giving teachers time to synthesize their learning from the day and introduce the next day's learning focus. Teachers will complete this activity individually and need a journal or reflection sheet. The 3-2-1 closing activity will ask teachers to write down 3 key takeaways from the day,

2 things they will work on being more mindful of tomorrow, and 2 questions they still have. This activity will prime teachers for the second loop learning experience they will participate in the following day. As I close out Day 1, I will thank the teachers for their hard work and express my appreciation for their vulnerability, recognizing that the learning sessions may take an emotional toll on them. The materials needed for this activity are a journal or reflection sheet and writing tools. The expected outcome of this closing session is for teachers to have an opportunity to process any new learning, solidify their understanding of MCS and military life, recognize the usefulness of trauma-informed tools, and identify areas for continued growth.

## **Day 2**

At the start of Day 2, I will begin the day with a brief review of yesterday's learning. The purpose of this activity is for teachers to reflect on what they learned the day before and what they hope to learn today. With relocation and separation in mind, teachers will answer questions like, "Now that we have a better understanding of the 'why' behind the behaviors of struggling MCS, what's one thing you're excited to learn how to do today?" The materials needed for this activity are a reflection sheet and writing tools. The expected outcome of this welcome session is to create a sense of continuity and ensure that teachers are well-prepared for the day's learning.

The Day 2 Session 1 activity will give teachers a chance to think about SEL and the trauma-related responses of MCS. The purpose of this activity is to help teachers deepen their understanding of the social and emotional responses of struggling MCS as a function of trauma and not as misbehavior. In this activity, teachers will define SEL,

review the SEL competencies, and discuss how trauma affects MCS students' ability to utilize each SEL competency. The teachers will also engage in a turn-and-talk activity, sharing a challenging moment with an MCS and discussing how their trauma affects their ability to utilize SEL skills. Teachers will then work in small groups, focusing on one SEL competency to brainstorm and list classroom strategies that support that competency. The materials needed for this activity are a printed document of the SEL competencies, chart paper, and writing tools. The expected outcome for this activity is for teachers to understand SEL within a trauma-informed context and gain strategies to support MCS.

The Day 1 Session 2 activity will allow teachers to engage in a role-playing activity. The purpose of this study is for teachers to practice and apply practical and useful strategies in a simulated and safe environment. This role-playing activity will have three roles: the teacher, student, and an observer. The scenario in the role-playing activity will pose a classroom challenge and provide the teacher with an observer to help them support the struggling MCS. The observer will have a checklist of non-judgmental feedback and trauma-informed strategies to engage and support the teacher. After an established amount of time, teachers will change roles. At the end of this activity, there will be a whole group debrief. The debrief will ask teachers to discuss what they learned about their responses and the challenges in applying the trauma-informed skills in the moment. The materials needed for this activity include the role-playing scenarios, reflective sheet, and writing tools. The expected outcome for this activity is to provide a

hands-on opportunity for teachers to apply newly learned skills and the ability to identify areas for personal and professional growth.

The Day 1 Session 3 activity will allow teachers to analyze and adapt their practices through a second-loop learning activity. Second loop learning will enable teachers to challenge their own assumptions. The purpose of this activity is for teachers to challenge their assumptions by examining why they respond the way they do, and to investigate their beliefs and how their beliefs influence their actions. Teachers will use their reflection sheet to reflect on the role-playing activity by answering questions like, “How did it feel to try a new strategy? What were your first thoughts during each role-playing scenario? What did you learn about your own beliefs? What did you learn about misbehavior and trauma?” After teachers have time to reflect individually, they will move into small group discussions, and then to a whole group discussion. The materials needed for this activity are a reflective sheet and writing tools. The expected outcome is for teachers to understand their beliefs, ways of thinking concerning student behavior, and the importance of a shift toward a trauma-informed mindset.

To close the day, teachers will participate in a self-care mindfulness activity. The purpose of this activity is to allow teachers to focus on the emotional heaviness of the learning sessions and the challenging work of being a teacher supporting struggling MCS overseas. The teachers will engage in a breathing or stretching activity. I will decide which mindfulness activity to use based on the mood of the learning space. After the self-care mindfulness activity, I will lead a discussion acknowledging secondary trauma, compassion fatigue, and burnout as symptoms teachers may experience working with

traumatized students. Then, I will review Day 3's learning to mentally and emotionally prepare the teachers for the last day of learning. This session does not need any materials. The expected outcome of this closing activity is to prepare teachers with self-care and mindfulness strategies and tools, and their benefits so that they can care for themselves better after the day's learning and beyond.

### **Day 3**

At the start of Day 3, I will begin the day with a reflective activity in which teachers think about a success they experienced in the role-playing activity from the day before. The purpose of this activity is to create a collaborative tone, build a sense of mastery, and emphasize the importance of community. Teachers will share a time they felt successful during yesterday's role-playing activity using trauma-informed practices. The materials needed for this activity are a reflective sheet and writing tools. The expected outcome of this activity is for teachers to feel a collective sense of confidence in their skills and to reinforce the importance of their contributions in creating a responsive and effective community of care.

The Day 3 Session 1 activity will support teachers in establishing communication through a collaborative approach. The purpose of this study is to support teachers in establishing best practices for communicating and collaborating with stakeholders. Teachers will review several case studies focused on various communication challenges. Communication protocols will support teachers in reflecting, analyzing, and developing a communication plan to help them with all key stakeholders. Teachers will use the communication protocols to create conversations that align with the different case

studies. At the end of the activity, I will select volunteers willing to share their communication protocol with the whole group. Then, I will facilitate a whole group discussion on the necessity of clear protocols and a shared language for creating a strong community of care. The materials needed for this study are the case studies, communication protocol, chart paper, and writing tools. The expected outcome for this activity is to build teacher capacity in having difficult conversations with a protocol to assist them.

The Day 3 Session 2 activity will encourage teachers to share their effective homegrown practices and resources. The purpose of this study is to empower teachers to be creators and collectors of knowledge. In a group setting, teachers will brainstorm and share their homegrown strategies to help students regulate or de-escalate on chart paper. Later, teachers will be divided into groups and review research-based articles on social and emotional best practices. Next, teachers will reflect and analyze their own homegrown strategies compared to the ones shared in the research articles, add new strategies to their arsenal, and consider how they can adjust these new strategies to fit their overseas learning environment. Materials for this session are the case studies, chart paper, sticky notes, and writing tools. The expected outcome for this activity is to validate current teacher knowledge and provide teachers with new vetted research-based strategies adapted to their specific learning environment.

The Day 3 Session 3 activity will involve a triple-loop culminating learning activity. The purpose of this activity is to have teachers ask themselves and reflect on why their beliefs have changed. Teachers will learn about the triple loop learning

approach that moves learning from “What I learned?” to “How I changed my practice?” to “How have my beliefs changed?” I will help teachers process the importance of learning, moving from single loop, double loop, and triple loop learning, needed for transformational change. Teachers will answer reflective questions, and after they capture their responses to the questions, they will pair up with a teacher they have worked with during the 3 day professional learning session. The materials needed for this activity are the reflection guide with questions and writing tools. The expected outcome of this study is for participants to experience transformational change in their practice, beliefs, and ways of thinking.

Teachers will celebrate, plan, and reflect at the end of the day during the final professional learning session. The purpose of this activity is to celebrate what they have learned, solidify their next steps and commitments, and create a path for support. Teachers will start by writing one action they plan to implement on a sticky note or index card. Next, teachers will participate in a “speed sharing” activity, like musical chairs, but people will move from person to person until the time I have established has passed. At the end of the speed sharing activity, I will end the day by celebrating the teachers' unique and diligent efforts and thanking them for their work in supporting and teaching MCS. The materials needed for this activity are sticky notes, index cards, and writing tools. The expected outcome of this activity is for teachers to conclude the 3 day professional learning series with a clear purpose and an integrated commitment to the well-being of both themselves and MCS.

### **Project Rationale**

The problem that prompted this study and the resulting project was that Grade K–5 teachers who work with MCS overseas struggle to support MCS who experience trauma. The findings in this study revealed that participants (a) overseas acknowledged the distinct characteristics of MCS overseas, yet encountered challenges in effectively supporting the trauma-related experiences these students endured; (b) overseas faced challenges in supporting and guiding MCS overseas who displayed social and emotional trauma-related responses, especially during transitional periods; and (c) overseas who worked with MCS overseas described specific professional supports needed to serve their students better. Due to the findings in this study, I developed a 3 day professional development project to meet the needs identified by the participants.

According to Samundeeswari (2024), teacher professional development plays a significant role in the effectiveness and quality of instructional practices and educational outcomes. Lander et al. (2025) explained that effective teaching improves students' health, societal, and well-being outcomes. However, effective teacher professional development should include learning engagements that embed peer-to-peer learning, like sharing best practices, and ongoing job-embedded training relevant to teacher experiences (Samundeeswari, 2024). Lander et al. (2025) shared that the goal of teacher professional development is to encourage change by designing professional learning with an intentional purpose for change. A purposeful change program for effective teacher professional development strongly considers and incorporates teacher (a) insights about teaching and learning; (b) motivation to make changes in their practice; (c) development

of techniques for putting their insights into action; and (d) embedding their skills into practice (Sims et al., 2023). The goal of my professional learning project is to address the data collected from the one-on-one interviews with the participants and integrate effective research-based practices to meet the needs of the participants.

I designed a professional learning project that directly responds to the critical findings of my basic qualitative study, where I explored the perceptions of K–5 teachers working with MCS overseas. This 3 day professional learning project will provide research-based, engaging, practical, and influential learning experiences to support teacher growth and development based on the needs expressed in the study. The study identified that teachers in overseas locations struggle to effectively support MCS who experience trauma related to the military lifestyle. Teachers participating in the 3 day professional learning series will receive relevant learning through scenarios, case studies, and role-play approaches to address the concerns participants identified. These learning approaches provide teachers with collaborative and integrated opportunities to influence their practice (Samundeeswari, 2024). Ghamrawi et al. (2024) elaborated that effective professional development should have the ability to foster collaboration among teachers and thoughtfully integrate practices.

I developed a slide deck presentation to organize and hold the content for the 3 day professional learning series. The slide deck will include the daily learning objectives, norms, and information on the different session activities. During the 3 day professional learning series, I will provide participants with handouts of the different scenarios, case studies, role-play descriptions, reflection sheets, research articles, and trauma-informed

strategies. Participants will also complete a formative evaluation measure on Days 1 and 2 to ensure that each learning session meets their needs, is relevant, and addresses areas of improvement. On Day 1, participants will focus on the lived experiences of MCS by (a) analyzing in small groups “Day in the Life” scenarios based on real MCS experiences; (b) discussing in small groups how research related to MCC and the military lifestyle aligns with the scenarios earlier in the day to make connections between research and the lived experiences of MCS; and (c) brainstorming in pairs initial de-escalation strategies for simple classroom challenges. On Day 2, participants will (a) discuss how SEL skills are affected by the effects of trauma, followed by charting of possible strategies to mitigate the effects trauma has on the social and emotional skill development of MCS; (b) role play in groups of three a complex classroom scenario with a coach to guide the teacher with the student; and (c) reflect on the role playing activity answering a specific set of questions to challenge their beliefs and assumptions with supporting struggling MCS. On Day 3, participants will (a) use case studies to reflect on and develop communication protocols to better communicate with key stakeholders; and (b) share their homegrown strategies to support struggling MCS, and validate them with research articles. This opportunity to validate their own strategies will help teachers refine, confidently use, and add to their list of effective strategies. The end of Day 3 includes many opportunities for teachers to reflect on their learning, create a plan to embed their new or refined learning into practice, and celebrate their learning journey. The participants will also complete a summative evaluation form at the end of the 3 day professional learning session. The learning sessions throughout the 3 day professional

learning series are designed to be relevant, collaborative, and applicable to their environment (Sims et al., 2023; Ghamrawi et al., 2024).

### **Review of the Literature**

To identify current literature sources, I used the Walden University library to research and analyze peer-reviewed studies. The Walden University library resources included conducting research through MyEBSCO, ProQuest, Taylor and Francis, SAGE Journals, and Google Scholar through the Walden Library. The following are the keywords I used to search for relevant peer-reviewed articles for my study:

*transformational “professional development” teacher, innovative effective teacher professional development, effective transformational trauma informed professional development for teachers, effective transformational change in practice social emotional professional development for teachers, understanding “military connected children” teacher, “triple loop learning” professional development, triple loop learning for growth, emotions and effective teacher “professional development,” change teacher “professional development,” interconnected model of professional growth, codesign teacher “professional development,” constructivism teacher professional learning, andragogy teacher professional learning, andragogy teacher professional development, motivational factors professional development, motivation effective teacher “professional development,” motivation “professional development” effective teachers, collaborative “professional development” teachers, and “experiential learning” teacher professional development change.* The review of literature supported and provided the framework for the 3 day professional development project I designed. The literature I reviewed supports

the data revealed in my study, bridging the study's themes with the 3 day professional development activities.

### **Andragogy**

I researched several learning theories to design the most effective 3 day professional development program for teachers overseas. One theory that came up often in my research was Knowles' theory of adult learning (Ajani, 2021; Ghamrawi et al., 2024; Hiew & Murray, 2021). Andragogy, the art and science of helping adults learn, is based initially on the work of Knowles and other adult learning researchers (Knowles, 1978). Knowles (1978) established six principles as the foundation for his theory of adult learning which aims to honor adult learners: (a) adult learners must be presented with and understand why they should learn something before they learn it; (b) adult learners are responsible for their own choices; (c) adult learners' experiences provide a rich resource to anchor new learning; (d) adult learners are ready to learn when learning opportunities are relevant to them and their lives; (e) adult learners need learning opportunities that motivate them to solve problems or accomplish tasks related to their lives; and (f) adult learners must be encouraged to learn by intrinsic factors versus extrinsic factors.

There are many benefits to implementing adult learning concepts into teacher professional development. Bahrani (2024) stated that andragogy principles enhance professional learning outcomes due to the reporting of higher levels of engagement, retention of skills, and professional satisfaction. The benefit of including adult learning principles in teacher professional development is creating a lifelong learning organization (Kovács & Kálmán, 2022). According to Kovács and Kálmán (2022), creating a lifelong

learning organization begins with providing teachers with learning experiences that leverage building knowledge through tasks and sharing among colleagues. Furthermore, effective professional development for teachers is active, social, and related to their professional practice (Ajani, 2021; Kovács & Kálmán, 2022). When thinking about teacher professional development, AbdulRab (2023) and Ajani (2021) suggested that adult learning principles for teacher learners should emphasize the why of learning, honor teacher self-direction or choice, make learning relevant to their real-life experiences, and position learning as a problem-solving task. I used the adult learning concepts of why, self-direction, relevance, and problem-solving in developing my 3 day professional development project study. According to Hristoforova and Pavītola (2024), teacher job performance is directly linked to continuous ongoing learning. Embedding adult learning concepts aims to honor participants while instilling the capacity for lifelong learning.

As a professional development designer, I embedded the adult learning concepts of the why of learning, self-direction, relevance, and problem-solving concepts into the professional development activities throughout the 3 days to maximize effectiveness. I integrated AbdulRab's (2023) and Ajani's (2021) four adult learning concepts into my professional development activities in a thoughtful way to maximize efficacy.

- I addressed the why of learning from the beginning of the professional development session on Day 1 with the welcome and introduction session. I did not use a generic ice breaker. Instead, I asked teachers to write down a word and a question, immediately showing them that their concerns and needs are central to the learning sessions.

- For self-direction, I gave teachers choices and control over their learning processes. The parking lot is an excellent example of this. It allows teachers to drive the conversation and address specific questions throughout the training. The small-group work and scenario cards enable teachers to guide their discussions and come to conclusions. The role-playing scenarios on Day 2 provide low-stakes opportunities for teachers to self-direct their learning. Teachers can experiment with different responses and see the results in real time without fearing judgment.
- For relevance, I strived to make the content relevant in a compelling way for the teacher participants. For example, I based the scenarios on real experiences of MCS. Using scenarios is a way to demonstrate relevance, as the scenarios directly mirror teachers' situations in their classrooms. I structured the 3 day professional development around solving problems related to how teachers overseas can effectively support MCS in dealing with trauma. I used a problem-based approach to embed relevant and engaging modalities focused on teacher needs. Also, the intentional transition from the theoretical understanding on Day 1 to the practical, skills-based sessions on Day 2 demonstrates to teachers that the concepts are not abstract ideas but are directly applicable to their classroom practices.
- Problem-solving is the cornerstone of the design of my 3 day professional development project. I built every activity around a problem requiring critical thinking, like discussing the emotional effects of a move or role-playing a

classroom meltdown. The activities strongly encourage teachers to apply their knowledge to solve a specific problem. The professional development design goes beyond teachers learning a new skill or strategy. By utilizing a triple-loop learning approach, I encourage teachers to question their fundamental beliefs about the behavior and discipline of MCS. Triple loop learning activities provide a higher-level form of problem-solving that leads to a deep and lasting shift in the mindset of the participant teachers to change their practice ultimately.

I combined these elements of adult learning to create a professional development experience to inform the participants and, even more so, to empower, provide relevance, and address the motivation of the adult learners.

### **Professional Development**

Professional development for teachers is a global practice used for teacher growth and development. According to Samundeeswari (2024), the professional development of teachers is essential for worldwide educational reform and improvement. Governments worldwide have invested significant resources, human capital, and millions of dollars to study the best design to maximize teacher professional learning (Sancar et al., 2021; Sims et al., 2023). Due to these investments in resources, key stakeholders, such as policymakers and educational leaders, are desperately trying to enhance the skills of the teacher workforce (Sims et al., 2023). These investments in researching and developing the best design for teacher professional development are needed. Samundeeswari (2024) stated that although research is growing, a significant gap exists in teachers'

understanding of the most effective strategies for maximizing teacher professional development.

A common understanding or definition of professional development for teachers is defined or presented in different ways according to local norms. Differing views of professional learning has complicated the development of effective teacher professional learning programs for some learning institutions (Sancar et al., 2021). AbdulRab (2023) defined teacher professional development as knowledge and skills used to strengthen teacher competency. Shahzad and Khan (2022) stated that professional development is a process that helps teachers sustain and enhance their skills and expertise throughout their professional careers. Based on the results of my study and the 3 day professional development project I designed, I approached my teacher professional development project as a transformative, experiential, and collaborative training designed to fundamentally shift teachers' perspectives on the trauma-related experiences of MCS overseas and how to support them.

Professional development aims to help teachers grow their skills and initiate changes in practice. Teachers' knowledge is foundational to their daily instructional decisions regarding the students in their care (Sims et al., 2023). Teacher professional development is pivotal to enhancing teaching effectiveness, ultimately improving student learning outcomes (Samundeeswari, 2024; Sancar et al., 2021). Teacher professional development is ineffective if it does not change how teachers understand their subjects, how they teach, and how students learn. Traditional approaches to teacher professional development, like one-time one-off workshops, are often considered ineffective in

making sustainable changes in teacher practices (Lander et al., 2025; Samundeeswari, 2024). Lander et al. (2025) added that traditional teacher professional development practices and their effects are often considered questionable and fail to support teacher change and growth. The presented project study is the first in a series of training sessions which will later include teachers revisiting their efforts at incorporating new strategies, skills, and understandings into their classrooms.

Effective professional development is needed to motivate teachers as agents of change. According to Ghamrawi et al. (2024), teacher professional learning should help teachers acquire new knowledge and bridge that learning with their current understanding without overloading them. According to Lander et al. (2025), teacher professional development programs must position teachers as change agents enabled by active, reflective, and ongoing professional learning. Ghamrawi et al. (2024) stated that effective teacher professional development (a) ignites motivation in teachers; (b) enhances teacher capacity and knowledge; (c) encourages collaboration; and (d) enables teachers to integrate their newfound skills into their practice. My 3 day teacher professional development project aims to motivate teachers with relevant and timely learning experiences to shift mindsets and enhance their capacity by incorporating adult learning principles, collaboration, and reflection, to support MCS overseas who experience trauma better.

### ***Motivation and Teacher Professional Development***

Motivation often describes the reason why people do what they do. According to Ahmed et al. (2021), motivation is a controlling force directing people's behavior. Sims

et al. (2023) shared that motivation is a person's willingness to put forth effort when pursuing a specific goal or outcome. Effective professional development must motivate teachers to pursue and put forth effort in making shifts and changes within their practice (Sims et al., 2023). Shahzad and Khan (2022) stated that professional development is significant in teacher satisfaction, increases their productivity, and satisfaction in their professional roles. Motivating teachers as agents of change must start with creating inspiring professional development with the collective understanding of how the professional learning experience will lead to high-quality student achievement and outcomes (Potera & Zabeli, 2022). However, inspiring teacher professional development to create high-quality learning experiences for students must begin with ensuring that it will first motivate its teacher participants.

When designing effective professional development for teachers, I must consider ways to motivate each group of participants. Ahmed et al. (2021) showed that many training and learning programs for teachers are ineffective in motivating teachers to develop their skills as intended. According to Sims et al. (2023), teacher motivation is an integral determinant for implementing new knowledge and skills from professional learning experiences into their practice. Often, teachers fail to make shifts in their practice due to the lack of motivating factors from teacher professional development. Sims et al. (2023) elaborated that research confirms teacher motivation is a significant factor that strongly influences their adoption of new practices.

Teachers are motivated to learn for several reasons. Potera and Zabeli (2022) stated that intrinsic and extrinsic motivational factors influence teacher professional

development. Potera and Zabeli (2022) elaborated that teachers are stuck in an ongoing battle between their desire for independence and the expectations of outside forces that may limit their freedom to make their own decisions in the classroom. This ongoing struggle often prevents teachers from achieving control over their professional lives. According to Zhang et al. (2021), intrinsic motivation is more autonomous, leading to self-determination with higher potential for positive learning outcomes for teachers. Self-determination in teacher professional development includes learning experiences that promote autonomy, competency, and relevance (Zhang et al., 2021). However, extrinsic motivation is considered controlled motivation (Zhang et al., 2021) that often leads to professional development learning associated with adverse outcomes, lack of sustainment, and joy. For teachers' professional development to be effective, intrinsic forces of motivation over extrinsic forces have a greater influence on teachers' drive to change (Zhang et al., 2021). Intrinsic examples of motivation for teacher professional learning include rich learning experiences that build teacher conceptual understanding, creativity, and problem-solving, dependent on social and cultural contexts (Potera & Zabeli, 2022). Other intrinsic examples of motivational teacher professional development include teachers participating in professional learning that they value, which is responsive to their personal or professional needs (Zhang et al., 2021). The professional development I designed is not about simply imparting information but creating learning experiences that motivate teachers to learn, collaborate, and apply new practices in their classrooms. I focused on creating learning experiences that center autonomy, competency, and relevancy. I intentionally designed the 3 day professional development

project study for teachers working overseas, motivated to participate in this professional learning series because it addresses their unique and often invisible challenges within their specific context in a respectful, relatable, and reflective way.

### ***Collaboration and Teacher Professional Development***

Collaborative modalities in teacher professional development have become more prevalent in developing effective professional learning for teachers. Teacher professional development has shifted from traditional methods like lectures, workshops, and one-off events provided by outside facilitators (Bergmark, 2020; De Simone, 2020). According to Bergmark (2020), using these conventional methods often stems from a deficit mindset of teachers, which likens them to lacking skills, knowledge, and needing an expert to educate them. The results of traditional teacher professional development are a top-down approach that is often abstract, lacks context that teachers can connect to their practice, centering performativity and accountability (Bergmark, 2020; De Simone, 2020). However, collaborative approaches are more pragmatic, moving from performativity to purposeful, relevant, and applicable learning (Bergmark, 2020). Bergmark (2020) stated that in conjunction with collaborative approaches, effective professional learning events should be bottom-up, continuous, purposeful, structured for embedding in teacher practices, and explicitly directed at improving student outcomes. Traditional or conventional teacher professional development may have its time and place. However, Zhou and Tu (2021) expressed that collaborative learning improves information flow among teachers, builds a community of trust, improves professional satisfaction, and reduces teacher turnover. To establish a respectful lifelong learning community of

educators, professional development must embody learning processes that evolve its modalities to benefit teachers, ultimately improving student achievement.

Collaborative teacher professional development encompasses several modalities. Zhou and Tu (2021) described collaborative professional development as providing teachers with active and social learning experiences. According to Zhou and Tu (2021), active social professional learning activities are engaging and valuable to teacher practices, providing multiple opportunities for hands-on activities. These hands-on activities include observing colleagues, practicing new learning, and analyzing student work (Lo, 2021; Zhou and Tu, 2021). De Simone (2020) provided additional collaborative professional learning activities, including group discussions, peer coaching, and collective problem solving and development of solutions to address teacher needs. For my 3 day professional development project study, I incorporated collaborative activities through active and social hands-on activities to build teacher capacity, addressing their professional needs by creating a respectful landscape for change. I integrated active learning activities into the 3 day professional learning event to support teachers as cocreators of knowledge.

### ***Reflective Approaches for Teacher Transformation***

For the 3 day professional development project study, I embedded a reflective approach for the professional development activities. According to Shah (2022), reflection is significant to thoughtful teaching, learning, and growing. Research indicates that reflection can assist in developing deeper learning, add significance to one's practice, and make it possible for personal experiences to influence professional practice (Farrell et

al., 2021). However, research indicates that reflection without guidance is ineffective in supporting teacher learning, growth, and development (Farrell et al., 2021). Farrell et al. (2021) stated that guided reflection is a practical approach to support learning development and facilitate changes in teacher practice. For my 3 day professional development, I utilized progressive triple-loop learning and experiential learning approaches as the vehicles for participant reflection throughout the professional learning event. The goal of using these reflective approaches for teacher learning and development was to intentionally provide them with the necessary reflective supports for transformative change.

**Triple-Loop Learning Approach.** I intentionally embedded a progressive triple-loop learning approach into the 3 day professional development project study for teachers. This progressive approach aims to provide teachers with regular opportunities to reflect on their learning and make shifts personally and professionally (Pahl-Wostl & Patterson, 2021). I began the professional development with a single-loop learning activity on Day 1 using real-life scenarios. Single-loop learning does not elicit a change in values, beliefs, or ideology, as it is generally recognized as an individual recognizing or defining a problem (Hill et al., 2023). Single-loop learning is the most basic form of learning, as it involves identifying a problem or a solution based on existing rules or goals. On Day 1, my goal for teachers was to engage in a single-loop learning activity by identifying and discussing the challenges in each scenario.

A double-loop learning approach is characterized as an individual's awareness of their thought processes as they attempt to address a problem (Hill et al., 2023). Double

loop learning is a deeper level of learning where an individual questions the rules or their assumptions of a particular problem. On Day 2, teachers participated in role-playing sessions. The teachers received a new framework of trauma-informed practices and were challenged to modify their approaches for supporting MCS struggling with trauma. Also, the observer's role in each role-playing session guided teachers to move away from old, ineffective strategies and try new ones to support MCS better.

According to Hill et al. (2023), triple loop learning is when an individual interrogates their values, beliefs, and ideology that guide their actions and behaviors. Triple loop learning intends for individuals to challenge and change why they do things, rather than thinking about what they did or how they did it. Focused on reflection, teachers review what they learned in the different activities and are encouraged to step back and question their core beliefs about student discipline and behavior. I designed this reflective process so that teachers could make foundational shifts in their mindset and to interrogate the possibility of misunderstanding the needs of MCS based on their previous actions. Triple loop learning is a transformative learning approach, eliciting a profound change in oneself (Pahl-Wostl & Patterson, 2021). Transformative change in teacher participants was the goal for embedding a progressive triple-loop learning approach in the 3 day professional development project study.

**Experiential Learning Approach.** I intentionally embedded an experiential learning approach into the 3 day professional development project study for teachers. This experiential approach aimed to provide teachers with regular opportunities to reflect on their learning and make shifts personally and professionally. According to Ghamrawi

et al. (2024), experiential learning is the act of learning by doing. Examples of experiential learning approaches include teachers having the opportunity to reflect on their experiences, share their experiences, glean insights from others' experiences, and apply what they have learned from these experiences to their own contexts (Ghamrawi et al., 2024). Ajani (2021) stated that teachers need these experiential opportunities to develop knowledge and skills to transform and change practice. Experiential learning allows teachers to try new skills, which increases self-efficacy as they simulate these new skills that will eventually be transferred into their respective classrooms (Affandi & Tantra, 2022; Ajani, 2021; Bahrani, 2024; Segarra & Gentry, 2021). Bahrani (2024) explained how simulation opportunities, such as real-world scenarios and case studies, are experiential activities that support teachers in applying new knowledge and skills. Applying these new learning through scenarios, case studies, and other real-life activities reinforces teacher learning by providing a hands-on approach with a higher possibility of skill retention and application (Bahrani, 2024). Experiential learning within the 3 day professional development is achieved by thoughtfully integrating opportunities for teachers through guided reflection activities, learning deeply, building self-efficacy, and establishing a collaborative community of lifelong learners.

### **Project Description**

#### **Needed Resources and Existing Supports**

The 3 day professional development will be offered to teachers of MCS overseas to enhance their understanding of traumas that MCS experience due to the military lifestyle. The professional development will also assist participating teachers in curating

additional tools and resources to support struggling MCS. Because the 3 day professional development is for overseas teachers, I will research and find elementary schools that serve MCS overseas via internet sources. School administrators and instructional leaders will be contacted via email to request a virtual meeting to discuss the study, its findings, and the possibility of facilitating the 3 day professional development. During the virtual meeting, I will share the purpose and goals of the professional development along with an outlined agenda with the daily learning activities and outcomes.

For school leaders who agree to participate in the 3 day professional development, an email invitation will be sent to administrators and teachers, along with a confirmation of the professional learning dates and logistical details. The professional development series will take place in a designated space on the school campus, such as the cafeteria or library, that can accommodate the elementary staff. The administrator or instructional leader will ensure that all technology components, including internet access and a Smartboard digital presentation tool, are available. School leaders will also provide the facilitator and teacher participants with additional learning supplies like pens, pencils, highlighters, sticky notes, chart paper, poster markers, tape, paper, and journals. The teachers will not need to bring anything to the professional development, but will be provided with the necessary presentation handouts, graphic organizers, resources, and reflection tools. The presenter will ensure enough copies of all the handouts, tools, and resources are prepared and available based on the number of people registered. Digital versions of all materials will be made available to participants after the professional development.

### **Potential Barriers and Solutions**

The project study is designed for K–5 teachers of MCS overseas. A potential barrier to its implementation is the emotional toll this professional development may place on participating teachers. Because this professional development centers on the traumas that MCS may experience, participants may find it difficult to hear about, reflect on, and empathize with these issues. To mitigate this barrier, the professional development will provide opportunities for teachers to share their concerns. I also embedded self-care tools to help teachers navigate the potential for dysregulation related to the topic. For example, professional development components will acknowledge the emotional challenges and stressors of being a teacher in a military-connected community. Acknowledgement builds trust and makes teachers feel seen, reducing their emotional burden and making them more open to learning. Additionally, a dedicated portion of the professional development focuses on the concepts of compassion fatigue and self-care. Instead of simply presenting professional learning content, I also intend to create a psychologically safe and supportive environment that acknowledges the emotional reality of the participants.

The second potential barrier is the military community's transient nature, where the teacher is located overseas. Because this learning environment constantly experiences change due to its connection with the military, there is a potential for a lack of continuity, which could cause apathy for participating in this type of professional development. To mitigate the consequences of this high mobility barrier, it will be essential to provide teachers with transferable strategies that could benefit all students. I will also consider

how technology can support the establishment of virtual communities to support teachers, especially as they transition to new duty stations. Looking ahead, a train-the-trainer model could mitigate the lack of continuity. By training a small group of highly motivated teachers to become facilitators at each school, the professional development has a higher chance of being sustained and offered on an ongoing basis. A train-the-trainer model aims to create an in-house system of support that is not dependent on an outside facilitator, making the training more resilient to the constant turnover.

### **Proposal for Implementation and Timetable**

The proposed project study will consist of a 3 day professional development learning series for teachers overseas. The 3 day professional development will occur consecutively over 3 days before students arrive at the beginning of the school year. The breakdown of the proposed 3 day professional development timeline is as follows (See Table 2):

**Table 2***Proposed Professional Development Timeline*

Date	Task(s)	Stakeholder(s)	Note(s)
April	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Email administrators</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Administrator</li> <li>Researcher</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Email</li> </ul>
May	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Virtual meeting with school administrators</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Administrator</li> <li>Researcher</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Research findings</li> <li>Professional development presentation</li> </ul>
June	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Setting professional development dates</li> <li>Share the revised presentation slide deck to meet the school's needs</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Administrator</li> <li>Researcher</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Email</li> </ul>
July	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Send professional development invitation and logistics information to participants</li> <li>Send the list of invited participants to the school administrator</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Researcher</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Email</li> </ul>
August	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Conduct Day 1–3 professional development</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Researcher</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Face-to-face</li> </ul>

### **Stakeholder Roles and Responsibilities**

To ensure the success of the 3 day professional development, a clear understanding of the key stakeholder roles and responsibilities is essential. My role as the professional development designer and facilitator includes the following responsibilities: (a) organizing an initial meeting with the school administrator; (b) formalizing the professional development dates and teacher participants; (c) ensuring that the venue is secured and all resources, materials, and tools needed for the professional development are available, accessible, and prepared; (d) facilitating the 3 day professional development sessions; and (e) observing formative assessments and reviewing the summative assessments from participants and make any necessary changes. The responsibilities of the school administrator include the following: (a) deciding and providing approval and support for the 3 day professional development; (b) selecting and sharing dates for the professional development; and (c) sharing the 3 day professional development with teachers, establishing criteria and expectations for participants, and supporting teachers before, during, and after the professional development to ensure teacher success. The responsibilities of the teacher participants include the following: (a) deciding to participate in all 3 days of the professional development; (b) agreeing to try new learning gleaned from the professional development series; (c) participating and fully engaging in the daily professional development activities; and (d) providing clear and direct feedback to support the improvement of the professional development.

### **Project Evaluation Plan**

This professional development project study was designed based on the findings from the research conducted. The purpose of the 3 day professional development project study was to address the needs expressed by teachers overseas who were challenged with supporting struggling MCS overseas experiencing trauma. According to Samundeeswari (2024), an evaluation plan for any professional development program is essential to ensuring its effectiveness and sustainability. The goal of having an evaluation plan for this project study is to determine the effectiveness of the 3 day professional development series. I developed an evaluation plan to identify the overall effectiveness of the 3 day professional development and activities through entrance tickets (welcome activities), exit tickets (closing activities), parking lot (check-ins), and surveys, providing participants an opportunity to share their reflections and feedback. Samundeeswari (2024) shared that teacher evaluation of professional development programs helps identify areas of improvement with the intention of making necessary adjustments to improve future professional learning. I will use the teacher feedback gathered from the formative and summative evaluation tools to monitor and adjust the learning for teachers.

#### **Formative and Summative Evaluation**

Thoughtful evaluation methods of professional development programs are a significant component of effective teacher learning. Sancar et al. (2021) stated that evaluation procedures are key to designing a strong professional development program. I thoughtfully used formative and summative evaluation methods for the 3 day professional development series. A formative evaluation is an intentional assessment

embedded throughout the learning process to provide feedback, reflection, and guide instruction (Mishra, 2024). The formative evaluation measures that will be used are entrance tickets, exit tickets, and a parking lot. At the beginning of every day, there is a welcome activity (entrance ticket) to get a pulse on participants, gauge their emotional state, and glean their learning expectations. At the end of every day, a closing activity (exit ticket) allows participants to reflect, synthesize their learning, and share with other participants. Each learning day, participants have access to a parking lot (check-in) chart for participants to write and communicate their questions and concerns. Each of these formative evaluation tools allows me to learn more about the participants, understand how and what they are learning, and make adjustments to the learning to meet participant learning needs. For a comprehensive evaluation approach, I will also utilize a summative assessment.

A part of the evaluation plan for the 3 day professional development includes administering a summative assessment at the end of the professional learning series. According to Mishra (2024), a summative assessment is an evaluation method used to evaluate the overall effectiveness and knowledge gained at the end of a learning series. At the end of the third day of the professional learning series, I will administer a summative evaluation I designed for the professional development. The intention of using the summative evaluation tool is for participants to share whether the learning was beneficial and met their needs. Also, the anonymous summative evaluation will evaluate whether the expected outcomes for the learning activities were achieved and the overall effectiveness of the professional development experience. With the feedback provided by

the teacher participants through the evaluation methods, I will adjust the design, facilitation, and learning activities to improve the 3 day professional development project study.

### **Evaluation Goals**

The evaluation goals for the 3 day professional development project study align with an outcomes-based approach and the objectives for the professional development. The objectives for the 3 day professional development are to meet the needs of teachers overseas who support struggling MCS experiencing trauma and provide them with strategies, tools, and resources. Another essential aspect of the professional development series is for teachers to have time to reflect on their mindsets regarding trauma and student behaviors. Another objective for the professional learning series is to provide teachers time to reflect on their practice and make shifts regarding how they think about struggling MCS trauma and their behaviors. Samundeeswari (2024) stated that reflective practices significantly affect professional development outcomes, teacher efficacy, and student achievement. Throughout the 3 day professional development, teachers will reflect on their practice and mindset through scenarios, case studies, and role-playing. The expected outcomes of these activities are for teachers to make shifts and changes professionally. The formative and summative evaluation measures intend to capture whether teachers made shifts in their practice and mindsets. The information and feedback shared will guide future professional development for teachers.

## **Key Stakeholders**

The teachers and the school administrators are the key stakeholders for the 3 day professional development project study. This 3 day professional development intends to address the needs expressed by the research participants. The teachers' role in the professional development is to attend, participate, and engage in all learning activities to address their needs. School administrators will have the role of monitoring teacher attendance and participation in the professional development series. School administrators will also be responsible for partnering with teachers to implement strategies, tools, or resources into their practice. In my role as the facilitator, I will provide the overseas teacher participants in the professional development series with strategies, tools, and resources to support struggling MCS experiencing trauma. However, if it is not possible for me to deliver the 3 day professional development series for any school overseas, I will incorporate a train-the-trainer option for school administrators to designate a teacher leader to deliver the 3 day professional learning series. All stakeholders will receive pertinent information from the research study to clearly establish an understanding of the purpose and goals of the professional development.

## **Project Implications**

### **Social Change Implications**

The 3 day professional development project study can potentially influence the students, teachers, administrators, and the school complex where the professional development occurs. The social implications of this professional development extend beyond individual teacher learning and can significantly benefit the school community.

Since this project study was based on the needs and perspectives of my study participants, the activities, strategies, tools, and resources were designed to influence the instructional practices and mindsets of teachers overseas who support struggling MCS that experience trauma. As teachers engage in the professional development, they will build a shared understanding of the experiences of MCS. According to Shah (2022), building a shared understanding through social reflection is a powerful collaborative process in an effective professional development program. By discussing and reflecting on a common topic, such as trauma and MCS, the teacher participants can develop a sense of shared empathy and a collaborative culture where teachers can collectively establish a community that uplifts and supports all professionals in addressing the complex needs of MCS.

### **Importance of the Project in a Larger Context**

This project study can potentially influence teachers, students, administrators, and entire school complexes worldwide. Because this 3 day professional development is for teachers overseas, the implications for its influence on people in a broader sense are possible. Successful programs are those that are not only effective but also sustainable and replicable (Samundeeswari, 2024). One of the objectives of this project study is to make it possible for this professional development to benefit other communities that support MCS, including students in Grades 6-12 and K-12 MCS in the United States. Expanding this project study to reach other MCS in different communities provides an opportunity to share research-based strategies, tools, and resources across various grade levels and contexts. Also, there are different circumstances in which teachers must

support students who are dealing with trauma or the effects of family separation and mobility. For example, the 3 day professional development could potentially be adapted to meet the needs of teachers who support students in migrant or even diplomatic communities, as such communities experience transitions that could affect students.

To help expand this project in a larger context, I plan to share the results of my study with different organizations and communities that serve MCS. I also plan to present my findings at various conferences and publish parts of my research in peer-reviewed journals to expand the influence and reach of my research findings.

### **Conclusion**

The professional development project study was designed to help teachers overseas understand the trauma of MCS, shift teacher mindsets regarding the connection between student behavior and trauma, and provide teachers with strategies, tools, and resources to better support MCS experiencing trauma. The 3 day professional development project study outcomes are based on the findings shared in Section 2. Section 3 connects the research findings to the professional development project study. I used the interview information to design the 3 day professional development for overseas teachers. Section 4 will provide an opportunity for reflection on the overall research and the project. This process of reflection on the overall research process and project study will also address the project's strengths, limitations, and implications.

#### Section 4: Reflections and Conclusions

The problem that prompted this study was that Grade K–5 teachers struggle to support MCS overseas who experience trauma. In this basic qualitative study, I explored Grade K–5 teacher perceptions of the challenges they experienced in supporting MCS overseas who experienced trauma. This study focused on K–5 teachers who faced challenges in supporting MCS socially, emotionally, and academically due to the traumatic events their students experienced. In particular, this study examined K–5 teachers working in overseas elementary schools. The findings from this study revealed that (a) teachers overseas acknowledge the distinct characteristics of MCS overseas, yet they encounter challenges in supporting the trauma-related experiences these students endure; (b) teachers overseas face challenges in supporting and guiding MCS overseas who display social and emotional trauma-related responses, especially during transitional periods; and (c) teachers overseas who work with MCS overseas describe specific professional supports needed to serve their students better. Based on the findings, I developed a 3 day professional development project study aimed at addressing the needs of teachers overseas who struggled with supporting MCS students who have experienced trauma. In Section 4, I reflected on and concluded this project study by addressing the project's strengths and limitations, alternative approaches, project development, significance and importance of the work, and the implications for social change and future research possibilities.

## **Project Strengths and Limitations**

### **Project Strengths**

The strengths of this project study are related to the research conducted, the data collected, and the analysis of the findings from the one-on-one interviews. A professional development project study was the best option for addressing the research study's findings. Hoffman et al. (2020) noted that student emotional regulation begins with teachers developing their own skills. However, teachers often receive limited training on student trauma, mental health concerns, and effectively responding to and misinterpreting behavioral responses (Atallah et al., 2023). Koslouski and Stark (2021) shared that mitigations to support students struggling with traumatic and other adverse experiences are more effective when disseminated through teacher professional learning programs. I developed a 3 day professional development project study based on the analyzed results, which ultimately aimed to address the expressed needs of the study participants. I designed various session activities over the 3 day professional development to address the study's findings, providing teachers overseas with an opportunity to understand trauma and its influence on MCS better, practice new strategies they had learned, and receive timely feedback and support regarding the application and implementation of this new learning. Teachers participating in the 3 day professional development learning series will grow and develop as practitioners through intentional, collaborative, and applicable activities with colleagues.

### **Project Limitations**

The geographical dispersion and high-mobility environments of teachers serving MCS overseas create a significant challenge for delivering sustainable and effective professional development, which poses a limitation to this project. According to Koslouski (2022), sustainable trauma-informed professional development must be intentional, job-embedded, and occur over time to be effective. Koslouski further stated that one-time trauma-informed teacher trainings or workshops do not influence the necessary shifts teachers need to make in their practice to support students struggling with the effects of trauma. The 3 day project presented here can be considered a critical limitation. There is a necessity to develop a model for on-going sustainable trauma-informed training for a geographically dispersed workforce.

Another significant limitation of this project is accessibility. If trauma-informed training is a professional learning need for educators supporting MCS worldwide, different models for delivering this 3 day in-person professional development must be considered. Ivanova et al. (2022) described how a coaching or train-the-trainer model can be used to create effective, ongoing job-embedded professional development for teachers. The train-the-trainer model could benefit schools by designating one person or a team of teachers at a particular location to receive the 3 day professional development virtually, deliver the learning to their respective colleagues in person, and follow up and work closely with staff members as thought partners as they implement new trauma-informed strategies and tools.

## **Recommendations for Alternative Approaches**

### **Alternative Approaches to the Problem**

A possible alternative approach for this study could focus on the perceptions of Grade K–5 teachers exposed to secondary traumatic stress (STS) as they support MCS overseas who experience trauma. STS is stress that a person experiences as a result of learning about another individual’s traumatic experiences. According to Koslouski and Chafouleas (2022), teachers are at risk of STS due to working with students who have experienced trauma, which can lead to professional, physical, and emotional burnout (Koslouski et al., 2022). An alternative STS project could involve interviewing teachers regarding how the traumatic experiences of MCS overseas affect them emotionally, how behavioral disturbances in the classroom influence teachers professionally, and what supports and resources teachers need for self-care. The data from these interviews could then be used to develop a school-based peer support system that addresses topics such as teacher burnout, promotes self-care, and provides ongoing trauma-informed professional learning through coaching and social networking (Koslouski & Chafouleas, 2022).

Another approach to the problem could include the perceptions of U.S. based Grade K–5 teachers who struggle to support MCS overseas who experience trauma. A U.S. based approach to this study could focus on local schools in the United States with a high population of MCS. To broaden the perspective, an alternative approach could invite participation from teachers who lack military affiliation, as teachers overseas are often attached to a U.S. military base that provides significant support. The data collected from interviewing U.S. based teachers of MCS could potentially bring different insights and

needs, which could influence the content and facilitation of the 3 day professional development project.

### **Alternative Definitions of the Problem**

The problem that motivated this study was that Grade K–5 teachers struggled to support MCS overseas who experienced trauma. I employed one-on-one semi-structured interviews with 10 participants to explore their perceptions of the challenges they encountered in supporting MCS overseas who experienced trauma and the supports, resources, and training needed. The data revealed the following themes (a) teachers overseas acknowledge the distinct characteristics of MCS overseas, yet encounter challenges in effectively supporting the trauma-related experiences these students endure; (b) teachers overseas face challenges in supporting and guiding MCS overseas who display social and emotional trauma-related responses, especially during transitional periods; and (c) teachers overseas who work with MCS overseas describe specific professional supports needed to serve their students better. I designed a 3 day professional development project based on the themes revealed in the study. However, I realized for teachers overseas to be more effective in supporting MCS overseas who experience trauma, authentic, intentional, and transparent partnerships with school administrators and parents were needed. Based on this realization of administrator and parent partnerships, two alternative definitions of the problem include:

1. Grade K–5 teachers overseas require opportunities for intentional and transparent partnerships with school administrators that focus on effective

communication to ensure the collaborative implementation of trauma-informed support practices for MCS school-wide.

2. Grade K–5 teachers overseas require opportunities for authentic and consistent partnerships with parents of MCS students overseas to create a cohesive and supportive learning environment for MCS students both at home and at school.

The alternative definitions of the problem, derived from the original study problem, could enable K–5 teachers overseas to explore alternate pathways to meet the needs of MCS who experience trauma holistically.

### **Alternative Solutions to the Problem**

Alternative solutions to the problem could support K–5 teachers overseas who are challenged with supporting MCS experiencing trauma. Based on the alternative definitions of the problem shared, partnerships between teachers and school administrators could benefit struggling MCS. According to Luthar and Mendes (2020), school administrators need to establish clear policies and boundaries regarding (a) the disclosure of students' traumatic experiences; (b) the disclosure of students' traumatic experiences; (c) the approaches used to for school personnel to discuss traumatic events of students; and (c) the expectations for how school personnel interact and support students who experience trauma. Another alternative solution to the problem could involve partnerships between teachers and parents, incorporating trauma-informed professional learning for families, along with necessary resources and support. For trauma-informed approaches to be more effective, their effects must extend beyond the

classroom and school. Koslouski and Stark (2021) emphasized that the entire school community, comprising all stakeholders (students, families, teachers, and school personnel), must work together to mitigate the effects of trauma to transform their communities.

### **Scholarship, Project Development and Evaluation, and Leadership and Change Growth as a Scholar**

I did not always recognize myself as a scholar throughout the capstone process of my doctoral journey. I experienced a mix of lacking clarity, understanding, and experience as a researcher and the capstone process, which often led me to feel like an imposter rather than a scholar. However, as I continued along my journey as a doctoral student, I began to recognize the scholarly aspects in my research study, which ultimately positively influenced my confidence as a scholar. Participating in a basic qualitative research study enhanced my ability to problem solve, as well as interpret, analyze, and synthesize information. Identifying the problem, purpose, rationale, and research questions for my study was a significant part of my scholarly development. However, it was during the one-on-one semi-structured interviews that I began to see myself as a scholar. The autonomy I experienced in collecting, transcribing, and analyzing the data was empowering. Then, being able to design a project that resulted in and complemented the themes revealed from the data solidified my identification as a scholar. The doctoral journey is not an easy one. The doctoral process is tedious and requires a great deal of time, care, patience, and dedication. Now, at the end of my doctoral journey, I am proud that I persevered, as I was able to develop a professional development project that

addresses the needs identified in the collected data, shedding light on and providing a potential solution to an important topic.

### **Growth as a Project Developer**

For my doctoral capstone, I designed a 3 day professional development to address the themes revealed in the one-on-one semi-structured interviews. When developing this project, it was essential to consider the most effective research-based approaches and structures for each learning session to support teachers in transforming their instructional practices and shifting their mindsets to become trauma-informed practitioners. As a project developer for this research study, I created an outreach and communication plan to discuss professional development with schools. I also made an agenda for each day of the professional development, which included daily facilitator notes and slide decks. One significant aspect of being a project developer is determining how to evaluate the effectiveness of professional learning and the corresponding measurement tool. I embedded formative entrance and exit assessments each day to gauge the progress of the adult learners, providing the opportunity to pivot or shift any of the learning sessions if needed. Lastly, I also developed a summative evaluation and feedback tool for the end of the 3 day learning series, with the intention of adjusting any future professional development delivered. Ultimately, as a project developer, I developed a professional development project that addressed the needs identified in the data collected from the study participants with intentionality and care.

### **Growth as a Practitioner**

Throughout my doctoral journey, I experienced growth that significantly influenced my capabilities as an expert, leader, and reflective practitioner. I transitioned from having a basic understanding of how Grade K–5 teachers are challenged in supporting MCS overseas who experience trauma to becoming more of an expert on this issue. This expertise provided me with a deeper insight into how the military lifestyle can influence MCS overseas, the teachers who serve them, and the types of professional supports, resources, and training these teachers need to meet the needs of their students effectively. I was also able to develop my ability to synthesize complex theoretical research into a practical and usable tool through the professional development series. The doctoral capstone process also compelled me to grow as a leader, which postured me to champion and initiate change. Part of the doctoral process is identifying limitations and alternative approaches. The process of identifying limitations and alternative pathways forced me to think strategically and anticipate potential barriers that could hinder growth and change. Ultimately, growth as a practitioner requires considerable self-reflection. The doctoral process refined my ability to make sound, ethical, and methodological judgments, which stemmed from being intentionally reflective throughout the entire process.

### **Reflection on Importance of the Work**

Completing this basic qualitative study for my doctoral degree provided the privilege of reflecting on the instructional shifts necessary for teachers to be effective, reaffirming the importance of a holistic approach to teaching and learning for student

success, and reconsidering the role of educators of young learners. The doctoral research process also provided the opportunity to gain insight into K–5 teacher perceptions of their struggles with supporting MCS overseas, as well as the supports, resources, and training needed to improve their efficacy. All participants shared that they had not received specific professional training focused on the unique aspects of MCS and how military life can negatively influence the social and emotional responses of MCS in the classroom. Some of these social and emotional responses can disrupt the learning environment, potentially affecting academic outcomes. The project’s goal was to raise awareness of and acknowledge the unique aspects of MCS, understand how military-related trauma experiences affect MCS overseas socially, emotionally, and academically, and simultaneously equip teachers with research-based strategies and resources. As I continue to reflect, I am acutely aware that teachers overseas need sustainable, effective, and intentional professional development opportunities focused on the influence of trauma on MCS overseas. All MCS who serve alongside their military-serving family members deserve to receive the highest-quality education possible, and this professional development project study aims to accomplish this goal by addressing the participants’ needs.

### **Implications, Applications, and Directions for Future Research**

In this study, I investigated the gap in practice regarding the challenges encountered by teachers of MCS overseas who experience trauma. I explored this gap by conducting one-on-one semi-structured interviews. During the interview process, I gained insight into the perceptions of the challenges participants faced while supporting MCS

overseas. Some of these challenges included how the military lifestyle adversely affected some MCS, how negative social and emotional displays by struggling MCS affected the learning environment, and how the need for robust supports, resources, and training affected teachers and students in the school setting. Based on the data collected from participant responses, I developed a 3 day professional development project study.

The project study was designed to address the challenges presented by the participants interviewed. Day 1 of professional development focused on teachers developing a deeper understanding of how aspects of the military lifestyle can elicit traumatic experiences for MCS overseas. Day 2 focused on supporting teachers in understanding and navigating how the development of intentional social and emotional skills could address the challenging social and emotional responses of struggling MCS. Day 3 focused on supporting teachers with the tools and strategies for building a community of care and forming thoughtful stakeholder partnerships.

The goal of this professional development project study was to build the trauma-informed capacity and confidence of teachers through intentional professional learning opportunities. The project has clear implications for positive social change for both teachers and MCS overseas. The project directly equips teachers with the necessary resources and skills to respond to the trauma-related experiences of MCS more healthily and effectively. Furthermore, by providing teachers with opportunities to analyze and reflect on common but challenging military-related experiences MCS endure, such as relocation and separation, they become better equipped to recognize student behaviors as indicators of distress and intervene accordingly. The enhanced ability for teachers to

accurately recognize trauma-driven distress and implement intentional, research-based interventions is intended to ultimately influence the well-being and academic stability of MCS overseas. Gaining a deeper understanding of the military lifestyle and providing research-based strategies and tools for intervention for teachers establishes a more secure and supportive learning environment for MCS, fulfilling the goal of positive social change.

The implications for positive social change for this project study are limited to overseas MCS and the teachers who serve them. However, the findings have the potential to contribute to positive social change within the broader military context. This research could help shed light on the very real struggles that MCS face due to the military culture. Because relocation and separation are common aspects of military life, decision-makers who influence military family policy may address the study's findings by advocating for more trauma-informed policies, programs, and resources to better support all MCS influenced by the military lifestyle.

I employed a basic qualitative methodology, which limited the scope of my research study to a specific demographic using a single data collection source. As I reflected on the methodology for my research, I wondered how the findings might have been different if I had chosen a case study or an observational qualitative approach. I also wondered how the findings would have been influenced if I had utilized a different conceptual framework. Because my research involved teachers and students located overseas, a culturally responsive framework could have been used. A culturally responsive framework could have potentially revealed how cultural aspects influenced or

potentially exacerbated any trauma that MCS experienced due to relocating overseas. Alternatively, an academic-related conceptual framework could have been employed to identify the academic effects of relocation and separation on MCS overseas. As a reflective scholar, I must consider alternative methodologies and frameworks to minimize bias and enhance the trustworthiness of my research. As a research scholar, I must also reflect on how my research could inform future research recommendations.

Despite the contributions of my study, the limited scope of the basic qualitative design warrants empirical recommendations for future research. The analysis of the data regarding the challenges teachers faced in supporting MCS overseas revealed that further research is necessary to understand the different challenges faced by other military-connected stakeholders due to the unique aspects of the military lifestyle. One key recommendation is to focus research on military spouses and their perceptions of the challenges they face in supporting their school-age children who struggle with trauma related to military life. This inquiry could specifically focus on the relational and emotional difficulties military spouses face as they navigate the recurring cycles of relocation and separation. Future research addressing these topics could employ a qualitative approach, utilizing interviews as a form of data collection to gather rich insights; however, a quantitative design could also be beneficial for measuring the scope of the students' academic challenges. Expanding research to include the perceptions and challenges of other stakeholders is crucial for achieving a comprehensive understanding of how military life affects all those involved.

## Conclusion

The foundation of this study is grounded in the belief that teachers have the potential to significantly influence thousands of human beings throughout their careers. For MCS, who are not only resilient, but who also live dynamic and highly mobile lives, teachers have an even greater opportunity to play a significant role, as they can model and instill compassion, consistency, and courage in students who regularly face unpredictability. However, for teachers of MCS overseas to accomplish their mission of compassion, consistency, and courage, we must acknowledge the challenges they face in navigating the struggles of MCS. This study successfully addressed this critical need to better understand the challenges Grade K–5 teachers endure as they support MCS overseas who experience trauma.

The data collected revealed a profound need within overseas environments that supports MCS. The data confirmed that while every participant interviewed demonstrated genuine passion for their students and their well-being, systemic barriers hindered their capacity to provide trauma-informed care. The barriers included the frequent overlooking of teachers' professional struggles by decision makers and critical resource deficiencies. These insights highlighted the need for a professional development project study that acknowledged and addressed the challenges faced by overseas teachers, while simultaneously building their capacity and confidence as trauma-informed practitioners. The primary goal of this professional development was to address these barriers and create a supportive environment that empowered teachers to act as agents of stability.

However, this research study was not only successful because of the professional development project that resulted from it, but also in the belief that intentional practice can shift the landscape of care. This belief is paramount for the teachers who passionately serve MCS overseas, especially those dealing with the effects of trauma because of the military lifestyle. All teachers who serve MCS should understand that their service is a cornerstone of resilience. These educators are called to humbly move forward with the conviction that being trauma-informed supports their role as agents of stability and care for their students. The challenge for teachers of MCS overseas is not easy, but the potential for positive social change is high, especially when combined with a sustained collective effort. My ultimate hope is that this research may serve as a mandate for the entire military-connected community to prioritize and protect the well-being of all who serve alongside them.

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## Appendix A: The Project

The 3 day professional development project study will include the following components: Daily Schedule, Facilitator Notes, Daily Presentation Slide Deck, Notes, and Professional Development Evaluation and Feedback Form.

### *Day 1: Professional Development Schedule—Understanding Trauma in Military-*

#### *Connected Students (MCS)*

Time	Activity	Notes
8:30 am – 9:00 am (30 Minutes)	Registration & Light Refreshments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The participants will sign in at the registration table.</li> <li>• The participants will receive Day 1 training materials.</li> <li>• The participants can enjoy light refreshments, including pastries, coffee, and tea.</li> </ul>
9:00 am – 9:30 am (30 Minutes)	Welcome & Introduction Session – Overview & Entrance Ticket	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The facilitator will introduce themselves and provide an overview of the 3 day learning event, objectives, and norms.</li> <li>• The facilitator will lead the welcome activity and use the presentation slide deck as a guide.</li> </ul>
9:30 am – 11:00 am (90 Minutes)	Session 1: The Lived Experience of MCS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The facilitator will lead the scenario-based activity and use the presentation slide deck as a guide.</li> </ul>
11:00 am – 11:15 am (15 Minutes)	Morning Break	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Self-Guided</li> </ul>
11:15 am – 12:15 pm (60 Minutes)	Session 2: Connecting the Dots – The Military Lifestyle, Challenges, and Trauma	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The summary of the study’s findings and its connection to the scenarios from Session 1.</li> <li>• The facilitator will lead this activity and use the presentation slide deck as a guide.</li> </ul>

12:15 pm – 1:15 pm (60 Minutes)	Lunch	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Self-Guided</li> </ul>
1:15 pm – 2:15 pm (60 Minutes)	Session 3: What Do I Do? Challenge	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The facilitator will lead the scenario-based activity and use the presentation slide deck as a guide.</li> </ul>
2:15 pm – 2:30 pm (15 Minutes)	Afternoon Break	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Self-Guided</li> </ul>
2:30 pm – 3:00 pm (30 Minutes)	Closing Session (Exit Ticket): Call to Action	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The facilitator will lead the closing activity and use the presentation slide deck as a guide.</li> </ul>

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## **Day 1: Professional Development Facilitator Guide**

### ***(Before) Preparing for Day 1 Session Activities – Responsibilities and Routines***

- Participants will be assigned to a table with mixed-grade-level teachers. For example, at least one K–5 teacher will be at each table.
- Participants will receive their Day 1 table numbers and training materials as they sign in for the professional learning.
- Each table will have a number at the center and a resource container with supplies such as sticky notes, markers, sharpies, highlighters, pencils, pens, and an envelope with the documents needed for each session activity.
- The facilitator will use the slide deck to guide the professional development activities and to share pertinent information. Each session activity document, i.e., scenarios, research quotes, case studies, and role-playing activities, will be placed in its own labeled envelope for participants to access when each session begins.

Participants will have a copy of the daily slide deck with a designated section for taking notes printed out for them to use.

- The facilitator will share the overall objectives for the entire professional development series, establish the norms at the beginning of each day, and provide the expected learning outcomes for each activity.
- The facilitator will also share that breaks are built into the learning sessions, encouraging participants to take breaks as they need to as adult learners.
- The facilitator will introduce to participants each learning activity/session, review the materials, directions, and expected learning outcomes.
- The facilitator will ensure that the different chart papers needed for the various activities are labeled and located in designated locations in the learning space.

***(During) Launching Day 1 Session Activities – Responsibilities and Routines***

- Day 1 addresses the theme of understanding the trauma-related experiences of MCS.
- Welcome & Introduction Session (30 minutes)
  - The facilitator will welcome participants.
  - The facilitator will introduce themselves.
  - The facilitator will review the Day 1 learning objectives.
  - Welcome Activity
    - Purpose: This activity aims to set a warm, reflective, and professional tone, moving beyond simple pleasantries to establish a safe space for vulnerability and shared learning. The activity aligns

with adult learning practices by establishing participants as experienced professionals whose knowledge is valued.

- Materials: Different color sticky notes, writing tools, and chart paper.
- Groupings: Individual and table groups.
- Facilitator Instructions:
  - The facilitator will begin with a brief personal welcome and introduce themselves.
  - In this reflective activity, the facilitator will ask participants to write down one word that comes to mind when they think of military-connected children and one question they hope this training will answer on a yellow square sticky note.
  - The facilitator will ask participants to place their anonymous yellow square sticky notes on the charts that correspond to their sticky notes. For example, participants should place their question sticky notes on a “Question” chart paper and their one-word sticky notes on a “One Word” chart paper.
  - The facilitator will have placed four chart papers in designated locations throughout the room. There

will be two charts for questions and two charts for their one-word.

- This activity will immediately demonstrate that teacher concerns and perspectives are central to the learning.
  - Once the sticky notes are on the designated charts, ask table group participants to go to the different “question” and “one word” charts spread across the room and read what their colleagues shared.
  - On a sticky note of a different color, participants can add comments to any yellow square stickies with questions or thoughts, taking a stance of curiosity.
  - Expected Outcome: The expected outcome of this activity is for participants to feel comfortable and respected. More importantly, the facilitator will gain insights into the group’s current mindset and specific learning needs.
- Session 1: The Lived Experience of Military-Connected Students (90 minutes)
    - Purpose: This activity aims to allow participants to build a shared understanding of the unique characteristics and potential stressors of MCS overseas. The Session 1 activity is a foundational step for understanding trauma in this demographic.

- Materials: Day in the Life Scenario Cards (one envelope of 3 scenarios for each table group, See Appendix Notes), chart paper, writing tools.
- Groupings: Small groups of 4–6 participants (table groups with at least one K–5 teacher at each table).
- Facilitator Instructions:
  - The facilitator will introduce the concept of the “Day in the Life” scenario activity and explain that these are fictional stories based on the real experiences of MCS. The facilitator will share that each table has an envelope labeled “Day in the Life.” Each envelope will have three different scenario cards describing a possible experience of MCS (e.g., a child moving for the fifth time, a child with a deployed parent, a child whose parent is in a remote location with limited communication, a child who experienced a long deployment separation from a parent/guardian).
  - The facilitator will instruct the table groups to start with one scenario at a time and share that they may not have an opportunity to review the other scenarios in their envelope.
  - The facilitator will inform the participants that they will share their thoughts in a gallery walk at the end of the activity, along with a whole group debrief. A gallery walk is an opportunity for participants to get out of their seats and review the work of other groups and provide feedback collectively or individually as they

move from one group's work to another. Each group should spend about 5 minutes or less reviewing and the work from the other groups.

- The participants will read and discuss one scenario at a time with the goal of addressing as many scenarios as they can in the time permitted. After participants read and discuss a scenario, they will list the potential emotional effects, possible challenges, and feelings the child might be experiencing.
  - Each table will be given a chart paper, which they will divide into three spaces to capture the emotional effects, possible challenges, and feelings they listed for each scenario discussed.
  - After the participants complete their respective charts, the facilitator will facilitate a gallery walk where table groups review the charts from different groups.
  - After the gallery walk, the facilitator will lead a whole-group debrief, intentionally highlighting the connection between their observations from the scenarios and the unique aspects of MCS focused on relocation and separation.
- Expected Outcome: The expected outcome of this activity is that participants will develop a deeper, concrete understanding of how military-connected life overseas can create challenging conditions for MCS.

- Morning Break (15 minutes)
- Session 2: Connecting the Dots: Lifestyle, Challenges, and Trauma (60 minutes)
  - Purpose: This activity aims to help participants bridge the gap between understanding the lifestyle challenges of MCS and recognizing potential trauma responses. The Session 2 activity is a critical learning opportunity to encourage participants to reflect on their existing knowledge and biases.
  - Materials: Handout with research quotes or findings (See Appendix Notes), interactive whiteboard, or large screen.
  - Groupings: Table groups (same as Session 1).

Facilitator Instructions:

- The facilitator will distribute a handout summarizing a particular research’s findings on challenges and trauma. The handout will also have a series of anonymous quotes from the highlighted research.
- The facilitator will ask the table groups to discuss these quotes and reflect on how they align with their earlier “Day in the Life” scenario analysis.
- Introduce the core components of the 10 Steps to Create a Trauma-informed and Resilient School model. In particular, the facilitator will highlight the component: understanding trauma.
- The facilitator will define trauma and explain how trauma is not just a single event but a response to an event or a series of events,

and that these experiences are often an invisible backpack that MCS carry with them.

- Expected Outcome: The expected outcome of this activity is that participants will begin to re-frame their understanding of the challenges MCS encounter due to the military lifestyle as potential indicators of trauma.
- Lunch Break (60 minutes)
- Session 3: Reflection and What Do I Do? Challenges (60 minutes)
  - Purpose: This activity aims to provide participants with a practical application of the knowledge they have gained from the different learning sessions of the day, focusing on initial responses to address immediate observable problems.
  - Materials: What Do I Do? Challenge cards (see Appendix Notes), sticky notes, writing tools.
  - Groupings: Pairs.
  - Facilitator Instructions:
    - The facilitator will use a strategy of their choice to form participant pairs.
    - The facilitator will provide each pair with a “What Do I Do?” challenge card describing a classroom challenge (e.g., a child suddenly withdraws, refuses to participate, and becomes agitated during a sudden fire drill).

- The facilitator will instruct the pairs to read, reflect on, and share their initial responses to the cards. Then, the participants will develop trauma-informed de-escalation strategies that could benefit the different challenges.
  - After the pairs have had time to discuss their trauma-informed de-escalation strategies, the facilitator will facilitate a brief group share-out.
  - The facilitator will lead a reflective discussion using the following sentence prompts:
    - “What was easy about this activity?”
    - What was challenging about this activity?
    - What did you discover about your own assumptions?”
- Expected Outcome: The expected outcome of this activity is that participants will feel more confident in their ability to provide immediate, trauma-informed support and begin to reflect on their habits, assumptions, and reactions to students’ social and emotional responses in the classroom.
- Afternoon Break (15 minutes)
- Closing Session (30 minutes)
  - Purpose: This activity aims to synthesize the day’s learning, provide space for reflection, and introduce the next day’s focus.
  - Materials: Journals, reflection sheets, sticky notes, and writing tools.
  - Groupings: Individual, whole group.

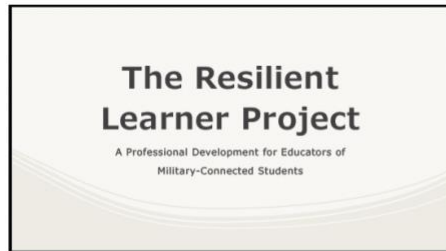
- Facilitator Instructions:
  - The facilitator will refer to, remind participants of, and encourage them to reflect on the questions they placed on the “question” chart from the morning’s Welcome activity.
  - The facilitator will lead a “3-2-1” reflection. The facilitator will ask participants to write down on a sticky note: 3 key takeaways from today, 2 things they will try to be more mindful of tomorrow, and 1 question they still have.
  - The participants will place their “3-2-1” sticky notes on the “Parking Lot” chart.
  - The facilitator will close the session by acknowledging the participants’ hard work and the emotional nature of the topic. The facilitator will thank the participants for their vulnerability and highlight the importance of their role in the lives of MCS.
- Expected Outcome: The expected outcome of this activity is that participants will have a chance to process any new information, solidify their understanding, and identify specific areas for continued growth.

***(After) Looking Ahead: Preparing for Day 2 – Responsibilities and Routines***

- The facilitator will review the questions from the morning welcome activity and the “3-2-1” stickies. Based on the responses, the facilitator will review the agenda and objectives for Day 2 and make any necessary adjustments.

- The facilitator will go to each table and gather the Day 1 resource envelopes and replace them with the Day 2 envelopes.
- The facilitator will also tidy the learning space and refill or replace necessary supplies.

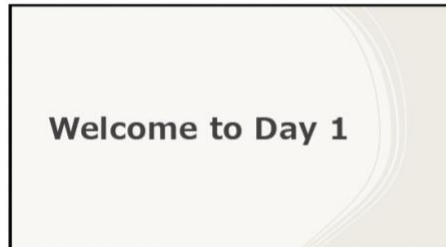
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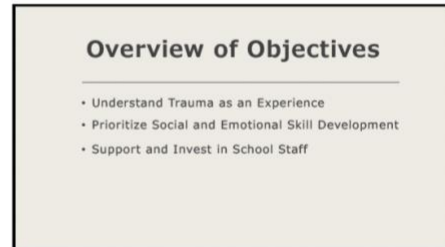
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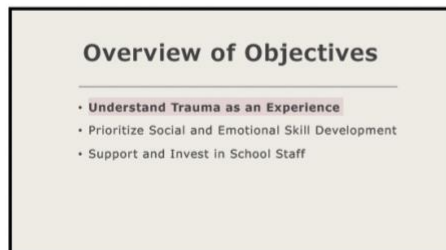
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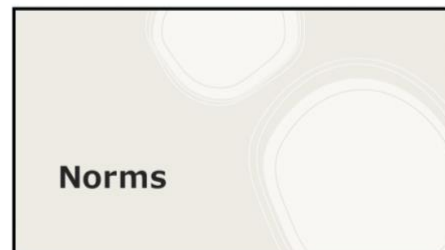
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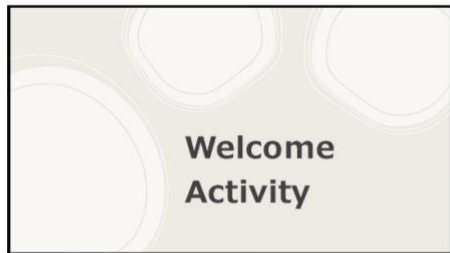
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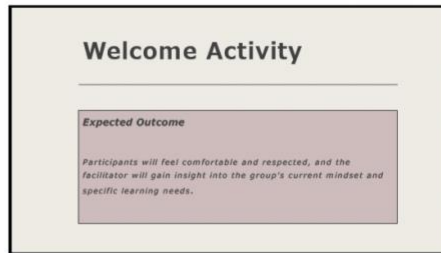
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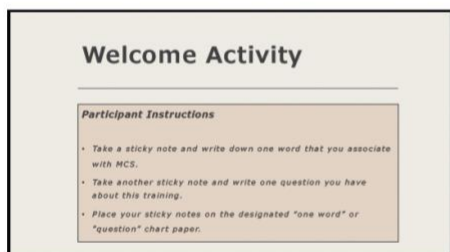
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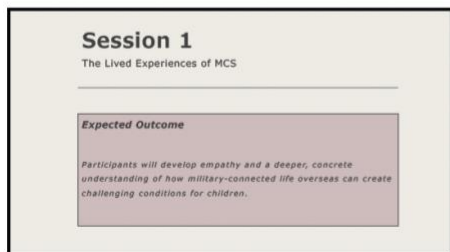
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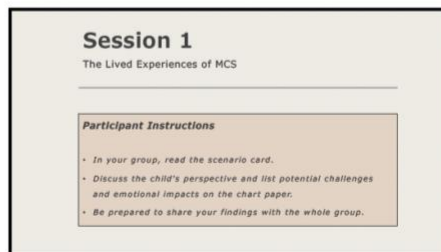
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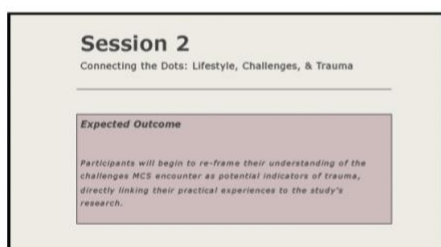
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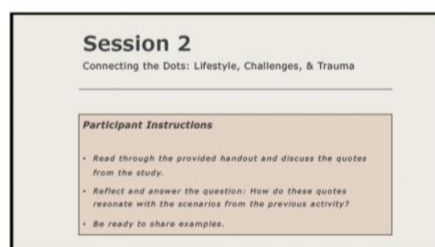
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17



18

**Session 3**  
De-escalation Scenarios

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**Expected Outcome**

*Participants will feel more confident in their ability to provide immediate, trauma-informed support and will begin to reflect on their habits, assumptions, and reactions.*

19

**Session 3**  
De-escalation Scenarios

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**Participant Instructions**


- Read the scenario.
- Discuss with your partner a few initial, calm, and supportive strategies you would use.
- Write one key takeaway on a sticky note to share with the group.

20



**Break**

21



**Closing Activity**  
Call to Action

22

**Closing Activity**  
Call to Action

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**Expected Outcome**

*Participants will have a chance to process the new information learned, solidify their understanding, and identify specific areas for continued growth.*

23

**Closing Activity**  
Call to Action

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**Participant Instructions**

- In your journal or reflection sheet, write down your "3-2-1" reflection.
- 3 key takeaways from today, 2 things to be more mindful of tomorrow, and 1 question you still have.

24

*Day 2: Professional Development Schedule – Navigating the Classroom: Social &*

*Emotional Skills Development*

Time	Activity	Notes
8:30 am – 9:00 am (30 Minutes)	Registration & Light Refreshments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The participants will sign in at the registration table.</li> <li>• The participants will receive any Day 2 training materials.</li> <li>• The participants can enjoy light refreshments, including pastries, coffee, and tea.</li> </ul>
9:00 am – 9:30 am (30 Minutes)	Welcome & Introduction Session – Overview & Entrance Ticket	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The facilitator will greet participants, review Day 1’s learning, and remind participants of the 3 day learning, Day 2 objectives, and norms.</li> <li>• The facilitator will lead the welcome activity and use the presentation slide deck as a guide.</li> </ul>
9:30 am – 10:45 am (75 Minutes)	Session 1: Emotional Intelligence & The Trauma- Informed Classroom	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The facilitator will lead the SEL Competency activity and use the presentation slide deck as a guide.</li> </ul>
10:45 am – 11:00 am (15 Minutes)	Morning Break	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Self-Guided</li> </ul>
11:00 am – 12:15 pm (75 Minutes)	Session 2: Role- Playing Solutions – Responding to Social and Emotional Responses of MCS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The facilitator will lead the role-playing activity and use the presentation slide deck as a guide.</li> </ul>

12:15 pm – 1:15 pm (60 Minutes)	Lunch	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Self-Guided</li> </ul>
1:15 pm – 2:15 pm (60 Minutes)	Session 3: Analyzing & Adapting Practices	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The facilitator will lead the reflection activity and use the presentation slide deck as a guide.</li> </ul>
2:15 pm – 2:30 pm (15 Minutes)	Afternoon Break	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Self-Guided</li> </ul>
2:30 pm – 3:00 pm (30 Minutes)	Closing Session (Exit Ticket): Self-Care Reflection	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The facilitator will lead the closing activity and use the presentation slide deck as a guide.</li> </ul>

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## Day 2: Professional Development Facilitator Guide

### *(Before) Preparing for Day 2 Session Activities – Responsibilities and Routines*

- Participants will be assigned to a new table group with mixed-grade-level teachers.
- Participants will receive their Day 2 table numbers and training materials as they sign in for the professional learning session.
- Each table will have a number at the center and a resource container with supplies such as sticky notes, markers, sharpies, highlighters, pencils, pens, and an envelope with the documents needed for each session activity.
- The facilitator will use the slide deck to guide the professional development activities and to share pertinent information. Each session activity document, i.e., scenarios, research quotes, case studies, and role-playing activities, will be placed in its own labeled envelope for participants to access when each session begins.

Participants will have a copy of the daily slide deck with a designated section for taking notes printed out for them to use.

- The facilitator will review the overall objectives for the entire professional development series, establish the norms at the beginning of each day, and provide the expected learning outcomes for each activity.
- The facilitator will also share that breaks are built into the learning sessions, encouraging participants to take breaks as they need to as adult learners.
- The facilitator will introduce to participants each learning activity/session, review the materials, directions, and expected learning outcomes.
- The facilitator will ensure that the different chart papers needed for the various activities are labeled and located in designated locations in the learning space.

***(During) Launching Day 2 Session Activities – Responsibilities and Routines***

- Day 2 addresses the theme of Social and Emotional Learning with the goal of providing participants with research-based strategies to support MCS.
- Welcome & Introduction Session (30 minutes)
  - The facilitator will welcome participants.
  - The facilitator will review and connect yesterday's learning objectives to Day 2's learning.
  - Welcome Activity
    - Purpose: This activity aims for participants to bridge the theoretical knowledge from Day 1 with the practical application of Day 2, preparing participants to engage in hands-on learning.

- Materials: None.
- Groupings: Whole group.
- Facilitator Instructions:
  - The facilitator will begin with a brief recap of Day 1, focusing on the key concepts of Relocation, Separation, and the Unique Aspects of MCS.
  - The facilitator will also address anything pertinent from the Parking Lot.
  - The facilitator will pose a simple question to the group to get them thinking, such as:
    - Now that we better understand the why behind these behaviors, what's one thing you're excited to learn how to do today?
- Expected Outcome: The expected outcome is that participants will feel a sense of continuity and be mentally prepared for the day's focus on practical strategies and skills development.
- Session 1: Emotional Intelligence & The Trauma-Informed Classroom (75 minutes)
  - Purpose: This activity aims to deepen participants' understanding of social and emotional responses as a function of trauma, not misbehavior.
  - Materials: Whiteboard/flipchart, pre-printed list of SEL Competencies (self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills,

responsible decision-making, See Appendix Notes), reflection sheets, sticky notes, and writing tools.

- Groupings: Whole group, small groups.
- Facilitator Instructions:
  - The facilitator will begin by asking the group to define social and emotional learning (SEL). The participants will write their ideas on their reflection sheet or sticky note.
  - The facilitator will introduce the list of SEL competencies and discuss how a child with trauma may struggle with one or more of the SEL competencies.
  - The facilitator will instruct participants on the Turn and Talk with a partner:
    - Think about a challenging moment you've had with MCS.
    - How might the child's trauma have influenced their ability to use a specific SEL skill(s) in that moment?
  - The facilitator will transition the whole group to small group work where each group is assigned one SEL competency to brainstorm and chart a list of classroom-level strategies to support it. There could potentially be more than one group working on the same SEL competency based on the number of total participants.
  - After the participants have written their list of classroom-level strategies, they will place their charts around the room.

- Each group will be assigned to a different group's chart paper and provide feedback on the group's strategies. Feedback can include clarifying questions or adding additional strategies using sticky notes.
- After the chart feedback, the groups will return to their chart paper to reflect, address, revise, or add to their list.
- Expected Outcome: The expected outcome for this activity is that participants will develop a more nuanced understanding of SEL within a trauma-informed context and gain specific strategies to support their students.
- Morning Break (15 minutes)
- Session 2: Role-Playing Solutions (75 minutes)
  - Purpose: This activity allows participants to practice and apply strategies in a safe, simulated environment, moving from theoretical knowledge to practical application. This activity directly applies the study's findings on the social and emotional responses of MCS.
  - Materials: Role-play scenario cards (see Appendix Notes, designated "actor" prompts, a reflection sheet, sticky notes, and writing tools.
  - Groupings: Triads (3 people: student, teacher, and observer).
  - Facilitator Instructions:
    - The facilitator will introduce the concept of role-playing as a low-stakes way to practice new skills.

- The facilitator will share that each triad's three role-play scenario cards are in a yellow envelope at their respective tables. Each role-play scenario card outlines a classroom situation (e.g., a child having a meltdown during transition, a child's parent just left on deployment, a child reacting to a fire drill).
- The facilitator will discuss the different roles and how each scenario describes each role. The participants are to use the role-play role description as a guide. The various roles for each activity include: a student, a teacher, and an observer. The observer's job is to use the guide on the role-playing cards to provide non-judgmental feedback and support the teacher.
- The facilitator will provide 15 minutes for each role scenario. The facilitator will make sure that participants know that each person in the triad must have a chance to be the teacher.
- After the role-play activity, the facilitator will lead a whole group debrief, asking participants what they learned about their own responses and what challenges they faced in applying the trauma-informed skills in the moment. The facilitator will also discuss the significance of the observer and ask the group how the role of an observer or coach can support or hinder the application of the trauma-informed skills.

- Expected Outcome: The expected outcome of this activity is that participants will gain hands-on experience in applying new skills and will be able to identify areas for personal growth and improvement in their responses.
- Lunch Break (60 minutes)
- Session 3: Analyzing and Adapting Practices (60 minutes)
  - Purpose: This activity encourages participants to critically examine why they respond the way they do and identify the underlying beliefs that influence their actions. This activity supports participants in challenging their assumptions and moving toward transformative change.
  - Materials: Journal, reflection sheet, and writing tools.
  - Groupings: Individual reflection followed by small group discussion.
  - Facilitator Instructions:
    - The facilitator will instruct participants to individually reflect on the role-playing activity in their journals or reflection sheets.
    - The facilitator will prompt the participants with prompts like:
      - What was your immediate instinctual response during the role-play?
      - Why do you think you responded that way?
      - How did it feel to try a new strategy?
      - What did you learn about your own beliefs about acting out behavior?

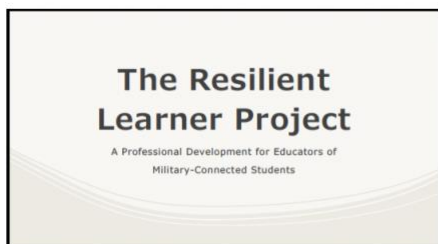
- After a few minutes of individual reflection, the facilitator will have the participants discuss their insights in their small groups.
- The facilitator will lead a final whole-group discussion, linking their reflections to the broader need for a paradigm shift in how they view student responses, and how taking a mindset of curiosity can be a first step in supporting a paradigm shift toward a trauma-informed mindset.
- Expected Outcome: The expected outcome for this activity is that participants will begin to understand their own beliefs and mental models related to student behavior and recognize the need for a more profound, personal shift toward a trauma-informed mindset.
- Afternoon Break (15 minutes)
- Closing Session (30 minutes)
  - Purpose: This activity aims to close with a focus on self-care and the emotional weight of this work, acknowledging the challenges identified in the study's themes.
  - Materials: None.
  - Groupings: Whole group.
  - Facilitator Instructions:
    - The facilitator will lead a guided mindfulness exercise or a brief self-care activity (e.g., box breathing, a quick stretching session).

- The facilitator will introduce the concept of “compassion fatigue” and “secondary trauma,” validating the feelings of burnout that can come from working with traumatized students.
- The facilitator will briefly preview Day 3’s focus on teacher supports and a community of care.
- Expected Outcome: The expected outcome of this activity is that participants will feel validated in the emotional challenges of this work and will be equipped with simple tools to begin their own self-care practices.

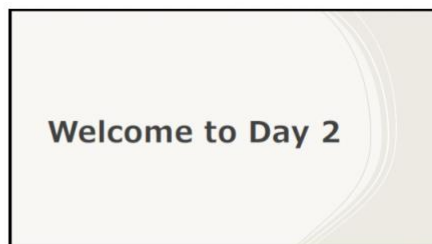
***(After) Looking Ahead: Preparing for Day3 – Responsibilities and Routines***

- The facilitator will reflect on the day’s learning and responses. Based on the responses, the facilitator will review the agenda and objectives for Day 3 and make any necessary adjustments.
- The facilitator will go to each table and gather the Day 2 resource envelopes and replace them with the Day 3 envelopes.
- The facilitator will also tidy the learning space and refill or replace necessary supplies.

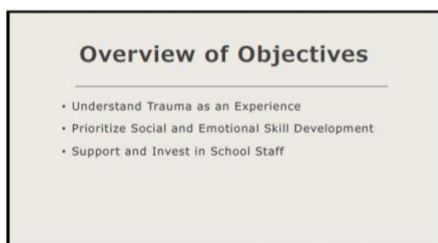
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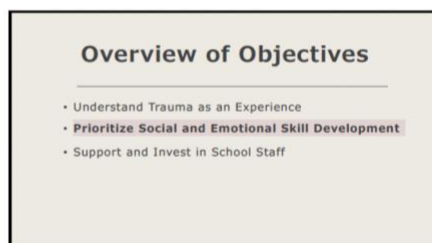
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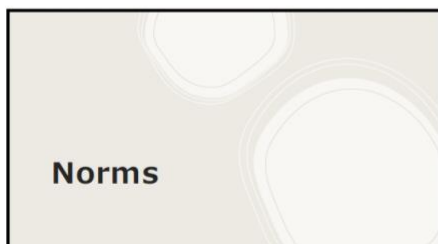
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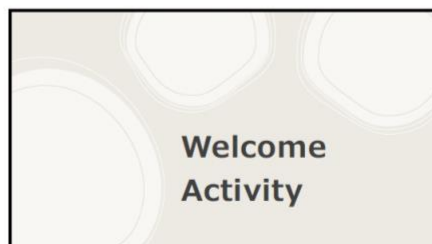
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### Welcome Activity

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**Expected Outcome**

*Participants will feel a sense of continuity and be mentally prepared for the day's focus on practical strategies and skills development.*

31

### Welcome Activity

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**Participant Instructions**

- Share a brief thought or reflection on how Day 1's learning changed your perspective.

32



### Session 1

Emotional Intelligence & The Trauma-Informed Classroom

33

### Session 1

Emotional Intelligence & The Trauma-Informed Classroom

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**Expected Outcome**

*Participants will develop a more nuanced understanding of SEL within a trauma-informed context and gain specific strategies to support their students.*

34

### Session 1

Emotional Intelligence & The Trauma-Informed Classroom

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**Participant Instructions**

- With your partner, reflect on a classroom moment and discuss the link between a trauma response and a specific SEL skill.
- In your small group, brainstorm and chart strategies to support your assigned SEL competency.

35



**Break**

36

**Session 2**  
Role-Playing Solutions: Responding to Social & Emotional Responses of MCS

37

**Session 2**  
Role-Playing Solutions: Responding to Social & Emotional Responses of MCS

**Expected Outcome**

*Participants will gain hands-on experience in applying new skills and will be able to identify areas for personal growth and improvement in their responses.*

38

**Session 2**  
Role-Playing Solutions: Responding to Social & Emotional Responses of MCS

**Participant Instructions**

- In your triad, take turns role-playing the teacher, student, and observer.
- The teacher should try to use the strategies from the previous session.
- The observer will provide specific, constructive feedback using the checklist.

39



40

**Session 3**  
Analyzing & Adapting Practices

41

**Session 3**  
Analyzing & Adapting Practices

**Expected Outcome**

*Participants will begin to understand their own beliefs and mental models related to student behavior and recognize the need for a more profound, personal shift toward a trauma-informed mindset.*

42

**Session 3**  
Analyzing & Adapting Practices

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**Participant Instructions**

- Use the reflection prompts to think about your role-playing experience.
- Be honest with yourself about your initial reactions.
- Share your reflections with your group.

43



44

**Closing Activity**  
Self-Care Reflection

45

**Closing Activity**  
Self-Care Reflection

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**Expected Outcome**

*Participants will feel validated in the emotional challenges of this work and will be equipped with simple tools to begin their own self-care practices.*

46

**Closing Activity**  
Self-Care Reflection

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**Participant Instructions**

- Participate in the mindfulness exercise.
- Reflect on the emotional demands of the work we have been discussing today and be prepared to take care of yourself this evening.

47

*Day 3: Professional Development Schedule – Building a Community of Care: Teacher*

*Support and Stakeholder Partnerships*

Time	Activity	Notes
8:30 am – 9:00 am (30 Minutes)	Registration & Light Refreshments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Participants will sign in at the registration table.</li> <li>• Participants will receive Day 3 training materials.</li> <li>• Participants can enjoy light refreshments, including pastries, coffee, and tea.</li> </ul>
9:00 am – 9:30 am (30 Minutes)	Welcome & Introduction Session – Overview & Entrance Ticket	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The facilitator will greet participants, review Day 1’s learning, and remind participants of the 3 day learning, Day 3 objectives, and norms.</li> <li>• The facilitator will lead the welcome activity and use the presentation slide deck as a guide.</li> </ul>
9:30 am – 10:45 am (75 Minutes)	Session 1: A Unified Front	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The facilitator will lead the case study activity and use the presentation slide deck as a guide.</li> </ul>
10:45 am – 11:00 am (15 Minutes)	Morning Break	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Self-Guided</li> </ul>
11:00 am – 12:00 pm (60 Minutes)	Session 2 – Creating Your Toolkit: Homegrown Practices & Resource Sharing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Different research articles with student regulation, de-escalation, and SEL best practices, strategies, and resources.</li> <li>• The facilitator will lead this activity and use the presentation slide deck as a guide.</li> </ul>
12:00 pm – 1:00 pm (60 Minutes)	Lunch	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Self-Guided</li> </ul>
1:00 pm – 2:00 pm (60 Minutes)	Session 3: Changing Our Paradigm	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The facilitator will lead this activity and use the presentation slide deck as a guide.</li> </ul>

2:00 pm – 2:15 pm (15 Minutes)	Afternoon Break	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Self-Guided</li> </ul>
2:15 pm – 2:45 pm (30 Minutes)	Closing Session – Exit Ticket	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The facilitator will lead the closing activity and use the presentation slide deck as a guide.</li> </ul>
2:45 pm – 3:00 pm (15 Minutes)	Professional Development Evaluation & Feedback Form	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The facilitator will lead this activity and use the presentation slide deck as a guide.</li> <li>• Participants will receive a web-based link to complete the Professional Development Evaluation and Feedback Form.</li> </ul>

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### **Day 3: Professional Development Facilitator Guide**

#### ***(Before) Preparing for Day 3 Session Activities – Responsibilities and Routines***

- Participants will be assigned to a new table group with mixed-grade-level teachers. For example, at least one K–5 teacher will be at each table.
- Participants will receive their Day 3 table numbers and training materials as they sign in for the professional learning session.
- Each table will have a number at the center and a resource container with supplies such as sticky notes, markers, sharpies, highlighters, pencils, pens, and an envelope with the documents needed for each session activity.
- The facilitator will use the slide deck to guide the professional development activities and to share pertinent information. Each session activity document, i.e., scenarios, research quotes, case studies, and role-playing activities, will be placed in its own labeled envelope for participants to access when each session begins.

Participants will have a copy of the daily slide deck with a designated section for taking notes printed out for them to use.

- The facilitator will review the overall objectives for the entire professional development series, establish the norms at the beginning of each day, and provide the expected learning outcomes for each activity.
- The facilitator will also share that breaks are built into the learning sessions, encouraging participants to take breaks as they need to as adult learners.
- The facilitator will introduce to participants each learning activity/session, review the materials, directions, and expected learning outcomes.
- The facilitator will ensure that the different chart papers needed for the various activities are labeled and located in designated locations in the learning space.

***(During) Launching Day 3 Session Activities – Responsibilities and Routines***

- Day 3 learning addresses the themes of building a community of care by thinking through communication protocols, creating a trauma-informed toolkit with research-based strategies and resources, and shifting paradigms.
- Welcome & Introduction Session (30 minutes)
  - The facilitator will welcome participants.
  - The facilitator will review and connect yesterday's learning objectives to today's.
  - Welcome Activity

- Purpose: This activity aims to transition from personal practice to building a collective support system, emphasizing community and collaboration.
  - Materials: Whiteboard or digital collaboration tool.
  - Groupings: Whole group.
  - Facilitator Instructions:
    - The facilitator will start the day with a whole group share.
    - The facilitator will ask participants to share one win or positive moment from their role-playing experience the day before. Reflecting on a win or a positive moment builds on the participants' sense of mastery and sets a positive, collaborative tone.
  - Expected Outcome: The expected outcome of the welcome activity is that participants will feel a sense of collective accomplishment, reinforcing their skills and preparing them to think about how those skills fit into a larger community of care.
- Session 1: A Unified Front - Communication & Collaboration (75 minutes)
  - Purpose: This activity aims to establish best practices for communicating and collaborating with all key stakeholders, addressing the study's finding that teachers need better support systems.
  - Materials: Case study scenarios (different for each group, See Appendix Notes), communication protocol template, and writing tools.

- Groupings: Table groups of 5-6 participants.
- Facilitator Instructions:
  - The facilitator will present case studies involving communication challenges (e.g., communicating a student's behavior to a parent, collaborating with a school psychologist, or coordinating with a school liaison).
  - The facilitator will instruct groups to analyze the different case studies and use the communication protocol template to draft and script a best-practice conversation for the scenarios, considering the roles of teachers, parents, and other school staff.
  - The facilitator will ask groups to volunteer to share their best-practice protocol with the whole group.
  - The facilitator will lead a discussion on the importance of shared language and clear protocols in building a strong support network.
- Expected Outcome: Participants will feel more confident in navigating difficult conversations and will have a tangible protocol to use in their practice.
- Morning Break (15 minutes)
- Session 2: Creating Your Toolkit - Homegrown Practices & Resource Sharing (60 minutes)
  - Purpose: This activity aims to empower teachers to be creators and curators of knowledge, building on the concepts of andragogy, where they are experts in their own classrooms.

- Materials: Whiteboard, markers, writing tools, sticky notes, research articles (printed or digital).
- Groupings: Whole group brainstorm, small groups.
- Facilitator Instructions:
  - The facilitator will begin with a whole-group brainstorm on the whiteboard, asking participants: What is one homegrown practice you currently use that helps a student regulate or de-escalate?
  - The facilitator will divide participants into small groups and provide each group with a few research articles on best practices for social-emotional support.
  - The facilitators will instruct groups to read the articles and then discuss:
    - How do your homegrown practices align with the research?
    - What new tool or strategy can you add to your toolkit based on this reading?
    - How can you adapt a research-based practice to fit your unique overseas environment?
- Expected Outcome: The expected outcome of this activity is that participants will feel validated in their existing knowledge and leave with new, research-supported strategies they have vetted and adapted for their own context.
- Lunch Break (60 minutes)

- Session 3: Changing Our Paradigms (60 minutes)
  - Purpose: This activity aims to culminate the training by challenging participants to reflect on their fundamental beliefs and values, leading to a profound, transformative shift in their practice.
  - Materials: Journals, individual reflection guide, and writing tools.
  - Groupings: Individual reflection, paired discussion.
  - Facilitator Instructions:
    - The facilitator will explain to the participants that this is about asking not just “what did I learn?” (single loop) or “how did I change my practice?” (double loop), but “why did I change my beliefs?” (triple loop).
    - The facilitator will provide participants with a reflection guide with questions like:
      - What did you learn about your own identity as a teacher of MCS?
      - What core belief about ‘challenging behavior’ has this training shifted for you?
      - What is the one thing you will do differently, not just because of a new strategy, but because of a change in your perspective?
    - The facilitator will have participants find a partner they have not worked with yet and share their reflections.

- Expected Outcome: The expected outcome for this activity is for participants to experience a transformative learning experience, moving beyond a new set of skills to a new way of thinking about their role and their MCS.
- Afternoon Break (15 minutes)
- Closing Session (30 minutes)
  - Purpose: This activity aims to celebrate the work, solidify commitments, and provide a clear path for ongoing support.
  - Materials: Index cards or sticky notes, writing tools.
  - Groupings: Individual work, paired sharing.
  - Facilitator Instructions:
    - The facilitator will ask each participant to write down their “One Action,” which is one concrete commitment they will make based on the 3 day professional development.
    - The facilitator will lead a closing ritual where participants share their actions with the person beside them.
    - The participants should take this time to highlight any resources and support staff available within their school system.
    - The facilitator will share a powerful, reflective statement acknowledging the unique and crucial work that the participants do and thanking them for their commitment to MCS.

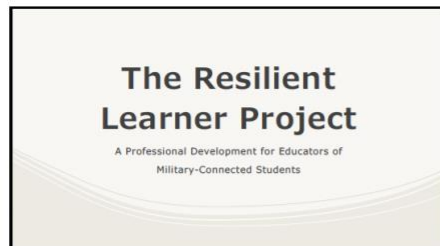
- Expected Outcome: The expected outcome of this activity is that participants will leave with a clear, personal commitment and a sense of shared purpose and continued support.
- Professional Development Evaluation & Feedback Form (15 minutes)
  - Purpose: This activity aims to allow participants to provide an honest, thoughtful, and reflective evaluation of the learning outcomes and provide feedback on improving the professional learning.
  - Materials: Laptops or a phone with an internet connection.
  - Groupings: Individual.
  - Facilitator Instructions:
    - The facilitator will thank participants for engaging and thoughtful participation in the 3 day professional development series.
    - The facilitator will ask participants to complete an evaluation and feedback form. The goal is for participants to have some time to honestly and authentically reflect on the session and provide feedback that could improve future professional learning.
    - The facilitator will give the participants a link to the virtual evaluation and feedback form.
    - The facilitator will inform participants that they are free to leave once the feedback form is complete.

- The facilitator's contact information will be presented on the whiteboard so participants can reach out if they have any questions.
- Expected Outcome: The expected outcome of this activity is for participants to evaluate the learning outcomes of the professional learning event and provide feedback to improve future professional learning sessions.

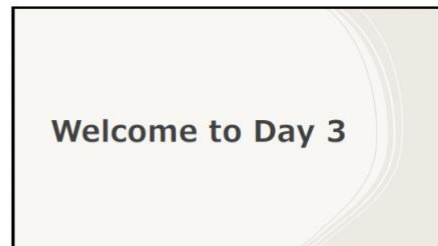
***(After) Looking Ahead: Preparing for Future Professional Learning Sessions – Responsibilities and Routines***

- The facilitator will review the Professional Development Evaluation and Feedback Form and reflect on the 3 day professional learning series.
- The facilitator will review the data collected and consider what aspects worked well, met expected outcomes, and what needs improvement.
- The facilitator will make any adjustments to the 3 day professional learning series as needed to improve future professional learning for teachers.

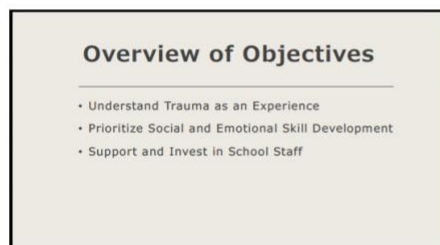
The PowerPoint slide deck for Day 3 is below:



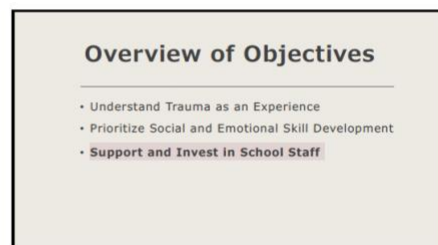
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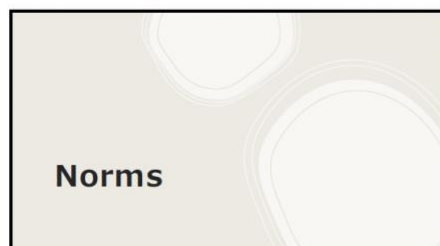
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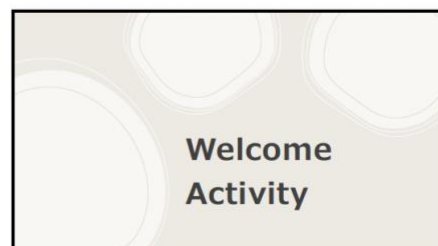
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**Welcome Activity**

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**Expected Outcome**

*Participants will feel a sense of collective accomplishment, reinforcing their skills and preparing them to think about how those skills fit into a larger community of care.*

54

**Welcome Activity**

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**Participant Instructions**

- Be ready to share a brief example of a time when a trauma-informed response felt successful during yesterday's session

55

**Session 1**  
A United Front

56

**Session 1**  
A United Front

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**Expected Outcome**

*Participants will feel more confident in navigating difficult conversations and will have a tangible protocol to use in their practice.*

57

**Session 1**  
A United Front

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**Participant Instructions**

- In your group, analyze the case study and use the provided template to draft a communication protocol for the situation.

58

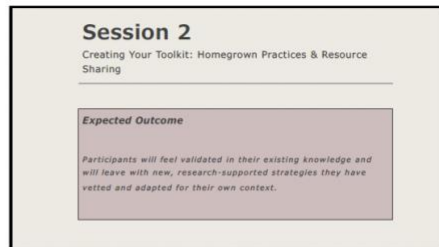


**Break**

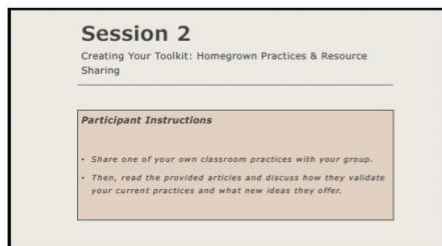
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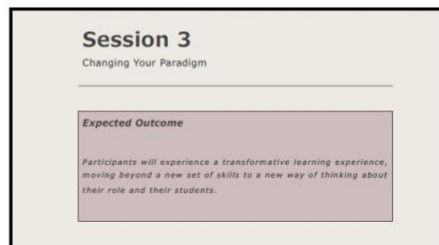
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**Session 3**  
Changing Your Paradigm

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**Participant Instructions**

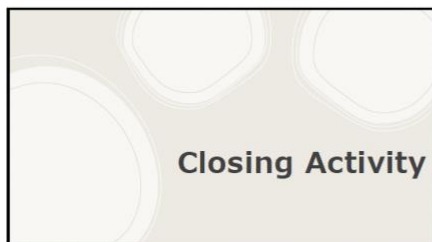
- Spend time with the reflection guide, journaling your thoughts honestly.
- Then, share your reflections with a partner, listening without judgment and sharing your own insights.

66



**Break**

67



**Closing Activity**

68

**Closing Activity**

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**Expected Outcome**

*Participants will leave with a clear, personal commitment and a sense of shared purpose and continued support.*

69

**Closing Activity**

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**Participant Instructions**

- On an index card or sticky note, write down your "One Action," or one concrete thing you will do differently.
- Be ready to share it with a partner.

70

## Appendix Notes

### Day 1 - Session 1: Day in the Life Scenarios

#### Scenario 1: The Invisible Backpack

- **Directions:** Read the scenario below and discuss the potential emotional and behavioral responses Alex is experiencing. Focus on identifying specific actions or feelings that could be linked to his recent move and separation from his friends and past routine. Be sure to capture your thoughts on the chart paper as you read and discuss the scenario.
- **Scenario:** Alex is a 5-year-old in kindergarten. His family just moved from a base in Japan to a base in Germany. This is Liam's third school in two years. His mom is a single parent and a Staff Sergeant in the Army. Liam's mom is exhausted as she has been working late every night as she gets settled into her new unit. At home, Alex seems withdrawn and cries easily, but at school, he is disruptive and often gets into arguments during free play. Liam does not have any friends yet and sometimes brings up his old school, talking about a friend named Sam. Alex does not understand why his friend is not with him.

#### Scenario 2: The Evolving Family

- **Directions:** Read the scenario below and discuss the potential physical and social manifestations of anxiety that Maya is exhibiting. Focus on identifying specific behaviors and feelings that could be a direct result of her father's deployment. Be sure to capture your thoughts on the chart paper as you read and discuss the scenario.
- **Scenario:** Maya is a 7-year-old in second grade. Her dad is on a 9-month deployment to a remote location with limited communication access. He called once in the last month, and the family got to talk to him for five minutes before the call dropped. Maya's mom is doing her best to manage the home and her own emotions. Maya has started wetting the bed at night and becomes very anxious when her mom is not in the same room as her. Maya's teacher has noticed she is having trouble focusing on her reading and is often distracted.

#### Scenario 3: The Juggling Act

- **Directions:** Read the scenario below and discuss the potential physical and social withdrawal Liam is experiencing. Focus on identifying specific signals that could indicate stress or anxiety related to the upcoming move. Be sure to capture your thoughts on the chart paper as you read and discuss the scenario.
- **Scenario:** Liam is an 8-year-old in third grade. His family has been at an overseas base for three years. His mom, a Lieutenant Commander in the

Navy, is now being transferred to the Pentagon in a few months. Liam’s dad is a stay-at-home parent and has been trying to figure out all the logistics. Liam’s mom and dad have been talking about the move constantly at dinner. Liam, who is usually a very good student, has started to have frequent headaches and stomachaches at school. He has stopped eating in the cafeteria with his friends and has become much quieter.

## Day 1 - Session 2: Connecting the Dots

### Research Quotes

“Nicholson et al. (2025) stated that because MCS often mirror the structure and discipline associated with the military lifestyle, they have become an invisible minority in education.”

“All participants, with different skills, training, and experience levels, implemented strategies to support struggling MCS to the best of their ability. Nicholson et al. (2025) shared that it is common for homegrown efforts to support struggling MCS as practical and research-based practices and programs are often slow or sporadic for teachers to access, utilize, and implement in their classrooms.”

“Participants acknowledged the presence of support staff at their schools. However, depending on the school’s location overseas and the support staff’s motivation and abilities, there is a potential for inconsistent care. Hill and Blue-Banning’s (2023) research indicated that the lack of continuity of care in education settings poses challenges in meeting the health needs of MCS.”

## Day 1 - Session 3: What Do I Do? Challenges

### Challenge 1: Grade K–1

- **Challenge:** A new student, Sofia, has joined your class. She just moved from another country and speaks English. Sofia has been completely silent since she arrived, even when you try to engage with her one-on-one. She clings to her backpack and refuses to participate in group activities.
- **Things to Consider:**
  - What might Sofia be feeling as a new student in a new school and country?
  - How can you show her you are a safe person without forcing her to speak?
  - What non-verbal cues or environmental changes could you use to make her feel more comfortable?
- **Possible Student Behaviors to Navigate:**

- Avoiding eye contact.
- Clinging to a personal item.
- Shaking head “no” to all offers.
- Hiding face or body language.

### **Challenge 2: Grade 2-3**

- **Challenge:** A student, Isabella, is a kind and bright child whose mother works as a pilot on a transport aircraft. Her mom’s job has a higher risk profile and unpredictable flight schedule. Isabella frequently asks to go to the nurse’s office with stomachaches and headaches, especially on days she knows her mom has a flight.
- **Things to Consider:**
  - What are the physical symptoms signaling for Isabella?
  - How can you provide a sense of control and predictability when her mother’s schedule is out of her control?
  - How can you validate Isabella’s feelings without encouraging her to go to the nurse’s office constantly?
- **Possible Student Behaviors to Navigate:**
  - Frequent requests to go to the nurse.
  - Complaining of physical pain.
  - Restlessness or fidgeting.
  - Asking about the time or her mom’s whereabouts.

### **Challenge 3: Grade 4-5**

- **Challenge:** A student, Marco, has been told his family will be moving in two weeks. His teacher has noticed he has become more aggressive with his classmates and friends. Marco has been yelling and lashing out over small things like his papers falling out of his desk. He also broke his pencil on purpose during a math lesson and said, “Who cares? I won’t be here anyway!”
- **Things to Consider:**
  - What is Marco’s outburst really communicating?
  - How can you respond to the disrespectful behavior while also addressing the underlying pain?
  - What can you do in the final two weeks to help him feel a sense of closure and control?
- **Possible Student Behaviors to Navigate:**
  - Physical aggression with peers or objects.
  - Defiant or disrespectful comments.
  - Excessive crying or emotional outbursts.
  - Unwillingness to complete assignments.

## Day 2 – Session 1: SEL Competencies

1. **Self-Awareness** – ability to recognize one’s emotions, thoughts, and behaviors.
2. **Self-Management** – ability to regulate one’s own emotions and manage their thoughts/behaviors.
3. **Social Awareness** – ability to acknowledge the perspectives of others and empathize with them.
4. **Relationship Skills** – ability to make and maintain healthy relationships.
5. **Responsible Decision-Making** – ability to make healthy choices and decisions regarding oneself and in social situations.

## Day 2 – Session 2: Role-Playing Scenarios

### Role-Play Scenario 1: Grade Level – K

- **Directions:** Role-play the following scenario focusing on using a calm, non-confrontational approach to help the student co-regulate and express their emotions without escalating the situation. This scenario is a continuation of “The Invisible Backpack” from Day 1.
- **Roles:**
  - **The Teacher:** You notice your student (Alex) who has been withdrawn since coming to your classroom. Today, during a small group activity, he has put his head down on his desk and is refusing to participate. He is not visibly upset, but when you get closer, you see he has tears in his eyes.
  - **The Student (Alex):** You are feeling overwhelmed and exhausted. You miss your old friends at your old school and feel like you have to start all over again. You don’t want to talk about it and just want to be left alone. You are getting frustrated by the teacher trying to talk to you.
  - **The Observer:** You will be looking for how the teacher’s response influences the student’s behavior. Did the teacher’s tone and body language help or hinder the student’s ability to calm down? You will provide real-time feedback and suggestions.
- **Possible Trauma-Informed Teacher Responses:**
  - **Non-Verbal:** Quietly placing a hand on the student’s back (with permission).
  - **Simple Validation:** “I see you, Alex. It’s okay to feel sad.”
  - **Offering Choices:** “Would you like to stay here and rest for a minute, or go sit in our quiet corner?”
  - **Low-Demand Language:** “When you’re ready, you can come sit with me.”
- **Possible Student Behaviors to Navigate:**

- Crying silently with head on the desk.
- Shaking or trembling slightly.
- Refusing to speak or make eye contact.
- Tensing up when approached by the teacher.
- **Observer’s Guide to Support:**
  - **If the teacher uses a direct question like “What’s wrong?”:** Prompt them to try a statement of observation instead. “Remember, a direct question can feel like a demand. How can you show you see his distress without asking for an explanation?”
  - **If the teacher is unsure what to do:** Encourage them to use non-verbal cues. “Try just being a calm presence next to him first. Your calm energy can be a powerful tool.”

### **Role-Play Scenario 2:** Grade Level – 2

- **Directions:** Role-play the following scenario, focusing on using empathy and a skills-based approach to address the student’s anxiety. Instead of focusing on getting the work done, prioritize helping the student calm their mind and feel safe. This scenario is a continuation of “The Evolving Family” from Day 1.
- **Roles:**
  - **The Teacher:** You are working with a student (Maya) during reading time. She is struggling to focus and is picking at the edges of her book. You know her dad is deployed, and she has been anxious. She says, “I can’t do this. My head is fuzzy.”
  - **The Student (Maya):** You are feeling worried and cannot get your mind to focus on the words. You are missing your dad and are anxious about your mom being home alone. You feel panicky and want to stop reading.
  - **The Observer:** You will be looking for how the teacher helps the student regulate. Did the teacher’s actions address the underlying anxiety or just the reading problem? You will provide real-time feedback and suggestions.
- **Possible Trauma-Informed Teacher Responses:**
  - **Validating Emotion:** “It sounds like your brain is feeling a little fuzzy right now, and that is okay.”
  - **Offering a Break:** “How about we take a quick break? You can grab a drink of water or just sit quietly for a minute.”
  - **Reducing the Demand:** “Let us just look at the pictures on this page for now. No need to read any words.”
  - **Modeling Co-Regulation:** “Let’s take a deep breath together, like we practiced. Ready? In for four, hold for four, out for four.”
- **Possible Student Behaviors to Navigate:**
  - Fidgeting with clothing or picking at the book cover.

- Shaking their head “no” or saying, “I can’t.”
- Tearing up or becoming visibly frustrated.
- Staring blankly at the page, unable to focus.
- Complaining of physical symptoms like a headache or stomachache.
- **Observer’s Guide to Support:**
  - **If the teacher focuses on the academic task:** Prompt them to pivot to the emotion. “She’s already told you her head is ‘fuzzy.’ How can you respond to that feeling first, before you address the reading?”
  - **If the teacher asks “Why?”:** Encourage the teacher to use a statement of observation first. “Instead of asking ‘why’ she’s feeling this way, which can be overwhelming, try saying ‘I see you’re feeling worried.’ This builds trust without pressure.”

### Role-Play Scenario 3: Grade Level – 3

- **Directions:** Role-play the following scenario, focusing on creating a sense of predictability and control for the student. Prioritize acknowledging the student’s physical symptoms as a valid expression of their stress. This scenario is a continuation of “The Juggling Act” from Day 1.
- **Roles:**
  - **The Teacher:** A student (Liam) comes to your desk for the third time this week, holding his stomach and complaining of a headache. He is quiet and seems withdrawn from his friends.
  - **The Student (Liam):** You are nervous about the upcoming move. Your parents are always talking about it, and you are tired of hearing about it. Your stomach really does hurt, and you feel like you are losing your friends.
  - **The Observer:** You will be looking for how the teacher validates the student’s experience. Did the teacher rush to a solution or take the time to understand the root cause of the physical symptoms? You will provide real-time feedback and suggestions.
- **Possible Trauma-Informed Teacher Responses:**
  - **Empathetic Connection:** “I’m so sorry your stomach hurts. I hear that you are feeling worried about the move.”
  - **Proactive Plan:** “How about we make a plan for the next time your stomach feels this way? Maybe you can get this pass and go to the nurse’s office, or you can go to the quiet corner.”
  - **Introducing a Routine:** “Let us try a daily check-in. Every morning, you can tell me how you are feeling with this mood chart, and we can make a plan for the day.”
  - **Validating the Feeling:** “It makes sense that you feel this way. Change can be really hard.”
- **Possible Student Behaviors to Navigate:**
  - Complaining of physical pain like a headache or stomachache.

- Becoming quieter and more withdrawn.
- Avoiding social interactions with classmates or friends.
- Increased irritability or lashing out at small frustrations to occur.
- Refusing to eat lunch or snacks especially during breaks.
- **Observer’s Guide to Support:**
  - **If the teacher suggests a quick fix like “Just drink some water”:** Prompt them to explore the underlying cause. “That’s a good step, but what if it is not just about hydration? How can you show him you’re concerned about more than just the physical symptom?”
  - **If the teacher becomes frustrated:** Remind them that the behavior is communication. “Remember, this behavior is Liam’s way of telling you he is overwhelmed. What is one thing you can offer him to make him feel a sense of control over his situation?”

### Day 3 – Session 1: Communication Case Study Scenarios

#### Scenario 1 – Stakeholder: Parent/Guardian (Military Service Member)

- **The Situation:** You teach a third-grade student, Ethan. His family is scheduled to PCS (Permanent Change of Station) in six weeks. Since the date was announced, Ethan has become highly disruptive. You need to initiate a conversation to explain his behavior and the need for support from his parent or guardian.
- **Challenge:** The parent or guardian is highly focused on discipline and sees the behavior as a lack of respect, not a sign of emotional distress.
- **Task:** Script a draft email to the parent using the Communication Protocol Template, focusing on factual observation and proposing a small, collaborative action like a simple morning check-in ritual.

#### Scenario 2 – Stakeholder: School Counselor/Specialist

- **The Situation:** Liam, a first-grade student, is struggling with separation anxiety due to his mother’s nine-month deployment. He clings to his favorite stuffed animal and has regressed academically. The counselor is overwhelmed and has a long waiting list.
- **Challenge:** You need to make a persuasive case to a resource-strapped counselor that this is urgent. The MCS trauma-related response requires immediate attention and resources.
- **Task:** Script a concise referral note or in-person request to the school counselor, focusing on the context and proposing a clear, time-limited action that could be possible for the counselor to commit to like a 5-minute daily check-in.

#### Scenario 3 – Stakeholder: Military Family Life Counselor (MFLC)

- **The Situation:** Chloe, a second-grade student, is showing signs of hyper-vigilance and is startled by sudden noises after her father returned from a deployment. You suspect her father may be struggling with his own reintegration, which is influencing Chloe. The MFLC is often on campus, but their role is strictly non-clinical.
- **Challenge:** Collaborating effectively with an external, non-reporting resource while respecting their professional boundaries and focusing only on the child's observable classroom behavior.
- **Task:** Script a private conversation with the MFLC, focusing on the observed behavior and the possibility of supporting the student during an unstructured time like lunch or recess

### 3 day Professional Development Evaluation and Feedback Form

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

School: \_\_\_\_\_ Grade Level: \_\_\_\_\_

*Please circle one response that captures your experience during the PD.*

*1 – Strongly Agree    2 – Agree    3 – Neutral    4 – Disagree    5 – Strongly Disagree*

1. The PD supported you in building a deeper understanding of how military-connected life overseas can create challenging conditions for MCS.

1                      2                      3                      4                      5

2. The PD helped you re-frame your understanding of the challenges MCS encounter due to the military lifestyle as potential indicators of trauma.

1                      2                      3                      4                      5

3. The PD helped you feel more confident in your ability to provide immediate, trauma-informed support?

1                      2                      3                      4                      5

4. The PD helped you develop a more nuanced understanding of SEL within a trauma-informed context and gain strategies to help support you students.

1                      2                      3                      4                      5

5. The PD provided hands-on experiences in applying new skills and helped you identify areas for personal growth and improvement in your responses to MCS experiencing trauma.

1                      2                      3                      4                      5

6. The PD helped you begin to understand your beliefs and mental models related to student behavior and recognize the need for a personal shift toward a trauma-informed mindset.

1                      2                      3                      4                      5

7. The PD helped you feel more confident in navigating difficult conversations and provided you with a tangible protocol to use your practice.

1            2            3            4            5

8. The PD validated your existing knowledge and left you with vetted research-supported strategies you can adapt in your own context.

1            2            3            4            5

9. The PD provided a learning experience that moved you beyond a new set of skills to a new way of thinking about your role and the MCS you serve.

1            2            3            4            5

10. What aspect of the PD resonated with you the most?

11. What aspect of the PD worked well?

12. What aspect of the PD needs improvement?

13. What additional feedback do you have?

## Appendix B: Interview Protocol

Interview Protocol**Introductory script:**

*Thank you for your interest in participating in my research study. Before we get started, I wanted to share a bit about myself and why I am doing this study as part of my doctoral research.*

*My name is Lachanda Garrison, and I have had the pleasure of teaching military-connected students for over 18 years overseas. During that time, I was a classroom teacher, instructional coach, and interventionist. After many years of being an instructional coach, I was able to return to the classroom as a 2nd-grade teacher. However, I quickly learned that many of my colleagues and I observed that students were struggling socially and emotionally, which influenced their academic performance. My colleagues stated that they struggled with and did not have the tools to appropriately identify or meet our students' needs, which extended beyond academics.*

*This journey brings us together today. I am studying and want to learn more about the challenges Grades K–5 teachers encounter supporting military-connected students overseas who experience trauma. I am excited to learn more about your experiences and your perceptions of any challenges you may have faced supporting these students and your ideas about how to better invest in teachers who are supporting struggling military-connected children.*

*For the purpose of this research, trauma will be defined as an event, series of events, or experiences—physical or emotional—that a student has encountered, which was harmful or life-threatening to the student. These encounters can impair students' abilities to function mentally, physically, socially, emotionally, academically, and spiritually.*

*For military-connected students overseas, these traumatic experiences may result from, but are not limited to:*

- *Multiple and/or frequent moves.*
- *Extended or repeated separation events from military-serving parents.*
- *Extended periods of time away from extended family and other support systems.*
- *Cultural adjustments and the challenges of adapting to new environments.*
- *Exposure to dangerous situations due to the nature of military service.*
- *Exposure to stressors associated with the military lifestyle.*

*These experiences, when combined, can create a unique and complex trauma landscape for military-connected students overseas, potentially influencing their overall well-being and academic success.*

*As you answer my interview questions today, please keep this definition in mind.*

*On another note, I will be audio recording our interview to create a transcript and an accurate record of what you share with me today. We will both turn off our cameras so that I can begin audio recording this interview session.*

**[START RECORDING]**

### **Background, Screening, and Introductory Questions:**

*Today's date is [DATE], and it is [TIME, including time zone]. Thank you for your willingness to volunteer for my doctoral research study.*

*Before we get started with the official interview, I want to confirm that you read the letter of consent prior to this interview and ensure you understand the following 1) I will protect your confidentiality, and 2) You can stop this interview at any time.*

***Do you agree to be interviewed for this study?***

*Do you have any questions about participating in this study?*

*Thank you, Let's go ahead and transition to the interview questions.*

### ***Table of Interview Questions***

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**Transition Statement:** *My first group of questions relate to your experiences with military-connected students. (Share any definitions participant may need to best understand what you're getting at.)*

<b>RQ #1:</b> <i>What are Grade K–5 teacher perceptions of the challenges they encounter in supporting military-connected children overseas who experience trauma?</i>	
<b>Interview Questions (IQs)</b>	<b>Alignment to framework</b>
<b>IQ 1:</b> <i>Please tell me about your general experiences teaching military-connected students overseas. What are some of the unique aspects of this student population that you have observed?</i>	<b><i>Understanding Trauma as an Experience</i></b>
<b>Prompts:</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>What are common characteristics you noticed in this population versus non-MCS?</i></li> </ul>	

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>How does teaching this population differ from teaching non-MCS?</i></li> <li>• <i>What were your first impressions when you began teaching MCS?</i></li> </ul>	
<p><b>IQ 2:</b> <i>Tell me about a situation where you felt a military-connected student was experiencing more than the typical adjustment responses. What indicators or observations made you think they were experiencing something atypical?</i></p>	<p><b><i>Understanding Trauma as an Experience</i></b></p>
<p><b>Prompts:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>What did you observe?</i></li> <li>• <i>How did MCS with atypical adjustment responses differ than other MCS in class who were adjusting more typically?</i></li> <li>• <i>How did you understand or make sense of what was happening with the MCS?</i></li> </ul>	
<p><b>IQ 3:</b> <i>Tell me about a time when you observed a military-connected student overseas exhibiting signs that you perceived might be related to them experiencing a challenging time.</i></p>	<p><b><i>Understanding Trauma as an Experience</i></b></p>
<p><b>Prompts:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>What were the signs that stood out to you regarding this student?</i></li> <li>• <i>What was the context of this situation? (e.g., classroom, lunch, recess etc.)</i></li> <li>• <i>What did you think was going happening with this MCS?</i></li> <li>• <i>How frequent were these signs displayed by students experiencing a challenging or difficult time?</i></li> </ul>	
<p><b>IQ 4:</b> <i>Tell me about any challenges you encountered in trying to support military-connected students, especially considering the potential for trauma.</i></p>	<p><b><i>Understanding Trauma as an Experience</i></b></p>
<p><b>Prompts:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>What did you know about this student's situation?</i></li> <li>• <i>Describe any red flags regarding this situation.</i></li> <li>• <i>Describe any challenges you experienced in learning more about the student's situation.</i></li> <li>• <i>What did you do to gather more information about the student?</i></li> </ul>	
<p><b>IQ 5:</b> <i>Tell me about an experience where you felt a student's actions might be related to the unique stressors of military life overseas, such as deployments or frequent moves. What challenges did you face in addressing that situation?</i></p>	<p><b><i>Understanding Trauma as an Experience</i></b></p>
<p><b>Prompts:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>What specific stressors did you suspect were influencing the student?</i></li> <li>• <i>Describe how you supported the MCS in that moment?</i></li> <li>• <i>What, if any, were challenges you faced in providing support for the MCS?</i></li> </ul>	

**Transition Statement:** *Now that you've shared about your experiences with military-connected students overseas, I would like to move on to questions related more to social*

and emotional skills development in connection with supporting military-connected students. (Share any definitions participant may need to best understand what you're getting at.)

<b>RQ #1:</b> <i>What are Grade K–5 teacher perceptions of the challenges they encounter in supporting military-connected children overseas who experience trauma?</i>	
<b>Interview Questions (IQs)</b>	<b>Alignment to framework</b>
<b>IQ 6:</b> <i>Tell me how you prioritize the development of social and emotional skills alongside the academic needs of MCS (who experience trauma).</i>	<b>Prioritize Social and Emotional Skill Development</b>
<b>Prompts:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>How do you balance teaching core lessons and the development of social and emotional skills?</i></li> <li>• <i>What strategies do you use to integrate social and emotional skills development into academic instruction?</i></li> <li>• <i>How do you collaborate with other school staff to address the social and emotional needs of MCS?</i></li> </ul>	
<b>IQ 7:</b> <i>Tell me about some social and emotional learning (SEL) strategies or programs that have been most effective in supporting MCS overseas who might be dealing with the effects of trauma (and any challenges you may have in implementing these strategies or programs)?</i>	<b>Prioritize Social and Emotional Skill Development</b>
<b>Prompts:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Tell me about any challenges you may have experienced in implementing SEL in your classroom/instruction?</i></li> <li>• <i>In what ways do you identify success of using/implementing SEL strategies or programs?</i></li> </ul>	

**Transition Statement:** *My last set of questions are related to your thoughts, ideas, and suggestions regarding the investments needed to support Grades K–5 teachers to better support military-connected students overseas who experience trauma. (Share any definitions participant may need to best understand what you're getting at.)*

<b>RQ #2:</b> <i>What are Grade K–5 teacher perceptions of the supports, resources, and training needed to support military-connected children overseas who experience trauma?</i>	
<b>Interview Questions (IQs)</b>	<b>Alignment to framework</b>
<b>IQ 8:</b> <i>Tell me about any training or prior experiences that have prepared you for dealing with MCS overseas who might be experiencing trauma.</i>	<b>Support and Invest in School Staff</b>
<b>Prompts:</b>	

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>What aspects of your training or previous experience was helpful, and what was lacking?</i></li> <li>• <i>How did you identify the signs or symptoms of trauma in MCS?</i></li> <li>• <i>What other resources or information would have been helpful to you?</i></li> <li>• <i>What challenges have you faced in finding or accessing the necessary supports and resources within the school setting for MCS who experience trauma?</i></li> </ul>	
<p><b>IQ 9:</b> <i>What training or professional learning would best equip you to support MCS overseas who experience trauma effectively?</i></p>	<p><b><i>Support and Invest in School Staff</i></b></p>
<p><b>Prompts:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>What specific areas of trauma-informed care you would like to learn more about or receive training/professional learning on?</i></li> <li>• <i>How would this training or professional learning influence your interactions with MCS students?</i></li> <li>• <i>Describe what and how current training has prepared you for supporting MCS who experienced trauma.</i></li> <li>• <i>Overall, what do you need to support MCS who have experienced trauma?</i></li> </ul>	
<p><b>IQ 10:</b> <i>What additional resources or training do you believe would be most beneficial in enhancing your ability to prioritize and support the social and emotional skill development of military-connected children overseas who experience trauma?</i></p>	<p><b><i>Support and Invest in School Staff</i></b></p>
<p><b>Prompts:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>What specific SEL strategies, frameworks, or models you would like to learn more about?</i></li> <li>• <i>What format of training would be most helpful to you? (e.g., in-person trainings, mentorship, virtual professional development sessions, etc.)</i></li> <li>• <i>How often would you need updated, current, and relevant training to support MCS who experience trauma?</i></li> </ul>	

**Final Interview Question:**

*Is there anything else about military-connected students that we have not yet had a chance to discuss?*

***Additional questions you might end with:***

- *What have you learned about your teaching practice through all of this?*
- *What have you learned about yourself through all of this?*
- *Do you have anything else to add?*

**Closing Script:**

*Thank you so much for your time today. I really do appreciate you sharing your thoughts with me.*