# **Article Summary: Thomas, Crosby & Vanderhaar (2019)**

Thomas, S. M., Crosby, S., & Vanderhaar, J. (2019). Trauma-informed practices in schools across two decades: An interdisciplinary review of research. *Review of Educational Research*, *43*(1), 422–452.

## Background and Purpose

The literature review presented in the article had two purposes: (1) to describe the conceptual frameworks and methods used to study trauma-informed school practice and (b) to summarize the related research findings. It was based on 33 carefully selected peer-reviewed articles in research journals, which reported on 30 different interventions.

## Frameworks and Methods

The research literature exhibited three main concerns: (1) professional development, (2) organizational changes, and (3) changes to professional practice. The focus of most of the studies (pp. 433-440) was on the use of programs *with children specifically identified as traumatized* (via war or immigration, or exhibiting PTSD) rather than with the organizational changes that are a concern in the field of trauma-informed education.

By discipline 19 of the 33 studies appeared in interdisciplinary journals, six in psychology, five in education, and three in social work (p. 441). The earliest study in education identified by the review was published in 2012 (p. 442). The concerns of educators are little represented in this literature.

## Research Findings

Student outcomes were examined in 13 studies (p. 443). About half of those might be described as experimental or quasi-experimental. Nonetheless, nearly all the studies reported a positive influence for the intervention studied, whether they had examined student outcomes or not. Just half of the outcome studies imposed statistical controls for student or school characteristics. Most of the published studies did not describe the context or participants adequately (p. 443) despite the fact that scholars in the field stress the importance of context to trauma-informed practice. Even though results overall were positive, study limitations call for cautious interpretation.

## Recommendations

Research about trauma-informed education, including what it is and what it means for schools, is in its infancy. The authors (pp. 445-447) recommend (1) broadening recognition and understanding of trauma and its impacts, (2) shifting from deficit notions of trauma, (3) placing culturally responsive instruction at the center of trauma-informed education, and (4) organizing to promote staff well-being. The authors “advocate for a truly systems-wide discussion … that results in actionable recommendations and respect for all individuals and components of the system with explicit attention to schools” (p. 448).