

Conceptual Framework Concept Map



Conceptual Framework Memo

Conceptual Framework Overview

I aim to study how middle school students who have experienced trauma in one way or another perceive their self-efficacy for self-regulated learning (SRL), and subsequently how this might impact their academic outcomes. This is a key intersection of interest as middle school is a period of vast developmental transitions across the board. Furthermore, research has established that trauma negatively correlates with academic outcomes and self-efficacy; and SRL strategy use is predicted by self-efficacy for SRL, and then in turn these have a positive impact on academic outcomes. The thing is, there is not much work on the intersection of all of these constructs, and we do not have much prior work on how learners might perceive these interactions, or their importance. This lack of exploration really inhibits us from understanding how these students feel they may best be helped to learn in academic environments.

Research Questions, Core Constructs, and Goals

Through this work, my main aim is to deeply understand how middle school students who have been impacted by trauma believe in their own abilities to regulate their learning, and what they observe in themselves when actually trying to regulate their learning and their own outcomes. I have this primary aim because trauma can be so destructive for an individual's self-beliefs, and middle school is a key developmental period for ideas like self-beliefs, and self-beliefs around SRL skills are vital to academic success.

Practically and intellectually, understanding the experience of middle school students impacted by trauma would not only deepen our understanding of theory behind self-efficacy and how it interacts with a variety of constructs and individuals, but it would help provide educators and school administrators with greater knowledge around how to make classrooms more

accessible to students, regardless of their prior life experiences. Personally, it's important to me to help students during adolescence who have experienced trauma to experience success in an academic setting after seeing friends go through trauma at that age. It by their own reports obliterated their self-efficacy for everything, and all struggled in a traditional academic setting despite their incredible strengths.

To do this work well, I will need clear definitions of what I mean by self-efficacy, self-regulated learning, self-efficacy for self-regulated learning, trauma, and academic outcomes. Some of these are more straightforward to define than others, and I can see myself needing more support from the literature—and maybe even my participants, to a degree—to understand what is contextually meaningful with respect to trauma and academic outcomes. Trauma in particular I am learning about primarily from my background in neuroscience, work in counseling research, and some areas of educational psychology, social-emotional learning, and school mental health. Authors I continually run into are Ben-Eliyahu and Linnenbrink-Garcia, and I also see work by Immordino-Yang to be valuable in the development of my understanding. Self-efficacy and SRL is more straightforward in terms of my influences; my understanding comes almost entirely from social-cognitive theory and work from individuals such as Bandura, Zimmerman, and Kitsantas.

Theoretical Framework, Tacit Theories, and Analytical Framework

Social-cognitive theory and theories of self-regulated learning as framed by Bandura, Zimmerman, and Kitsantas as outlined above fuel my understanding of self-efficacy for self-regulated learning. My understanding of trauma is less founded but is tacitly informed by my personal experiences and those of my friends. In terms of analysis, I am most experienced with Braun and Clark's thematic analysis after framing my work from the perspective of

phenomenology, but I'm not quite sold on that being the best means of understanding the lives and needs of this population of middle school students.

I can feel my background in neuroscience, applied behavior analysis, and quantitative research clouding my ability to understand deeply how to explore this research area in a nuanced, authentic way, with integrity. I have these personal connections and a small network developed from examining prior work, but that emotionally charged foundation I bring is really not only what fires and fuels my work, but also obscures my ability to see past my comfort zone with respect to theoretical and analytical framing. I think ultimately reaching out to colleagues and professors for guidance as I work out the best perspectives to bring to this work is the best possible way I can do right by my work and by my participants.

Methodological Approach, Research Methods, and Contexts

Methodologically, as I want to understand the lived experiences of these students with respect to their perceptions of their self-efficacy beliefs in school settings, I think a phenomenological approach is best, though I do consider complementing that with something like ethnographic approaches to grasp the context. To really grasp these lived experiences, settings such as interviews, focus groups, and observations of things like PTA/PTO meetings and teacher professional development sessions should give me a deep understanding of the full context in which middle school students who have experienced trauma are embedded and their own perceptions of such a context.

Depending on the location (e.g., rural, urban, suburban) and political climate of the educational contexts I examine, I will need to be aware that participants may not be as open to non-traditional schooling methods, discussing ideas such as trauma or even emotions as openly, or may even downplay these ideas if it is not culturally acceptable for them. In this way, the way

I interact with participants, request consent, and phrase relevant concepts in consent forms and interview protocols needs to be methodical and respectful of this. Ultimately, including the students themselves in my studies are vital, but as I will not be completing an IRB form for this specific study, I will not be able to include this stakeholder group. Instead, I think placing the lens on the educator and their experiences working with these populations or working with individuals who run professional development sessions for educators to foster academic growth in this population might be the strongest approach.

It is well worth noting the current context that I and the teachers and learners I wish to understand are currently experiencing a wide range of contexts and events that may relate to trauma. COVID-19, racial inequities and systemic racism, social and economic inequities all contribute to situations (e.g., poverty, violence, housing and food insecurities) that leave individuals with traumatic experiences. These experiences all play into the multifaceted identities of individuals. For instance, I believe in the intersectionality of these facets, allowing all of the identities that an individual holds to play together to make up the whole individual. This is shaped by my experiences myself understanding the many facets of my identity, but also seeing students and friends explore their gender, sexuality, careers, hobbies, and so on. Watching someone go from isolated and suicidal to confident and secure is incredible and in my experience is heavily related to feeling secure in identity.

To this end, my understanding is that trauma absolutely destroys one's sense of identity and self-efficacy. I can see the work that I'm trying to do help change educational systems to be more adaptive for a wide variety of learners, but I am painfully aware that nothing may come of my findings due to funding. Education is massively underfunded, nor is mental health, and placing more work on the shoulders of teachers when they are already working in a setting that

approaches these students from a deficit mindset (regardless of their personal mindsets) is heavy for individuals who already carry a heavy load.

Reflexivity and Dialogic Engagement

I am extremely strongly influencing the entire frame of the study. I am entering this research niche specifically because I know people who had backgrounds of trauma through middle school and were absolutely destroyed in the traditional academic context. I watched them grow up with basically zero self-efficacy. That being said, I always found them to be absolutely brilliant, and even had the opportunity to teach martial arts alongside a couple of them. It was absolutely wild to me being able to watch these same people who struggled in learning contexts themselves teach their own students how to self-regulate alongside other learning skills, and at the same time not have a means of applying these skills to their own lives. This personal experience I've had has shaped the entire framework I have for the research in my mind, even though there seems to be a lack of work in this specific intersection to establish the importance of understanding this area. In this sense, I am influencing the entire frame of the work, and need to be cautious that, as the researcher, I am not imposing my prior experiences so intensely on my participants and during my data analysis. As the researcher, with the knowledge and past experiences I have, I am incredibly aware of the possibility I will need to be carefully questioning my perceptions of what I observe and the information my participants entrust to me.