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BEST TEACHING PRACTICES FOR ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS WHO
HAVE EXPERIENCED TRAUMA: A BOOK OF TRAUMA-INFORMED, ENGLISH
LANGUAGE MINI-LESSONS FOR ELL TEACHERS

by

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A capstone submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts in English as a Second Language.

Hamline University

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To my dear husband, Jake, and our dirty-cloud dog, Macy. Thanks for comforting me in times of stress (especially with the licks, Mac), putting up with my crabbiness, and seeing the beauty in my story. My African family, your stories are forever a part of my work, I wouldn't be where I am today without you all. My students, your courage and joy motivate me every day to be an example of strong love: you will do so many great things.

“Dɔɔnin-dɔɔnin, kɔnɔnin be a ɲaa da. “
 (“Little by little, the bird builds its nest.”)
 - Bambara Proverb

“When educating the minds of our youth, we must not forget to educate their hearts.”
 - Dalai Lama

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LIST OF TERMS

ACE(s).....	Adverse Childhood Experience(s)
BICS.....	Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills
CALP.....	Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency
CDC.....	Center for Disease Control
EL(s).....	English Learner(s)
ELL(s).....	English Language Learner(s)
PTSD.....	Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder
SAMHSA.....	Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration
WIDA.....	World-Class Instructional Design and Assessment

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

“You have 18-hours to leave the country.” This is what I was told by the United States’ embassy workers in Mali, West Africa hours before packing up and leaving my home to flee to a neighboring country for safety from threats of kidnapping by Al Qaeda. I never thought that my time teaching in Africa would end this way, or that I would find myself struggling with recurring nightmares of kidnappings once I was in the safety and security of my own home, in Minnesota, months later. Having a first-hand experience with some of the challenges that refugee students face, I began a journey in my American EL (English language) classroom of seeking to help my English Language Learners (ELLs) heal from trauma while acquiring a new language.

Where I currently work, in a kindergarten through 5th-grade elementary school in the Minneapolis, Minnesota area, the EL classroom is where I work diligently to encourage students to find a safe place both mentally and physically to develop their unique interests and abilities. Throughout my years as an ELL teacher, I have come to know the personal hardships and traumas of many of my students. I have had the privilege of hearing their stories of experiences that I often wish were not true. Through the journey to help my students heal from trauma, I have had to work hard to intertwine the required task of learning to communicate in a new language. Learning English is the primary academic goal in my classroom, and it is what continues to unify my students in their journeys toward academic success. Through a collaboration of creativity and passion, learning English is blended together with learning to heal from trauma in my classroom. Therefore, having informal experiences with blending trauma healing with

language learning, I have decided to ask the research questions, *how do traumas and adverse experiences in English Language Learning (ELL), elementary students affect English language acquisition and general academic functioning, and how can I create mini-lessons, based on best practices, for elementary ELL teachers to teach ELL students with previous or ongoing traumatic or adverse experiences?*

In the rest of this chapter, chapter one, I will lay out my journey to creating my research question, the development of my interest throughout my research project, and the significance of my research question to stakeholders including colleagues, students, and parents. At the conclusion of chapter one there will be an overview of the rest of this research project and the coinciding chapters.

ELL Standards

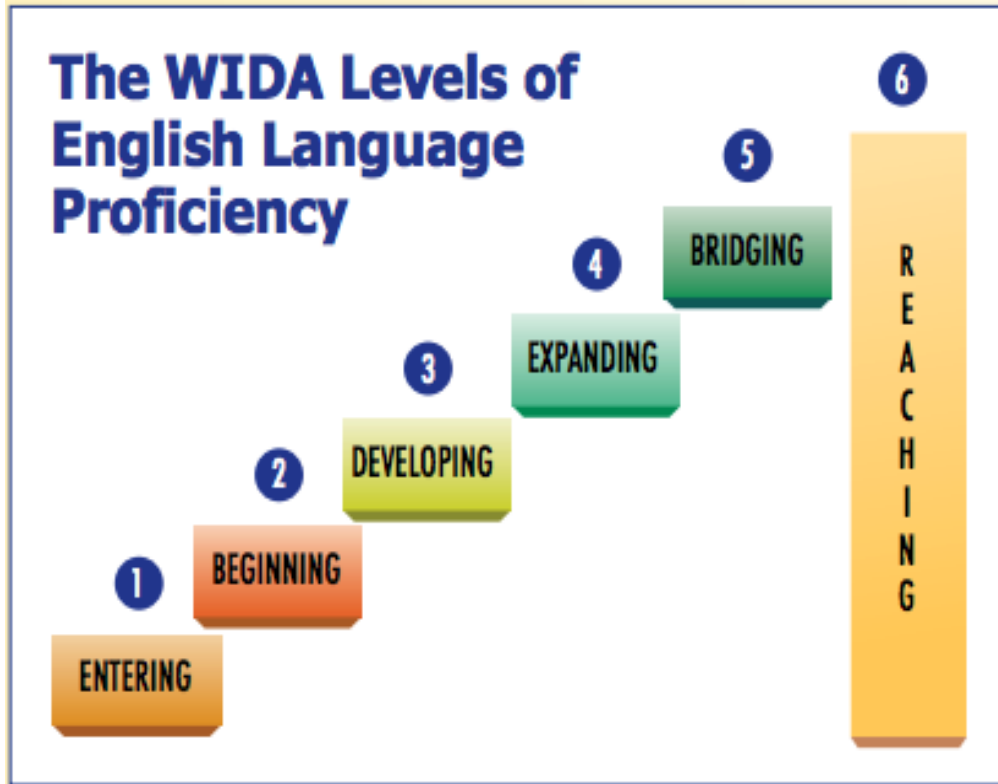
As I teach ELLs, I seem to always find myself hindered by the lack of resources available that incorporate both trauma-informed practices in conjunction with ELL standards. Many of my students seem distracted and speak of situations that occurred or are occurring outside of school that hinder them from having the ability to fully attend to the task of learning English. In order to guide my teaching, I am bound to using the English language development standards that my school abides by. Although my students' emotional needs seem to be negatively impacting their language learning, the lessons currently available to me only focus on meeting the English proficiency standards set by the state of Minnesota.

My school, and much of the country, uses the WIDA standards to plan English language instruction for ELL students and to assess students' English language learning. WIDA is the name of an organization (the WIDA acronym comes from the states that

made up the territory when the organization began: Wisconsin, Illinois, Delaware, and Arkansas) that “advances academic language development and academic achievement for children and youth who are culturally and linguistically diverse through high quality standards, assessments, research, and professional learning for educators” (WIDA, 2014). Throughout this paper and at the beginning of each mini-lesson in my research project, I will be referring to these standards as the measure of ELL students’ language development.

Since an ELL teacher’s most important task is to teach in order for students to meet the WIDA English language proficiency standards, the ELL teacher must be familiar with all aspects of the WIDA model. When ELL students are first assessed for English language proficiency in a state that implements these guidelines (such as the state of Minnesota, where I currently teach), they take a language screener provided by the WIDA consortium. This score is then used to guide the EL teacher in providing the service times that the student will receive throughout their year in their current school system. ELLs then continue to receive English language services based on their language level as defined by WIDA ACCESS standardized test that is taken by each ELL student in the Spring of each academic school year. This annual English language assessment is taken electronically and is scored by the WIDA consortium. Official results are delivered in the Fall of the following school year.

From either the screening test or the annual assessment, ELL students fall into 6 language levels as outlined by Figure 1.



(WIDA, 2014).

Students are expected to move through these language levels and exit the ELL program within a 3-7 year range depending on the language level upon beginning a language intervention program. During my time as an ELL teacher, I have watched students get stuck in various language development stages seemingly because of traumatic experiences that are negatively affecting their social and emotional functioning, which consequently affects their academic functioning. Therefore, I have been frustrated with the focus on language gains when students are unable to attend to work because of the personal and emotional barriers they are facing that make academic learning difficult.

Not only do many students already face opposition with teachers and other school professionals when they are struggling with language acquisition because of emotional or personal situations; many ELL students also face the very common stigma that learning a

language should not take “so long.” To clarify the language learning process and timeline, I will reference Professor J. Cummings’ research and publications on language acquisition. According to Cummings’ (1984) well-known and widely referenced research on language development, language students typically take up to two years to develop Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills (BICS), which are the skills that are needed for social interaction with peers. In my experiences, what is less understood by teachers and school staff without specific language training is that many students develop their BICS far before they develop their CALP (cognitive academic language proficiency) skills. CALP skills are the skills needed to participate fully in the academic discourse of the English speaking classroom. Typically, these CALP skills take at least five years to develop, but can often take up to seven years. In the field of elementary education, this means that most elementary teachers/ELL teachers will not even see their students fully master their academic language skills throughout their years in elementary school, even if their ELL students are in the minority of students in an English language school from kindergarten to fifth grade. It is almost then guaranteed that teachers will not see students master their academic language skills, and exit the EL program, if the student began English learning at any point after kindergarten.

This misunderstanding of English language development, coupled with the lack of resources for ELL students experiencing negative effects from trauma or adverse experiences, creates a breeding ground for ELL students to underperform in the mainstream classroom and on state standardized tests. With more awareness and resources given to teachers on how to meet these diverse needs, students will be more likely to overcome adversity and succeed academically.

Definition of Trauma or Adverse Experiences

Traumas or adverse experiences are defined as events or experiences that are “deeply distressing or disturbing” (Webster, 2018). Adverse experiences are experiences that negatively impact a student. The definition of adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) as they are defined in the school setting today was compiled through the research of the American health maintenance organization, Kaiser Permanente, and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). The terms “ACEs” and “childhood trauma” are interchangeable and will be used this way throughout this research project.

The CDC-Kaiser foundation has defined ACEs as either abuse, neglect, or household dysfunction. Having a high level of ACEs often leads to negative behaviors such as, but not limited to, alcoholism, drug use, missed work, depression, suicide attempts, etcetera. Children are particularly vulnerable to the negative effects of trauma because they have not developed the coping skills needed to maintain healthy mental functioning in comparison to the coping skills many adults have developed throughout their lives (Masser, 1992).

In the past few years, there has been an increasing focus by school districts to make their schools “trauma aware” or “trauma sensitive” in response to the research on the high levels of ACEs in elementary students and the negative effects of those ACEs on everyday life. These efforts are often recommended to be in place for the student body as a whole. When the entire school is operating under the same trauma-sensitive standards, already vulnerable students are more likely to feel safe, and the consistency provides a place of peace. Unfortunately, trauma and ACEs are unavoidable for most refugee students, and they are very common for immigrants as well. These new trauma-sensitive

practices do not include specific considerations for students who do not have a strong command of the English language. Much of the trauma care that is being implemented school-wide now is very literally being lost in translation.

One of the most encouraging findings from trauma research is that it only takes one consistent and positive adult to reverse many of the ACEs' effects on young children. Harvard's Center on the Developing Child states the importance of a supportive caregiver as, "the single most common factor for children who develop resilience" (developingchild.harvard.edu, 2018). With this in mind, the ELL teacher, or mainstream teacher, can have significant influence on a student's well-being and healing from trauma. Although there is currently not enough research on the positive effects of targeted trauma interventions for ELL students in particular, there is current research that has emerged in the past few years that shows the prevalence of traumatic experiences in ELL's lives.

Trauma's Prevalence in ELL Students

ELL students are often found in unique familial, social, and educational situations. Many ELL students come to the United States of America because of war or other unsafe living conditions in their home countries. These extreme reasons for immigration can in-and-of-themselves cause trauma, but as much of the research states, the act of immigration alone can then cause post-immigration stress for families and especially students who are assimilating into a new culture at school. In very recent U.S. news, there has been an uprising in the practice of separating immigrant children from their parents. These separations cause added stress to the child and contribute to the fear of prolonged separation from a parent, which can cause significant trauma for a child.

Often, the younger the child, the more significant the trauma because of their greater need for caretaking.

According to Kataoka's research on the Role of English Language Fluency in Latino Youth (2008), recently immigrated youth in the United States experience a high rate of issues in their lives because of exposure to violence and subsequent PTSD (Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder) symptoms (p. 335). In my own experience, I have seen that many of my ELL students tend to have experienced more extreme cases of trauma because of the uncertain living conditions that they faced either abroad or since their immigration. I have spoken to many students who witnessed the loss of loved ones, feared for their lives or family members' lives, and frequently still worry about those same things even if they are now in a more stable living environment in the United States.

While in the U.S., many students may face the pressures of waiting for other family members to also arrive safely, finding their "place" in their new community and school, learning a new language, fearing or experiencing prejudice and/or racist words and actions, fearing repercussions for undocumented immigration, and many other stressors. With all of this post-immigration stress, it is not hard to imagine that it becomes difficult for ELLs to attend to academics, and in particular, to attend to English language learning. Culture shock is a term that the general population is typically familiar with, but few American-born citizens have experienced or know the intricacies of the many varying influences on the successful movement of a child through culture shock. Although a strong familial support system is very effective in helping to navigate through culture shock, research also shows that if students are able at this point to receive help

and comfort from their community, especially through the school, there is a much better chance that they will be able to attend to school work and be more academically successful.

As Parameswaran states in her 2014 research on language acquisition, “Similarities between a student's mother tongue and the second language facilitates learning the second language and dissimilarities between languages impede learning (p.415). Therefore, it can be deduced that the more dissimilarities that a student has with their new culture (i.e. culture shock), the more difficult it will be for the student to learn the new language. Students with significant differences between their home countries’ cultures may experience trauma in the form of social isolation in their new culture. The more successfully a student can overcome all these challenges with the help of a consistent adult, the more successful they will be in their language acquisition.

Rationale for Research

As an ELL teacher, I have wanted to spend more time addressing my students’ emotional needs before or during my focus on English language development. Once I started researching trauma and speaking out in my school community, I found that there are not many (if any) trauma-informed resources for ELL teachers and that there were not many curriculums targeting elementary ELL students. In fact, I was only able to find one English language curriculum that focused on emotional health and trauma healing. Therefore, with the lack of resources available, I decided there was a great need for the creation a curriculum of mini-lessons that I could personally use to teach lessons to my own elementary ELL students and that I could share with other English Language (EL) teachers.

As I continued on my own process to include trauma-informed lessons into my classroom, I began to see how important this subject was to the school community. When I started to share my plans for my thesis, I had other ELL teachers telling me that they would be interested in teaching some of the lessons in their own classrooms once I had them published. Also, the principal of my school and the school psychologist asked me to share my findings with them once the project was complete. Not only do I see my project as important in my school; I also see my project as very relevant because as of last year, both school mental health and ELL best practices have been added to the requirements for professional development for teacher relicensure in the state of Minnesota. My district, as a whole, is interested in including some of my research into a district-wide staff development plan.

Overall, this topic is also important to all school professionals who work with ELL students and it is also important to the ELL students themselves. ELL students, of course, would, hopefully, gain the most from the use of the trauma-informed mini-lessons. With the use of trauma-informed English language mini-lessons, ELL students would attain a better sense of belonging in their new communities, find healing from traumatic experiences, and experience fewer adverse side effects of trauma, especially in relation to the ability to attend to academics.

Along with students gaining positive outcomes from the trauma-informed mini-lessons, I believe that parents would also have much to gain from this project. The problem of ELL students getting mental health services in dealing with adverse effects of trauma is often compounded by the fact that many cultures have a stigma against mental health services (Krivitsky, 2015). With the classroom trauma intervention model instead

of a clinical intervention, parents would be less resistant to the help. Even if stigma is not an issue for a parent, I believe parents could simply gain confidence through the mini-lessons that their child's emotional needs are being met at school. With the use of this project in the classroom, parents would not have to seek as many, or possibly any, outside mental health resources to help their children deal with traumatic experiences that affect their ability to attend to academics. I believe that parents would also benefit from the social skills that their child(ren) would learn through the trauma-informed practices and would therefore potentially be able to spend less time working on both social skills and academics at home.

In addition to students and parents benefiting from this project, school workers are the other group of professionals that I believe would benefit most abundantly. Like me, many teachers feel frustrated by the lack of resources for ELL students who have had traumatic or adverse experiences. I believe that teachers (mainstream, ELL teachers, and others) would benefit from the low-prep and easy-to-implement lessons and would see their students' English language levels rise, the main goal of all English language teachers. Consequently, teachers would have less stress from the lack of resources and teachers will find that once the emotional needs of their students are met, they are able to engage their students on a more focused and productive level academically.

Summary and Chapter Outlines

Throughout this research project, I am committed to researching the best practices in teaching elementary students who have experienced traumatic events in order to inform my mini-lessons. I believe that my book of mini-lessons will be a practical tool

that all teachers and other school professionals, such as social workers or mental health practitioners, can use to best support the emotional needs of their learners.

In the next chapter of this research project, I will introduce the literature that pertains to my research and guides my production of the book of trauma-informed, English language mini-lessons. Chapter two will be broken into subtopics that formed in my research of the overall topic. At the end of chapter two, there is a subsection devoted to the gaps in research to show the need for the production of this research project. After the research chapter, in chapter three, I focus on the methods of, context for, and project timeline for the capstone project. In chapter four, I will conclude the research by writing about my findings and implications from the project.

CHAPTER TWO

Introduction

"Young children exposed to five or more significant adverse experiences in the first three years of childhood face a 76% likelihood of having one or more delays in their language, emotional or brain development" (US Department of Health Services). ELL students are often struggling with social-emotional stress, academic stress, and language learning stress, not to mention those that are coming to America as refugees with a host of other stresses that many immigrants in other situations did not come in contact with. This triple-threat of social-emotional stress, academic stress, and language-learning stress, along with the adverse effects from traumatic experiences, necessitates specific trauma-informed teaching to ELL students. According to Yoder (2005), "Contrary to popular adage, time does not heal all wounds. Unhealed trauma is passed from generation to generation in families, communities, and nations" (p. 43). With this in mind, there is a great need for educators to take the opportunity to help heal trauma in order to better the future generations of learners and workers.

Throughout this research there were many sub-topics that formed as a result of studying the guiding research topic: *How do traumas and adverse experiences in English Language Learning (ELL) elementary students affect English language acquisition and general academic functioning, and how can I create mini-lessons, based on best practices, for elementary ELL teachers to teach ELL students with previous or ongoing traumatic or adverse experiences?* The subtopics listed in this chapter will form a review of the literature about trauma in elementary ELL students, trauma's effects on academic functioning and language acquisition, trauma-informed practices, and ELL best practices.

The research found for each subtopic is discussed at length. These subtopics are divided below followed by the end of this chapter, where the gaps in research, as they pertain to the motivations for this capstone project, are noted. Conducting this research aided in the development of an appropriate book of trauma-informed, English language mini-lessons for ELL teachers.

Trauma in Elementary ELL Students

Trauma in elementary students has been widely researched, but trauma in ELL students is less researched at this time. PTSD (Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder) is the most common mental health problem cited for immigrant, elementary-aged children, especially refugees. Overall, migration is widely known to cause psychological trauma (Masser, 1992). It is important to note that immigrants to the United States of America have “overwhelmingly come from what have been considered Third World Nations” (Pumariega, 2010). Many of the circumstances or events that ELL students have experienced in Third World Nations would qualify as ACEs according to the formally defined research by the CDC. At this time, researchers have stated a lack of proper evaluations intended for immigrant students that would assess their adverse experiences. In Flores and Salazar’s (2017) research on the limitations of the ACE questionnaires to capture the traumas experienced by immigrants, it is proven that a more effective form of ACE evaluation is needed for immigrants, especially in light of recent challenges against Latino immigrants in particular. Without a way to measure immigrants ACEs at this point, an overall look at stressors facing immigrants is the best option for moving forward with the research on effective trauma-informed language learning interventions for ELL students.

Overall, with the lack of proper nutrition and housing, exposure to higher violence and criminal activity, lack of medical resources, inhumane treatment of children, food insecurity, and the fact that just the act of immigration itself can cause trauma or unnecessary stress in the life of immigrant youth, there is no doubt that if immigrants have not experienced trauma, they have certainly experienced higher rates of stressful experiences compared to non-immigrant peers. Often, a student who is assimilating into a culture that is not their own has also faced the feeling of loss of self, and that threatens their personality along with other logistical stressors (Pumariega, 2005). Without a strong sense of self, students are left vulnerable to a host of mental health problems.

With an already compromised sense of self and a consequently high risk for mental health problems, first-generation immigrant, ELL students are also at a higher risk for experiencing traumatic events. More than 60% of first-generation immigrants that were studied in Aragona's et. al. study (2013) reported traumatic events experienced in their lifetimes. Some of the events included "material deprivation," "disappearance, death or injury of loved ones," "bodily injury," "war-like conditions," "witnessing violence to others," "torture, and forced confinement," and "coercion" (p. 171). Most of these experiences are vastly unknown by immigrants' U.S.-born peers. First-generation immigrants or refugees are the primary concern for the diagnoses of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

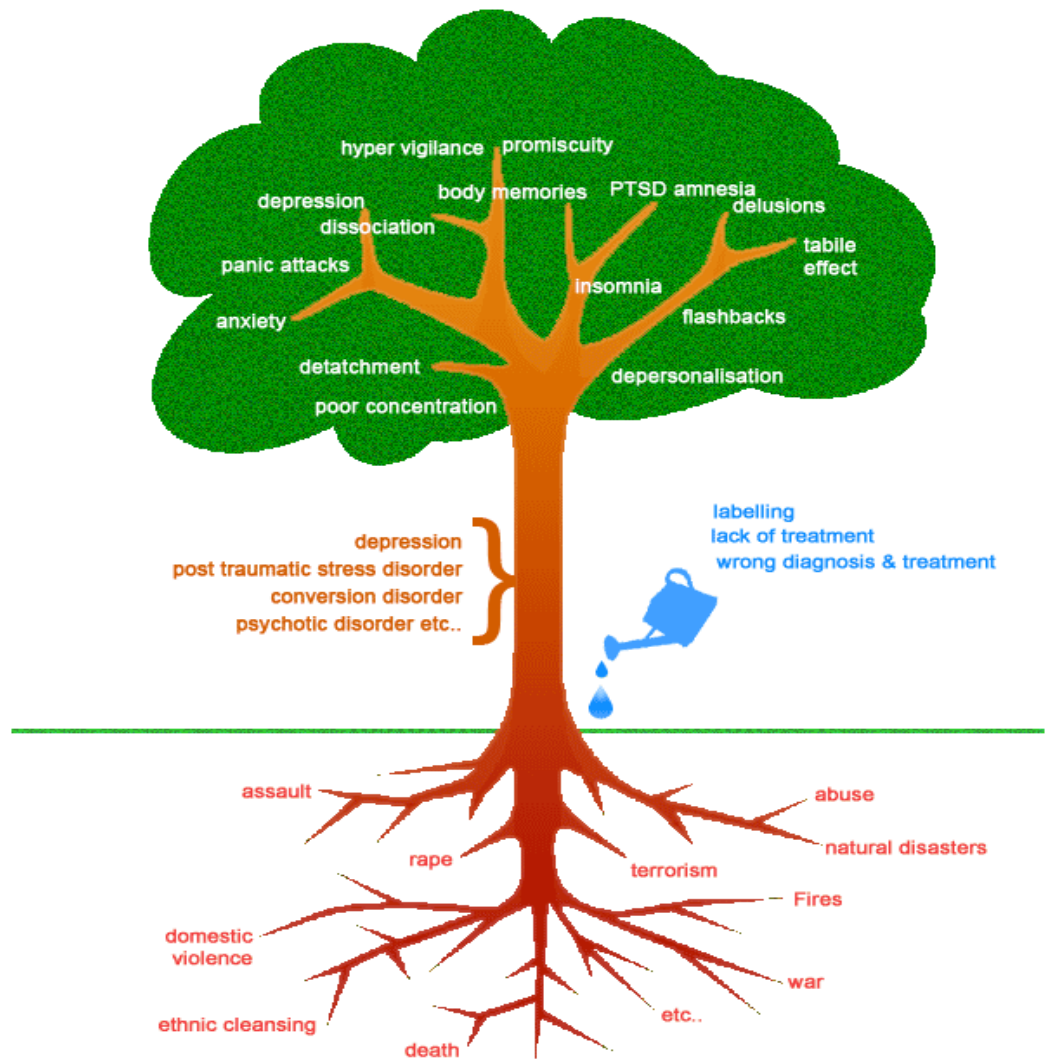
First-generation immigrants are typically the focus of research on trauma, but for the sake of this literature review it is important to note that it is not only first-generation immigrants that are at risk for negative symptoms from adverse experiences. Even second- or third-generation immigrants can be at risk for the complications that come

with traumatic immigration experiences. Yoder's (2005) research in his powerful book, *The Little Book of Trauma Healing*, explains that "historical trauma that is transferred through generations" affects many of the ELLs that are second or third generation immigrants. Yoder presents the fact that students do not even need to hear traumatic stories of their family members to suffer from the systemic effects of trauma on former generations who are now caregivers to the later generations (p. 13).

Now, drawing the focus back to the another group of immigrants that make up many U.S. ELL classrooms, as expected, the most likely ELL students to be suffering from negative effects of traumatic experiences are refugees. Many students who have witnessed or have been impacted by warfare which necessitated their immigration to the U.S. are living with PTSD and this mental health condition has been proven to have serious implications on academic functioning (Pumariiega, 2005). "The younger children are when exposed to trauma, the more likely they are to develop long term mental health problems" (Sims, 2002). Without a formal intervention, students may not be able to avoid long term mental health problems.

The long mental health problems that manifest themselves in students with high ACE scores are well studied at this point, and the figure below presents a comprehensive view of how ACEs lead to unfavorable behavioral outcomes. Many of the outcomes seen would seriously impact any student's ability to succeed in academics, especially, as noted, the propensity for lack of concentration. The roots in this diagram name just a few of the experiences that are unfortunately very common in immigrants coming to the U.S. for a "better life."

Trauma Tree



(EMDR Institute, 2018)

Overall, as stated, whether ELL students are refugees themselves or are third-generation immigrants, they are at a very high level of risk for having negative effects from traumatic events in their lives. From those negative effects, ELL students will most likely have a harder time with concentration and overall academic functioning. The prevalence of trauma in an ELL's life is an important reason that this capstone project has

been created. The effects of trauma on academic functioning for students in general is well researched and makes the correlation to ELL students' needs a necessary focus.

Trauma's Effects on Academic Functioning and Language Acquisition

In view of the fact that traumatic experiences are common in ELL students' lives and produce negative effects, trauma's effects on academic functioning are significant and require intervention(s). Not only can an ELL teacher identify the need for a counseling referral, but an ELL teacher can also be the one to provide trauma-informed lessons to help students with English language development along with academic achievement. Masser states that trauma in a child "interrupts a growth process." Unlike an adult, a child's brain is still developing during a time of trauma, which means that often, "a child fails to acquire skills they might have acquired during that period" (1992).

Positively, in Sinclair's (2001) research on educational responses during emergency situations, conclusive evidence was reported on the value of early educational interventions for students that have experienced traumatic situations. These interventions should therefore support social and emotional healing by providing a sense of normalcy and hope for the future. Without this hope and normalcy provided by educational interventions, students will not be able to attend to basic tasks, let alone master a new language. Giving hope, Sinclair goes on to explain that research from the Rapid Response Education Program shows that healing began to take place after only two weeks of educational interventions. Two weeks is a short time in the overall U.S. academic school year and would not take away from a significant amount of general educational experiences, which makes the case for classroom interventions that much stronger. Students that had these interventions that Sinclair studied experienced an overall sense of

relief when they were able to talk about their experiences or draw pictures of their experiences of trauma. With this sense of relief, there came a newfound feeling of safety and an ability to attend to academics without distraction.

Along with the ability to attend school work without the distraction of painful emotional and often physical responses to trauma, educational interventions for students can give students the motivation to want to attend school in general. A common response to negative symptoms of traumatic experiences is disengagement with school; school absenteeism rates are higher in immigrant students (Motti-Stefanidi, F., Masten, A., & Asendorpf, J., 2015). School absenteeism is then one of the leading causes for academic underachievement in all students. Chronically absent students are more likely to drop out of school, and the effects on academic performance can be seen as early as kindergarten (Anonymous, 2012). Not only does absenteeism affect immigrants' academic performance, so do learning problems in general.

Learning problems for refugee children are a growing concern. In Graham's (2016) systematic review of thirty-four studies on immigrants experiencing learning problems, no conclusive evidence was formed because of lack of information. Not only was there a lack of information in general on immigrants' learning problems; there was no information on primary-aged immigrants' data in relation to learning problems. The current research on immigrants with learning problems does show that immigrants are often overrepresented for having learning disabilities. This overrepresentation is often blamed on teacher bias, but it is also hypothesized that the overrepresentation can also be attributed to immigrant students' sense of belonging and connection to schools and their psychosocial adjustment to the school norms (Kia-Keating & Ellis, 2007). With the high

prevalence of immigrant students suffering from academic underachievement and, in turn, language learning, using trauma-informed practices in teaching ELLs will rule out the possibility of trauma limiting academic and language learning.

Trauma-Informed Practices for Elementary Students

Trauma-informed practices for elementary students are being implemented at the institutional and national level with no particular considerations for ELL students and their unique, but unfortunate, traumatic experiences. Kia-Keating (2007) states in her research on belonging and connection to schools in refugee resettlement processes, “schools are one of the first and most influential service systems for young refugees” (p. 29). Schools being frontline in the battle against mental health issues for children with high ACE levels is a strong argument for trauma-informed teaching, but without a focus on ELLs and/or refugees, trauma-informed interventions would be less effective for these populations. By using the current research to study what trauma-informed practices currently look like for the general education population, a gap is highlighted to show how narrowing these interventions even more would be beneficial for students learning English, especially if the English language is considered the primary mode of communication of these trauma interventions.

Many schools across the nation have implemented trauma-informed positive education (TIPE) approaches. The current approaches meet the needs of students who have experienced violence, abuse, or neglect without focusing specifically on ELLs. The two focuses of TIPE are teaching students to have regulatory abilities and relational attachments (Brunzel et. al., 2016). Another popular method, and best practice, for helping students with trauma is implementing the sanctuary model. The sanctuary model

is a restorative culture that works as a school-wide system to meet the needs of those affected by trauma (Esaki, et. al., 2013). The sanctuary model works on the idea that survivors of trauma can heal if they are connected to a network and organized program of trained and caring adults.

Whether schools are using the sanctuary model, TIPE approaches, or other programs to help students effectively cope with traumatic experiences, there are some key best practices that reign true across the different program models. One of the biggest needs for students who have experienced trauma is the need to “‘restory’ [their] lives” (Yoder, 2005), which essentially means that students need to have the ability and safety to share their story and to make a new “story” or plan that makes them feel safe and hopeful about the future.

Along with the need to “restory,” Yoder’s (2005) book on healing from trauma states trauma survivors needs as the need for “safety, information, storytelling, empowerment, vindication, and restitution” (p. 25). The SAMHSA (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services) group has a list of trauma-informed best practices widely used in the clinical and school settings that relate to Yoder’s list of needs for trauma survivors. The SAMHSA trauma-informed guiding principles are providing and maintaining safety, trustworthiness and transparency, peer support, collaboration and mutuality, empowerment through voice and choice, and the addressing of and resisting of cultural, historical, and gender issues that negatively impact students. These guiding principles serve as the best practices for the book of mini-lessons published through this research project.

Perry (2006) write about his studies on classrooms often being the only consistent place that a student that has survived trauma comes in contact with. The importance of teachers using trauma-informed practices in unparalleled in other settings. Because of the need for every person that interacts with a traumatized student to practice trauma-informed care, the ELL teacher can see the special need for individualized training with their specific students. The more specific and personalized a trauma intervention can be, the more effective it will prove. In much of the research, but especially in Walkley and Cox's (2013) research on building trauma-informed schools, individualized interventions are preferred: "The very same traumatic experience will affect a toddler and first-grader differently, and, thus, different interventions will be required" (p. 124). Using this study, personalized and different interventions would be best for ELL students.

Taking all that is known about best practices for trauma survivors, any teacher can use these trauma-informed practices as the building blocks for their own lesson plans. An elementary teacher can make their classroom trauma-sensitive by combining these requirements with learning objectives, and in the case of ELL students, English learning objectives and best practices. McBrien's (2005) research on the educational needs for refugee students in the U.S. reports some of the most influential finding specific to ELL students' trauma intervention needs. McBrien synthesizes from many sources that refugee students placed in the U.S. school system need to experience a program that "respects the native cultures...and allow[s] them ample time to adjust and learn the language of their new host country" (p. 340). This research specifically ties into the next section on general ELL best practices whether or not a student or students have the influence of traumatic experiences in their background.

ELL Best Practices

ELL best practices differ slightly from expert to expert, but through organizations, WIDA in particular, there are ELL standards that many states and school districts have adapted, called "Can Do descriptors." These standards have been agreed upon and are being used for the assessment of ELLs English language development. Best practices that are used to teach ELL students should aid in ELL students' achievement of these WIDA Can Do descriptors.

To reach these standards, Barr (2012) suggests that ELL teachers should focus most intently on reading and vocabulary instruction. Throughout all research that is noted, the practice of explicit teaching in the realm of reading instruction and grammar was upheld as a best practice by all researchers. Explicit teaching means being clear with what is being taught and also teaching how to use the specific skill in context. Explicit teaching then can be combined with hands-on activities for students to practice the skills that have been directly (explicitly) taught (Protheroe, 2011, p.28).

In addition to explicit teaching of reading skills along with the allowance for interactive practice with those explicitly taught skills, research shows that ELL teachers should begin their explicit teaching with a focus on cultural relevance and cultural reality to the student(s) (Rendon, 2013). Sagor (2003) agrees that motivating students begins with knowing their interests, talents, and overall lives which ties in well with the previous section on trauma-informed practices. The more an ELL teacher knows his or her students, the easier he or she will be able to connect the learning objectives to meaningful experiences in their own lives. Barr also suggests using that knowledge of students to initiate the students' connections to background knowledge (2012).

Using or building background knowledge with students is another best practice for ELL students. Background knowledge is simply previous information that students have on a subject (Short, 2004). The act of previewing a subject with an ELL student to build background knowledge, before attending to a specific learning task, allows the student to activate prior knowledge and to ask questions where there are gaps in their knowledge. Building background knowledge with an ELL student is a necessary task, especially because each ELL student has varying background knowledge, much of which cannot be known without discussion, and all of which cannot be assumed by an educator.

Being in an English language classroom or receiving explicit English language instruction in some form is a stress reliever for most new immigrants to the United States' school systems. According to Masser (1992), many immigrant families that have referrals for sources of mental health interventions may be unlikely to follow through (p. 453). The fact that English language services are a federal mandate makes English services an intervention that students receive without the need for additional action by their caregivers. These mandatory language interventions in and of themselves help to reduce the effects of culture shock and releases some of the ongoing stresses of immigration or migration for a young student even before teachers combine these practices with trauma-informed best practices. The combination of both trauma-informed best practices and ELL best practices is ideal for student growth.

Gaps in Research

There is much research on English language teaching techniques and teaching students who are trauma survivors, but there is not an ample amount of research on the effects of using trauma informed teaching techniques specifically with ELL students. In

Kaplan's (2016) research on the effects of trauma and new language acquisition, it is confirmed that:

“there is...very little research evaluating the effects of various education programs on refugee students' academic progress and achievement, with studies tending to focus on children's trauma and psychological functioning, or students' and teachers' educational challenges, but neglecting educational outcomes” (p. 95).

With the use of trauma informed mini-lessons, research could be conducted to show the positive academic effects of addressing ELL's mental health needs in relationship to their experiences with trauma. Currently, the only research that exists to address trauma and language learning is targeted for adult learners. The topic of trauma and language acquisition for elementary ELL students remains virtually untouched.

As mentioned earlier, there is also a great need for further research on ACEs in immigrant children. There is currently not an assessment directly tailored for immigrant children; therefore, the prevalence of ACEs in immigrants still remains undocumented. An assessment of ACEs for immigrants would provide the much needed information on the prevalence of adverse experiences in immigrants as compared to non-immigrants. These studies could then inform helpful interventions for ELL students.

Summary

The research that has been done on trauma's effects in elementary students' academic functioning and language acquisition, trauma-informed practices for elementary students, and ELL best practices is substantial. Tying all of these best practices together is the struggle for the modern ELL teacher. As Pumariega (2010)

states, “the United States should make an investment in the health, education, and social welfare of immigrants.” ELL teachers have the great ability to impact all three areas mentioned in Pumariega’s statement.

Overall, as Krivitsky (2015) says, “The success of any education-based intervention depends largely on the teacher/administrator and the selection of an appropriate intervention.” The mini-lessons that follow in this project will give teachers/administrators an option for interventions that could significantly improve a student’s life, both academically and personally.

From this review of the literature pertaining to school trauma interventions for ELL students, the basis has been laid to move into the overview of the mechanics of the project of mini-lessons which will be explored thoroughly in chapter three. In chapter three, the audience for the book of mini-lessons, the project methods, project description, project content, and project timeline will all be given in this same order. Through the thorough explanation of the book of mini-lessons in chapter three, readers will have a clear idea of the methods and reasoning behind the capstone project.

CHAPTER THREE

Introduction

The question of this research project has been stated throughout this paper: *How do traumas and adverse experiences in English Language Learner (ELL) elementary students affect language acquisition and general academic functioning, and how can I create mini-lessons, based on best practices, for elementary ELL teachers to teach ELL students with previous or ongoing traumatic or adverse experiences?* This question guides the methods and project content that follows.

This chapter will start with an overview of the project and then transition into more detailed explanations of the specifics of the research project. After the opening overview, this chapter, chapter three, will move into explaining who this project is aimed at reaching. Then, what the project will be focused on resolving will be addressed. Next, there will be a timeline for when the project will take place. After, it will be demonstrated where the mini-lessons are best used. Fifth, how the mini-lessons are to be taught, including timing and an emphasis on keeping them “mini” will be described. Finally, this chapter will conclude with an explanation of why the project is being formed in the way that it is.

Overview

The project that is included with this research paper is a book of mini-lessons intended to be used within an elementary school setting. Total, there are 10 mini-lessons, targeted to differing language and grade levels, which are noted at the top of each mini-lesson. Each mini-lesson begins with a title followed by the WIDA standard that the lesson is intended to meet. After stating the WIDA standard, the intended WIDA level is

also included. Following the WIDA level is the one of the SAMHSA's Six Key Principles of a Trauma-Informed Approach that also correlates with the lesson. After the trauma-informed information, there is a brief mention of the grade level that the lessons would be most suitable for.

Following all of the introductory standards, the mini-lessons begin. Each mini-lesson is intended to last for 10-15 minutes so teachers are able to teach these mini-lessons without sacrificing valuable content area teaching. All of the mini-lessons follow the same format: supply list, objective, method, checking for understanding, and applying knowledge. Using a consistent format throughout the book of mini-lessons makes using the resource much more approachable and user friendly for teachers. Once a teacher has taught just one lesson from the book, the hope is that they will be familiar with the formatting and will feel more confident in teaching similar lessons. Although teachers are the primary audience for this book, noted in the next section of chapter three are some other stakeholders that may find interest in using this resource.

Audience

The audience for this book of mini-lessons is first, and foremost, elementary ELL teachers. I chose this group of people because the lessons are most helpful to use with a teacher that has background knowledge in the WIDA standards (or other equivalent English language proficiency standards), and the lessons are targeted for younger students. Also, I myself am an elementary ELL teacher, so I felt most qualified to write to this audience.

Ideally, these mini-lessons would be taught in small groups of elementary ELLs because of the idea of creating a safe space for students suffering from the effects of

traumatic experiences, but the lessons could also be used in a whole-group classroom with the guidance of a skilled teacher. Although the project is intended specifically for ELL teachers, I believe that the project could also be used by mainstream teachers, especially those mainstream teachers who have a high population of ELL students in their classroom, and even more specifically, mainstream teachers who have a high population of ELLs who are refugees. The lessons could also be used in the common model of content teacher co-teaching with an ELL teacher. The two teachers would work collaboratively to teach the lesson to the entire class, regardless of ELL status.

Another audience that would benefit from this project would be school mental health professionals, counselors, or social workers. In my current school setting, there are multiple school support staff that have helped to edit this project. A school counselor, behavior intervention teacher, school psychiatrist, school psychologist, social worker, guidance counselor, mental health specialist, mental health therapist, or special education teacher could use these mini-lessons in small groups to aid students in achieving relief from trauma in order to make language learning gains. When presenting this project to a school mental health professional, the response was overwhelmingly positive because of the explanation that school mental health professionals often have little-to-no experience with English language teaching standards. One professional even noted that she has shied away from servicing ELL students because she was unaware of how to work with a student with limited English language skills.

Project Method

After choosing the audience for this book of mini-lessons, detailed notes were needed while reading through articles on best practices from trauma-informed teaching.

From these notes, I was then able to brainstorm ideas for lessons. Once I had the general ideas for the lessons, I then had to think of ways to correlate the trauma-informed lesson with a language learning lesson. Because I am currently a ELL teacher, I had a large knowledge base of language lessons from what I currently teach and from other ideas I have seen. I used what I knew about planning a good language lesson and the WIDA standards to create this book of mini-lessons. All of the lessons in the project have been tested in my own classroom with third grade ELL students, ranging from a level 1 (newcomer) to a level 4.

Once the first draft of the project was complete and piloted in my classroom, I was able to go through and edit the lessons one more time before having a school psychologist edit the project to ensure that all methods were trauma-informed and sensitive to the needs of students who have experienced trauma. After this review, the project was also shared with peer-reviewers who were all teachers, both mainstream teachers and ELL teachers. Using all of this valuable input, the project came to its final stage and is now available to educators in a variety of user-friendly formats.

Project Description

The project itself is meant to be a user-friendly and convenient book for educators to have in their classrooms. All materials needed throughout the book are easy to find, and any printables are included in the guide directly following each mini-lesson. The book of mini-lessons is to be used as is stated, without teachers having to do much additional preparation.

The book was formatted in PDF form for easy download by those who would like to use it. In addition to the PDF form, the book was also formatted in Google Slides. The

book was also printed in its completed stage and bound to be presented as a completion for the Hamline Capstone requirements. If the need arises, the book can be bound and sold for the cost of production.

Project Content

The mini-lessons vary in their focuses, but all relate to healing from trauma and building social emotional skills and are tied to language learning standards as defined by WIDA. At the beginning of the book, there is a list of both the WIDA standards and the SAMHSA trauma informed best practices. This list gives some background knowledge on the need for these two areas to be addressed in the classroom with ELL students.

The first lesson is a lesson that would be most applicable to all students; it is a story mapping lesson. The lesson has students work on their own “story,” which relates to Yoder’s (2005) research that shows the great need for trauma survivors to “re-story” their traumatic experiences. The second mini-lesson allows the opportunity for students to talk about an immigration item or picture that is important to their or their family’s immigration story. Next, the third mini-lesson has students write a letter to a fictional character who is a refugee. Following the character letter mini-lesson, the fourth mini-lesson is a lesson that is similar to a guided meditation technique used in many therapeutic formats and teaches students how to mentally imagine a safe and comforting place. The value of mentally imagining a safe and comfortable place is that this place can never be “taken away” as some of these students’ previous living spaces were taken from them.

After the fourth lesson on finding a safe place, the fifth mini-lesson is a lesson where students write about themselves. Students work on using descriptive language in

conjunction with creating a positive self-image to make a work of art about themselves. Sixth, the lesson teaches students how to cope with bad dreams by creating a dreamcatcher. The seventh mini-lesson focuses on the future by having students create a vision board. The eighth mini-lesson is a lesson focused on remembering lost loved ones. In this lesson, students use the English language to create sentences or finish phrases in a tribute book. In the ninth lesson, students write about an ethical issue in their home or familial culture. Finally, in the tenth lesson, students use the command of the spoken English language to tell stories from their culture.

Project Timeline

The research project has been put together in stages. The preliminary stage was gathering research and reviewing it in the form of the first two chapters of this research project, which was done in the Spring of 2018. After gathering research and reviewing it, brainstorming took place to form lesson ideas. From those lesson ideas, I created one pilot lesson which I tried with my ELL 3rd grade students, also in the Spring of 2018. My ELL third grade students range from level 1 (newcomer) to level 4. After the pilot lesson, I began to compile my other lessons throughout the Summer of 2018. After completing all of the mini-lessons, I worked on teaching them to my third grade students. All lessons in this project have been taught and then edited during the Summer of 2018.

Finally, I was able to compile the lessons into a book format and to decide on publishing and formatting features that would be most user friendly for ELL teachers. I also had multiple teachers peer edit and review the book at this stage before self-editing and submitting my final project. All of the final editing took place in August 2018 before

graduating from Hamline University with a Master's of Teaching English as a Second Language.

Summary

The preceding chapter concludes this research project. Chapter three gave an in-depth review of the overall project, the audience that the project is aimed at reaching, the project methods, the content of the mini-lessons, and the timeline that was used to complete the book of mini-lessons.

The final chapter will connect previous goals of this research project to final outcomes. The last chapter, chapter four, will detail the major learnings from this capstone project, any limitations faced, implications of the project, and suggestions for further research. After this final chapter, references are included which correlate with citations throughout this paper.

CHAPTER FOUR

Introduction

Throughout this research project, my goal was to answer the question: *How do traumas and adverse experiences in English Language Learning (ELL) elementary students affect English language acquisition and general academic functioning, and how can I create mini-lessons, based on best practices, for elementary ELL teachers to teach ELL students with previous or ongoing traumatic or adverse experiences?*

The previous chapter stated my methods of creating the capstone project. This chapter, chapter four, will conclude this paper by presenting major learnings, limitations while creating the project, implications of the project, and suggestions for further research. Beginning with major learnings, this chapter aims to complete this capstone project.

Major Learnings

The major learnings of this project relate to the research that was performed to gather ideas and standards for the mini-lessons created in the project. While researching the topic, ideas began to emerge for specific lessons topics. Along with those topics, ideas for ways to meet language and trauma-informed standards also began to form. After joining the lesson topics with standards, the project began to come together. From these learnings, then came the need for formatting that was easy to use for consumers, specifically teachers.

As a writer, there was much to be learned about how to create a resource that was downloadable and user-friendly for teachers. I used Youtube.com to search for a video on how to format materials for the purpose of teachers being able to easily download and

print the book. On Youtube.com, I specifically used videos from the *Teachers on Less* channel (Morris, 2015). With the help of Morris's videos on creating a product to upload onto a website, I was able to create my project. Going through this process helped me to gain a better understanding on how to create accessible materials for teachers, which I believe I will use again in the future.

Throughout this capstone project, there were a few unexpected things I learned. One of the unexpected things I learned was how complicated it actually was to create a downloadable product. It took me quite a while to format my product and then more time to make it visually appealing. This work was a surprise because I was not intending to spend so much of my time working on formatting in addition to the actual creation of the mini-lessons' contents.

Another unexpected thing I learned during the research phase was that traumatized students have the need for to "re-story" their traumatic experiences. I did not know that young children need to process traumatic experiences in a way that gives them a new outlook on their current life. It was surprising to me that this idea of "re-storying" traumatic experiences came up in almost all of the research on trauma-informed practices in one way or another.

Revisiting the Literature Review

As a researcher, during the literature review portion of this research project, the facts presented themselves to show the great need for teachers and school workers to specifically address traumatic experiences in children, such as helping students to "re-story" their lives. Through the research in whole, I learned that there is a lack of solid data-focused research paying particular attention to ELL students being taught English

through trauma-informed techniques. Further, not only is there a lack of research and data on this subject; there is also a lack of teaching resources for educational professionals working at the elementary level.

The most valuable research resources during my project were the WIDA English proficiency standards (WIDA, 2014) and the SAMHSA website (SAMHSA, 2018). These two resources provided the basis for the standards and the focus for my curriculum project of trauma-informed, English language mini-lessons. With the help of both resources, I was able to create mini-lessons that were consistent with the language skills that students would be tested on during the school year to measure their English proficiency from year to year as well as mini-lessons that were helpful and not harmful in helping students heal from traumatic experiences.

Another valuable research source was Kia-Keatings' (2007) research that emphasized the importance of schools being one of the first and often most pivotal places for elementary ELL immigrants. Throughout my research, I was constantly reminded of the importance of school interventions for students. Schools are extremely influential in helping students to succeed. A well-organized and positive school or classroom has the power to change a student's life. With these reminders throughout my research, I was able to see the great need for the attention and interventions aimed at ELL's trauma-healing demand.

Through the literature review, I was able to make new connections from best practices for ELL students to best practices for students affected by trauma. I believe that this connection is very important for the field of study moving forward. In the future I would hope see this project and others like it as an important influence to more research

being done on trauma's effects on ELL students and effective interventions for trauma-impacted ELL students.

Implications

In light of this project's completion, school professionals will be able to have a resource for working with ELL students with the need for trauma-informed lessons. Right away, this project provides at least ten days of mini-lessons that would benefit ELL trauma survivors. These ten days fit within the research that healing begins to take place within two weeks of an intervention being implemented. Along with this project fueling the ability of ELL teachers to teach trauma-informed lessons based on their student's specific needs, I believe this project is influential in highlighting the need for more resources and research on the subject.

This project will inform those in the realm of education on the need for resources and research that specifically address the healing from trauma by ELL students. I believe that this capstone project shows the need for more teachers using trauma-informed lessons with their ELL students. My hope is that EL teachers are empowered by this project and see positive results in their classrooms after using these ten mini-lessons. Some positive language learning progress they may document in their students would be related to the increase of English proficiency in one or more of the four language domains as stated by WIDA: less negative classroom behaviors, less distractibility, less emotional instability, and an overall increase in interest and engagement from students in English language development. By documenting these positive outcomes, teachers will be able to see the effectiveness of using trauma-informed lessons to teach ELL students.

Although this project is helpful in its current state, there are a few limitations that should be noted. The literature review of this project indicated a great need for more data-driven research to be conducted on ELL students who are trauma survivors. Without proper research to guide more creations of curriculum, the curriculum's effectiveness will not be measurable. The lack of research on ELL trauma as it relates to language learning and overall academic learning created a limitation on the overall persuasiveness of the argument of the need for ELL trauma-informed resources for those who are not seeing the need for themselves when working with ELL students. With more research, a more compelling need for curriculum, and possibly funding, would be present. In order to communicate the results of this project to stakeholders and those outside of the classroom, there would need to be a greater concern for these issues brought up in the education realm as a whole.

Communicating Results

Although stakeholders may not see the need for trauma-informed curriculum for ELL students, many school professionals and especially teachers have already shown interest in this project. As stated previously, this project has been formatted specifically for download by the general public. This project is posted and available for download in its entirety on Hamline University's Bush Library online resources under the Capstones, Dissertations, and Honors Projects subsection. With this access point, the project will be a benefit to teachers and other professionals working with ELL students who are trauma survivors to develop the English language.

Review of Chapter

This chapter has reviewed the major learnings from this capstone project. Chapter four has drawn claims of the importance of the project process on my individual growth as well as the importance of the subject of more research and resources being focused towards trauma healing for ELL students. Overall, this chapter asserts that there are many implications on teachers and the education field because of the findings and works of this capstone project.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this project has completed the goals that were stated in chapter one. Chapter one introduced the guiding question for this project: *How do traumas and adverse experiences in English Language Learning (ELL) elementary students affect English language acquisition and general academic functioning, and how can I create mini-lessons, based on best practices, for elementary ELL teachers to teach ELL students with previous or ongoing traumatic or adverse experiences?* This question has been answered throughout the entirety of this capstone project. From the question came the literature review, from the literature review came the project, and from the project came the implications. Overall, this capstone project has shone a light on the need for more research in the area of ELL trauma healing, setting forth a resource that can be used to help ELL students who are survivors of trauma as well as, hopefully, a model for other curriculums to be made in the future.

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