Please take a half sheet on your table. Read it, and discuss with your tablemates:

- How would you feel if you were this student?
- How would these life experiences impact your perception of school?
- What are your motivations in life, and what would you do to get what you want or need?
• How would you feel if you were this student?
• How would these life experiences impact your perception of school?
• What are your motivations in life, and what would you do to get what you want or need?

You were born in a refugee camp in Ethiopia. Your parents and older siblings are from Mogadishu, Somalia, but you’ve never been there. Two of your sisters have been raped in the camp, and one of your brothers was stabbed. Your father left for the United States two months ago, and is trying to get visas for the rest of our family to come over, too. You know if they do get visas, it won’t be for everyone just yet. You hope you’ll get to go in the first group, but one of your sisters is pregnant and will probably go before you.

You are seven years old.

You were born in Colombia on a farm by the forest. But, soldiers have taken your land so you, your parents, and your four other siblings go north. You’ve traveled over a thousand miles to the southern border of the United States. Your parents hire coyotes to help your family cross the border, but the coyotes take all your money. They’ve even taken your fifteen-year-old sister. Last night, your family and the coyotes were crossing a wide river on a leaky boat. Your mother dropped your baby brother into the water and he was swept away down stream. Today, your mother won’t stop sobbing, and her nails cut into you when she hugs you.

You are eight years old.

You are living in a one-bedroom apartment with your mother and three brothers and two sisters. Your oldest brother has dropped out of school to work all day, and he goes out at night to work, too. Even with all this work, you are never full after you eat. Your older sisters stay in only to take care of your baby brothers. One of them is pregnant, but she doesn’t have a boyfriend. You and your family arrived in the U.S. months ago, and you have a visa. But, you’ve overheard your mother and older brother talking about what they are going to do when the visas expire. Should they stay and risk being deported, or should they return to the violence you left behind in your home? What about when the baby is born?

You are ten years old.
Strategies teachers can use to meet the social emotional needs of recently arrived elementary-aged Latino and Somali English Learners (RAELs) who have experienced trauma
Strategies teachers can use to meet the social emotional needs of recently arrived elementary-aged Latino and Somali English Learners (RAELs) who have experienced trauma
1. Who are RAELs?

2. What are different types of trauma that RAELs may experience?

3. What are the symptoms and social emotional needs of RAELs?

4. What are strategies that teachers can use with and teach to RAELs who have experienced trauma?
Part 1: Who are RAELs?

- EL = English learner
- RAEL = recently arrived English learner
Current immigration trends

- ELs increased 300% over last 20 years
- 252 different home languages
Role of RAELs’ Culture and Countries of origin

- Awareness of cultural norms, values, and practices
- Ethnic groups not homogeneous
Role of RAELs’ culture and countries of origin
● Transition between educational settings
● Coping mechanisms
● Family ties
● Childrearing
Part 2: What are different types of trauma that RAELs may experience?

- “Cumulative trauma-exposure” (Ehntholt & Yule, 2006; Ellis, MacDonald, Lincoln, & Cabral, 2008; and Lustig et al., 2004; as cited in Betancourt et al., 2015, p. 210)

- Complex trauma (Souers & Hall, 2016)

- Stages of immigration: Pre-immigration, transition to host country, and host country trauma

- Jigsaw activity
Recently arrived English learners, particularly Somali and Latinos, may have endured political violence in their home countries. Traumatic events that can result from political violence include loss of loved ones, exposure to violence, and having to leave one’s home (Betancourt et al., 2015). According to Salas, Ayón, and Gurrola (2013), there is a positive correlation between high rates of crime and/or violence and immigration to the U.S. Drug violence is a particular challenge that many immigrants face every day. Some Somali refugees have had to live in refugee camps for years at a time. There are often few opportunities for education in these camps, and many parents feel it is unnecessary to send their children to the schools in camps as they would soon be emigrating to the U.S. (Birman & Tran, 2017). RAELs often come to the U.S. to escape the trauma in their home countries. However, there are numerous traumatic events they may experience as travel to their new homes.
Transition to Host Country (Handout)

There some traumatic experiences that only occur while RAELs are traveling to the U.S. A number of immigrants travel by land to cross the U.S.-Mexico border (Yoon-Hendricks & Greenberg, 2018). These immigrants often face journeys with little food or shelter, and face danger from animals, anti-immigrant enforcement, and vigilante groups who shoot immigrants (Phipps & Degges-White, 2014). Sometimes RAELs’ families must pay coyotes (travel brokers who operate illegally) additional fees in the form of money, labor, or sexual favors for an unguaranteed safe passage to the U.S (Phipps & Degges-White, 2014; Salas et al., 2013). Some immigrants who go by land stuff themselves into small containers, such as tractor trailers or small compartments in vehicles and are transported illegally across the border (Perez Foster, 2001; Phipps & Degges-White, 2014). According to Bragg (1999), other Latino immigrants cross the Caribbean Sea to reach their destination (as cited in Perez Foster, 2001). These boats are often not safe to travel in, and so many people die in the crossing. The immigrants who survive have been at sea for long periods of time and have possibly witnessed drowning along the way.

During President Trump’s zero tolerance policy in spring and summer of 2018, over two thousand immigrant children were separated from their parents while their parents were being detained. While this policy has been revoked, as of this writing, many children have not been reunited with their family members (Yoon-Hendricks & Greenberg, 2018). The long-term trauma of these events is yet to be felt. Though the journey to get into the U.S. can be very traumatic, there are still more traumatic events that RAELs experience once they have settled in their new homes.
Some traumatic events and circumstances many refugees face in their new host country include poverty, poor housing, low English proficiency, racism, discrimination, social exclusion, and unemployment (Betancourt et al., 2015). Traumatic experiences related to social exclusion include loss of family ties, support systems they relied upon in their home country, and perceived loss of their culture. Many immigrants who held high status jobs must take on low-level jobs because their credentials are not recognized in the United States. In addition, many immigrant families send money back to relatives in their home country. The decrease in income and the money sent home result in poverty for many families. This change in lifestyle can be very traumatic for some RAELs. Betancourt et al. (2017) explain that these children are often forced to live in poor and dangerous neighborhoods because of their poverty. The location of their new homes may put them at risk for even more trauma including community violence. Some parents, struggling to accept their new roles and status, may vent their frustration on their family members.

Immigrants’ legal status can sometimes influence their experiences in the U.S (Salas et al., 2013). Some immigrants who do not have legal status avoid going out in public for fear of deportation. As a result, immigrants feel they have less social mobility, more feelings of isolation, and a crippling sense of powerlessness. Given the current political state, characterized by vocal protests, immigrants also feel that the host culture is rejecting them. However, it is important to note that not all immigrants report feeling this sense of loss (Cobb et al., 2017; Salas et al., 2013; Phipps & Degges-White, 2014). Some are very successful in their new homes.

According to Betancourt et al. (2015), some Somali parents feel they are in a worse environment in the United States than in Somalia. This is in part because these parents feel that the American youth their children are interacting with are a “bad influence” on their children (p. 117). As immigrant children begin to adjust to their new culture in the United States, they are not as interested in continuing to practice their home culture. As a result, the communication between parents and children decreases. RAELs sometimes learn from their American peers that parents do not need to be respected as much as they are in their home countries. While many RAELs may at first find this new freedom from their obligations to their parents liberating, these new social roles can be disorienting (Betancourt et al., 2015).
Part 3: What are the symptoms and social emotional needs of RAELs?

- Theory of self-determination (Woolfolk, 2014)
  - Feel competent and have control
  - Feel successful, connections with others, and sense of choice in their lives (Woolfolk, 2014)

- Similar to Maslow’s hierarchy of needs, but more recent
Review of main points from *Fostering Resilient Learners: Strategies for Creating a Trauma-Sensitive Classroom* By Kristin Souers with Pete Hall (handout)

- “Trauma is an exceptional experience in which powerful and dangerous events overwhelm a person’s capacity to cope.” (p. 15)
- Many of us have 3 or more adverse childhood experiences, or ACEs (p. ix) ACEs can include a death in the family, assault, drug use, domestic violence, parent incarceration, neglect, or divorce. (p. 15-17)
- These ACEs create toxic stress that can “affect the pace and extent of brain development, quality of our relationships, and our ability to manage ourselves.” (p. ix)
- Complex trauma “refers to the simultaneous or sequential occurrences of child maltreatment… that are chronic and begin in early childhood.” (p. 15)
- It’s more important to focus on the students themselves and the effect trauma has on them, rather than the traumatic event itself. (p. 16)
- While some stress is good and can build resistance, trauma causes toxic stress. (p. 22)
- Trauma keeps students from coming to school with a “learning-ready” brain, and results in attendance and behavior challenges. (p. x)
Review of main points from *Fostering Resilient Learners: Strategies for Creating a Trauma-Sensitive Classroom* by Kristin Souers with Pete Hall (handout) (continued)

- When we get stressed, we go into the *flight, fight, or freeze* response. If a student is in this stage too long, his/her brain “shifts its operation from development to stress response.” (p. 21) When students are in these modes, they can respond in different ways: withdrawing, acting out, or going numb. (p. 28)
- When stressed, students use the limbic area of their brain, also called the “downstairs brain.” Only when they use the prefrontal cortex (“upstairs brain”), can they do higher-functioning behaviors, like thinking, reasoning, and being flexible. (p. 31)
- While teachers often react to students in a negative/punishing way, we need to ask ourselves, “Is this willful disobedience, or could it be a response to a traumatic life event that ____ is struggling with?” (p. 31)
- Healthy relationships are key to helping students repair the damage caused by ACEs. (p. x)
- Follow these steps to help take a problem from the “downstairs brain” to the “upstairs brain”: listen, reassure, validate, respond, repair, resolve. (p. 79)
- Students have their own coping mechanisms, and we need to reinforce the healthy ones and modify the unhealthy ones. We also need to teach them additional healthy ones. (p. 106)
- People who have experienced trauma may be “forever changed,” but not “forever damaged.” (p. 137)
Impact of Trauma on RAEL’s Brains and Learning: True or False

Young RAELS are well equipped to bounce back from trauma because of their youth.
Impact of Trauma on RAEL’s Brains and Learning: True or False

FALSE!
Healing from trauma is a long process (Suárez-Orozco et al., 2012).
Impact of Trauma on RAEL’s Brains and Learning: True or False

It can take up to two years for RAELs to catch up to their English-speaking peers.
Impact of Trauma on RAEL’s Brains and Learning: True or False

FALSE: Trauma makes this expectation is impossible.
1. Parts of the brain do not mature during the appropriate time period
2. The brain does not respond to stimuli in a normal and appropriate way
3. The brain is not able to process information, develop connections, or regulate emotions normally

(Brunzell, Waters, & Stokes, 2015)
Impact of Trauma on RAEL’s Brains and Learning: True or False

When students are constantly stressed, they operate out of the limbic area of the brain instead of the prefrontal cortex. The limbic area of the brain controls the fight, flight, or freeze response.
TRUE: Siegel (2013) found that students who have experienced trauma often function out of the limbic area of their brain instead of their prefrontal cortex (as cited in Souers & Hall, 2016).
Impact of Trauma on RAEL’s Brains and Learning: True or False

Changes in a person’s brain chemistry will result in a range of atypical needs and behaviors.
Impact of Trauma on RAEL’s Brains and Learning: True or False

TRUE: Let’s go into depth here.
Impact of Trauma on RAELs’ Social Emotional Needs and Behaviors

- Read the information
- Reflect on the information, write some notes
- Share your reflections and notes with a partner
Impact of Trauma on RAELs’ Social Emotional Needs and Behaviors (Handout)

Even though trauma influences every RAEL’s brain and learning, his or her response and reaction to trauma may be different. However, there are a number of behaviors that are characteristic of RAELs who have experienced trauma. Brunzell et al. (2015) found that common symptoms of trauma include “attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, conduct disorder, oppositional defiance disorder, reactive attachment, disinherited social engagement, and/or acute stress disorders” (p. 3). Students may also experience separation anxiety, phobias, bedwetting, mood disorders, nightmares, fear of loud noises, or chronic fear (Fontes, 2010). Birman and Tran (2017) explain that students who feel anxious about their learning may become frustrated, unable to focus, disengaged, disappointed in their abilities, bored, restless, fidgety, and disruptive. Segalowitz (1976) found that conversing in a second language may cause students to feel less confident and intelligent (as cited in Perez Foster, 2001).

Ellis et al. (2008) found that symptoms of PTSD negatively impacted students’ ability to adapt to new environments, making adapting to American schools even more challenging. Some of RAELs’ behaviors can become aggressive. Recently arrived English learners have been noticed to kick, bully, bite, fight, or throw things at other people, such as chairs and pencils. However, Bridges et al. (2010) found that Latinos born in the U.S. tended to express their reaction to trauma through external behaviors, while Latinos born outside the U.S. tend to express their anxiety internally (as cited in Phipps & Degges-White, 2014).
Birman and Tran (2017) list other behaviors characteristic for RAELs, including getting up and walking around during a lesson, talking with classmates, and fidgeting. Some students in Birman and Tran’s (2017) study did not know the procedure to ask to go to the bathroom, but once they knew, students asked to go constantly. When young RAELs are in distress, they may cry uncontrollably upon arrival at school or at the end of the day, run out of the room, or hide under furniture. While this may be a result of not being familiar with school and its routines, such behaviors can be aggravated by trauma. Students who do not know how to speak English may quietly refuse to do work, but once their English proficiencies increase, Birman and Tran (2017) report that students often begin to complain about doing work.

Fontes (2010) explains that some students who have experienced trauma are used to ignoring their needs of hunger, tiredness, thirst, or having to go to the bathroom. Some students will not tell the teacher they feel these things. These unmet needs, however, can also impact a student’s ability to focus. Porche et al. (2011) found that trauma can even have an impact on students’ academic careers later in life. Students who experienced trauma have a higher high school dropout rate than students who have not experience trauma.

Some additional behaviors include obsessing over pencils, food, and clothing. According to Birman and Tran (2017), students can become preoccupied with pencils. They may sharpen them often, horde them, throw them in the air, or on the floor. This may be done in protest or to get a reaction out of the teacher or other students. Students may also become possessive of their clothing and refuse to remove hats. Food can also become a distraction. Birman and Tran (2017) found that students may refuse to eat in the appropriate spaces or time, hoard food, or feel unsure eating unfamiliar foods.
Suarez-Ocozco, Pmentel and Martin (2009) explain a cycle wherein students’ difficulty with understanding and learning causes them to disengage (as cited in Birman and Tran, 2017). Students may become afraid and become unable to comfort and calm themselves due to their brain’s irregularity (Brunzell et al., 2015). As students’ get more and more frustrated, they may act out more and lose motivation. This could, in turn, make it more challenging for students to learn. This disengagement may lead teachers to believe they are not interested in learning. In turn, teachers may get angry with students and lower their expectations because these behaviors can be disruptive and do not help students’ learning. However, it is important for teachers to remember that these behaviors are often a result of students’ trauma.

It is important to note that in addition to all the needs and challenges that RAELs face in school, they have an additional set of needs from their home culture that must be met, as well. Sometimes what educators think their students need to be successful is different or goes against what parents think their children need (Moro, 2010).
Part 4: What are strategies that teachers can use with and teach to RAELs who have experienced trauma?

1. Impact of Teachers’ Worldviews on Student Success
2. School-Wide and Community-Wide Strategies
3. Strategies for a Productive Learning Environment
4. Strategies Teachers can Teach their Students
1. Impact of Teachers’ Worldviews on Student Success
   → What you think and say matters!

- “Sink or swim” vs supports (Birman & Tran, 2017)
- Empathy (Souers & Hall, 2016; Birman & Tran, 2017)
2. School-Wide and Community-Wide Strategies

- Communication between families, social workers, and cultural liaisons

- Organizations like FIRE help parents understand what education and childhood is like in the U.S.

(Betancourt et al., 2015; Sandoval, 2013; Birman & Tran, 2017; Fontes, 2010)
2. School-Wide and Community-Wide Strategies

Additional steps:

- Extra time in morning
- Communication in home language
- Avoid patriotic slogans or symbols
- Introduce police officers

(Betancourt et al., 2015; Sandoval, 2013; Birman & Tran, 2017; Fontes, 2010)
2. School-Wide and Community-Wide Strategies

Things you are already doing:
- Meet and collect data on student’s families
- Use interpreters, but don’t interpret
- Be aware of nonverbal behaviors

(Betancourt et al., 2015; Sandoval, 2013; Birman & Tran, 2017; Fontes, 2010)
3. Strategies for a Productive Learning Environment

- Scaffolding, break things into manageable parts, slow things down (Cole, 2005 as cited in Birman & Tran, 2017)

- Strong and trusting relationships (Birman & Tran, 2017)

- Positive Psychology

- Meaningful materials
4. Strategies Teachers can Teach their Students

- Self-regulation/coping strategies

- Acknowledging feelings

- Brain breaks, such as rhythmic exercises, patterned activities, songs, circle games, quick, yet intensive, physical activities, yoga, mindful breathing, and activities related to music (Brunzell et al., 2015).
Look back at your icebeaker half-sheets. What could you do for them right now to help meet their social emotional needs? How can you look at them through an ESL lens?
Conclusion

Thank you so much for coming!
References


References (continued)


