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## **How Can I Inform Colleagues About the Trauma of English Learner Scholars and Create a Trauma-sensitive Classroom For Multilingual Scholars In An Education Setting?**

Kwenen Nelson

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HOW CAN I INFORM COLLEAGUES ABOUT THE TRAUMA OF ENGLISH  
LEARNER SCHOLARS AND CREATE A TRAUMA-SENSITIVE CLASSROOM  
FOR MULTILINGUAL SCHOLARS IN AN EDUCATION SETTING?

by

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A capstone project submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of  
Masters of Arts in Teaching

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## DEDICATION

Thank you to my husband, Jon Jackola, my dreams are made with you on my side. To Nico and Jonah whose lives inspire me to do the very best, always. This is for my family. You have loved and supported me and I am eternally grateful. To future and past students, you've taught me well.

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## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **Introduction**

I was reluctant to become a teacher for many years after I graduated from college. My mother taught for over 40 years and my memory keeps bringing me back to images of my mom being exhausted, overwhelmed, and anxious. I returned to school to become a teacher (for the second time) as a thirty-four year-old. I'd had enough of working in an office in sales, marketing, and legal departments. I had volunteered at an alternative high school in Minneapolis and by this time, teaching was all I could think about. I knew there would be challenges but I hadn't anticipated how much schools have changed since I left school so many years before. Yet, I still joined a profession described in a 2018 Education Week article that acknowledges, "45% of new teachers are leaving the profession within 5 years." Granted, I attended high school in a predominately White student body with the socioeconomic demographics of middle to upper middle-class families. Mental health, trauma, reducing stress and anxiety were never talked about in classrooms or brought up within the walls of the school. By the first week of my first year

of teaching, I knew that ignoring these topics was no longer an option for my students or for myself. I began to wonder if I should leave the profession due to the emotional distress it was causing me. The discomfort I began to feel ignited my capstone research question: *How can I inform colleagues about the trauma of English Learners and create a trauma-sensitive classroom for multilingual scholars in an educational setting?*

### **Rationale**

I continued to teach without researching trauma in my personal background or how trauma affects children and how this translates to behavior or performance in an educational setting. However, the apparent need for mental health for students and the lack of support students were actually receiving in schools made me wonder how I could help as a teacher. By the end of my second year of teaching and experiencing another year of distress, I learned about the basics of ACEs (Adverse Childhood Experiences) and also how mindfulness leads to positive effects for students experiencing trauma. Finally, toward the end of my third year teaching while teaching online, also while the whole world began to experience a collective trauma due to COVID-19, I seriously started to focus on trauma in educational settings. I'm also aware that if or when I return to the classroom, my students will be coping with a continuance of racial trauma that literally blew up in the city of Minneapolis at the end of May, 2020. There isn't a more timely or appropriate topic that I can think of that will help me or my colleagues in the upcoming school years. Currently, I am teaching students who speak languages other than English including students from war-torn countries or are experiencing trauma from immigration.

My students are also existing in a systemic racist environment and education system and I need to learn these tools to create a safe learning space and share these findings with my colleagues.

### **Context**

Before I started teaching, I volunteered at a Minneapolis Alternative High School and worked as an AVID Tutor for the Minneapolis School District. I was informed that several students at the alternative high school had gang affiliations or had criminal backgrounds. Some of the female students had children or were pregnant. All of the students were disenfranchised from their home schools and a “typical” high school did not provide adequate support for their needs. I had struggled in high school because of personal and familial mental health issues. I grew up in a family with a parent that has a history of addiction to drugs and alcohol and it is prevalent in my entire family. In my family, there is a history of violence and trauma. I knew from my own experiences that instability in the home had the potential to disrupt one’s education experience. How could it not? I was at the school for a couple of hours a week. As I reflect on the emotional and mental toll it takes to teach or work with young people, I don’t recall my time at this particular school as having a strong impact on my well-being. There simply wasn’t enough time to build relationships with the students based on my limited time at the school. Naturally, I could recognize the angst, stress, and heaviness life had brought upon these kids but I never took it home with me.

One conversation I do remember while working as an AVID Tutor was with a male student. He was worried about housing and was certain his mother was losing the

house he shared with his mom and a younger sister. This student told me that he and his family had lived in a shelter in Minneapolis before. He explained how they were unable to get rest while staying at the shelter because of the noise level and safety issues. If they slept, their personal items would be stolen. The student continued to share with me that two of the very worst experiences they had while living in the shelter were having the stomach flu and not being able to access the bathroom when needed. The lack of flexible access to the bathroom includes toilet training his younger sister. This is the part of the story that still stays with me. During the time he told me this story, my son was two-years-old. The feeling of not being able to provide a safe and stable environment for my child weighed heavily on me. I proceeded to watch carefully over this student to make sure he was receiving enough support in his classes and hoping that he would recover from his life's experiences.

My first teaching job was at an alternative Minneapolis High school. It is the sister school to the alternative school I had spent two years volunteering at. The student body consisted of students with major mental health issues, emotional, and behavior issues, and addiction. It also had a significant population of highly mobile homeless students and a sudden shift in staff. The students, I was told, did not react well to the news that three out of four of their teachers were leaving the program. I saw red flags during the interview. I accepted the position anyway because I believed that with my personal background, I would be able to build positive relationships with the students and it would work well.

By the end of my first week at this school, I was exhausted. I had received verbal and physical threats. I was deemed the villain because I had taken the place of their previous beloved teachers. I worked hard at creating a safe room for students by allowing them to speak about their grievances but I could not steer the students into believing that I was there to support them. It took three months for the students to realize that no matter how hard they tried to get me to leave, I wouldn't leave. What they didn't know was that I wanted to leave. I didn't think I could make it through the school year. The students were unstable. The environment was unstable. The Program Manager that was hired for this particular school year was hired because she was a former student. She did not have any training in education or management. At her 90-day review, her position was terminated for inappropriate interactions with students. The Director of the school wasn't prepared for this trauma that rippled throughout the school and the issue was neglected for several weeks. Also, after winter break, the science teacher was going to leave and the position had not been filled. This meant for the students that they had an entire new staff and the rest of the school year was unclear.

At the beginning of the school year, the school was at capacity with forty students. By January, we were lucky if twelve students made it to school. Several students had dropped out but a large group was still enrolled at our school although they were not attending school. The part-time social worker suggested it was because it was winter and it was a challenging time for the students and many needed to be in treatment programs. I was not trained in social work and my job started to shift into what felt like working in a group home.

One student was so high-risk for committing suicide, that we had to make sure she was with an adult at all times. Another student confided in me she was going to kill herself. Instead of working with the Director or the school's social worker, it became my job to call the parent and have a meeting about the student's mental state. While working at the reception desk one morning, a student, who does not open up to many, told me about how his dad beat him and other horrifying events that happened in his home. When I consulted with the Director, I was told to refrain from calling Hennepin County because she didn't want the student to begin to distrust the school. I called regardless of my directive. Many of the students were coming to school hungover or on drugs. They were unraveling and taking their frustrations out on the safe people at the school.

By winter break, I was numb and detached and I no longer was practicing self-care. Self-care has always been challenging for me and at this point it was non-existent. I felt guilty about not having the capacity of taking care of my own child and family. I gained weight and I didn't exercise. I didn't see my friends and I had constant anxiety about the future of these students. I learned from this experience that the students' behavior triggered emotions and memories from my own experiences growing up. I also have now learned that throughout the school year my own trauma was telling me that I had to "fight, flight, or freeze."

At the end of the school year, I was not asked to return. Initially, this was difficult to comprehend because I had worked harder than I ever had before. I also believed that I supported and advocated for the students consistently. Now, I understand that the right decision was made but it was not a healthy place for me to work and I wouldn't have

grown professionally. It was not sustainable. I also learned that I was pregnant with my second child and chose to stay home. During the three years that I stayed home to parent, I also completed my second license to teach K-12 English as a Second Language.

Three years later, I returned to the classroom with high hopes of finding a stable environment. During the first week of school, on the second day of classes, I found myself during my prep hour in the bathroom looking for new jobs. I was to support 75 fifth and sixth grade EL students and it would be the only language support they would have during the day. Each student would receive support every other day for 40 minutes a class period non-content related. I dry-heaved with worry until winter break because I understood these students were not receiving enough support in their content classes. I also knew that a significant number at this school had trauma backgrounds and there was only one social worker employed at the school. Again, at spring break time, I found myself unable to function. I was also told at this time that my contract would not be renewed due to low enrollment which made motivation for me to fully show up every day for the students even more challenging. The feeling of putting your heart and soul into my work and the consistent lack of support led me to consider quitting the profession after only two years of teaching.

On top of compassion fatigue, there were behavior issues throughout the school. It was loud, violent, and students and staff generally did not feel safe at school. The students would come to class on edge and unable to participate for a variety of reasons. Aside from needed language support, the student's literacy skills were low. I suspect this was due to transferring schools multiple times throughout their short education career. I

also learned that content teachers were not using the school's Language Line so parents felt very disconnected from their child's education. However, through my experience of working for this school district, staff was able to hear a presentation on the Center of Disease Center's research on Adverse Childhood Trauma. We had a one-hour training on childhood trauma but it didn't include support teachers could use in classrooms, nor did include follow-up training for more information. When school resumed after spring break, I received an email from a friend and colleague about a training she went through and persuaded me at the mention of, "it saved my teaching career." The training is named "The Burnout Antidote" and it is through an organization called Present Teacher. By the time my session started in July, I had plenty of rest and generally felt relaxed. However, taking the time thinking about my teaching experiences would result in panic attacks and I did everything I could to not bring up my school year. I signed a contract at a new school for the upcoming school year. Based on the school's reputation and my friends who had children at the school district, it seemed it would be a solid place to land. Still, I kept from thinking about the school year out of fear and anticipation of the negatives that could happen.

The first Saturday of the mindfulness training, I was reluctant to go. I didn't want to spend six hours talking about education, schools, or teachers. Within ten minutes, I knew I was exactly where I needed to be. The room was full of exhausted teachers who continue to love their jobs but needed help recovering from stress and to learn skills to cope. To start the learning, we took the class outside and did a mindfulness walk. The instructions were to walk, barefoot, in the grass in a small area of Hamline University.

This seemed easy, though people were complaining and one's cell phone rang and was answered. This sent anxiety through my body. I'm triggered by the unwillingness to attempt something new as well as using a device during relaxation or instruction time. I would soon learn that these triggers were a good opportunity for me to work through my own trauma experiences. As I walked in circles and looked at different pieces of nature, I felt a release.

This exercise was tangible and simple enough to practice daily. After we returned to our designated classroom, our presenter, Jennifer Clifton, would share with us that an emotional trait is, "a feeling that persists for years. An emotional trait increases the likelihood that you will experience a certain emotional state in a particular way." I realized that the trauma I have experienced is continuously triggered in the classroom and again solidified the notion that I needed to find a way where I can be a stable adult in the classroom.

When the next school year began, I felt renewed and ready for my new school and students. I was not prepared for the undercurrents of trauma that the multilingual scholars were experiencing. As previously written, my education experiences were formed in urban and diverse settings. My current school is located in a small suburb outside of Minneapolis, Minnesota. The district is predominantly White, with free and reduced population of approximately 20%, the EL population is an estimated 5%, and the majority of the veteran staff have only been employed in this district.

By mid-year, my classroom became a place where students would congregate with their friends or on their own. Students would come during lunch, class passing time,

a place to take break while they were to be in other classes, and oftentimes after school. I began to notice that in my classes, the students were very talkative and expressive. However, if I observed these students in other classes, they often isolated themselves and rarely spoke up. I registered to complete my Master's Capstone and I knew that I need to explore trauma and begin to research trauma specifically related to the multilingual learners in my English Language Development (ELD) classes

### **Summary**

My professional education experience has led me to various schools with children and adolescents that are traditionally underserved and have experienced trauma. Due to my own trauma background, I empathize with my students and want to move forward so they are able to feel safe in their education setting.

In Chapter Two, I will research various types of trauma, highlight the original Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACES) as well as the trauma specifically related to immigrants, refugees, and students who have at least one parent born in another country. The Literature Review will also include a summary of how trauma affects the adolescent brain and how this manifests in a classroom.

Chapter Three will outline a presentation during time set aside for professional development. I will provide a summary of trauma our English Learner students may be experiencing in school, what the effect of trauma looks like in a classroom, and focus on microaggressions in the classroom. Research and personal narratives indicate that Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) students face microaggressions, sometimes daily, in school settings. By having a clear understanding of microaggressions and how

microaggressions in school cause trauma, teachers will have tangible resources to prevent this type of trauma in their classrooms.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **Literature Review**

#### **Chapter Overview**

Educators and administrators have known for quite some time that there is not one-type of student. We've been trained to teach and support students from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds, urban, rural, and suburban settings, and students with differing learning abilities—including mental and physical differences. Presently, school staff are needing to address the urgent needs of students with trauma backgrounds. Due to the effects of trauma and one's neuro-development, schools are finding more challenging issues surrounding student learning. A significant number of the students struggling are those who are underserved in schools—specifically multilingual learners.

This paper will provide information for several types of trauma and trauma specifically presented in adolescents and scholars in English Language Development (ELD) class in the Minneapolis/St. Paul metro area in Minnesota. The intent of this research and its findings is to help colleagues, in a secondary school, recognize trauma in

a classroom setting and further answer my question: *How can I inform colleagues about the trauma of EL students and create a trauma-sensitive classroom for multilingual students in an ELD setting?* Furthermore, this research will be used to provide professional development and data that will be presented to colleagues for professional development.

### **Definition of Trauma**

Currently, the world is buzzing with the word, "trauma." We hear it in the media, popular culture uses it casually, and socially it can be used to describe any given individual who has experienced a negative experience. There are traumatic events that happen in birth, during pregnancy, and delivery. Traumatic situations happen in schools, in our homes, while traveling, and without consent. There are zero boundaries to trauma and it has zero regard to the individual or groups that experience its effects.

There are many types of trauma, however, the focus for this project will be to initially acknowledge complex trauma (multiple events), and collective trauma (shared trauma). Trauma may be defined as, "an exceptional experience in which powerful and dangerous events overwhelm a person's capacity to cope" (Rice & Groves, 2005, as cited in Souers & Hall, 2016).

In other words, it is not a person having a bad day or experiencing situational stress; there must be a constant physical or psychological response attached to the trauma.

### **Complex Trauma**

There are two common and important types of trauma that need to be identified and defined before the specific types of trauma for young, immigrant children. The first common type is complex trauma. Defined by The National Childhood Traumatic Stress Network, complex trauma is, "children's exposure to multiple traumatic events—often of an invasive, interpersonal nature—and the wide-ranging, long-term effects of this exposure. These events are severe and pervasive, such as abuse or profound neglect. They usually occur early in life and can disrupt many aspects of the child's development and the formation of a sense of self" (NCTSN, n.d., para1). The NCTSN website also includes that this type of trauma involves a caregiver and child's attachment to the caregiver (NCTSN, n.d., para 1).

### **Collective Trauma**

Daniel Render Turmaid, a writer and counseling professional from Psychology Today, defines collective trauma as, "the impact of a traumatic experience that affects and involves entire groups of people, communities, or societies" (2020, para. 2). Currently, as of March 2020, we are experiencing collective trauma (trauma that affects a group of people) due to COVID-19 and the reckoning of past and present historical racial injustice. Collective trauma is an important concept when discussing the events of young immigrants—especially when considering refugees and asylees. While children may be experiencing complex trauma in their homes and personal lives, collectively, these same children may be experiencing persecution, wars, droughts, famine, and other exponential crises that either voluntarily or involuntarily force the children from their homelands.

### **Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE)**

As mentioned on the Center for Disease Control and Prevention website, complex trauma is the bedrock for the Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) and Kaiser Permanente (nation-wide medical center). These organizations analyzed the data of 9,508 adults whose traumatic events and adversity experienced as children, and used these findings to focus on the effects of toxic stress (the longevity of adversity without adult support) and how it has impacted their physical and mental health. Childhood experiences that were measured in the study included: emotional, physical, and sexual abuse, emotional and physical neglect, witnessing violence in the home, substance abuse or addiction by caregiver, mental illness, divorce or separation, and incarceration of a parent. The research found that adults from the study with four or more of these categories had a higher increase of developing an addiction to alcohol or drugs, experienced depression, or attempted suicide. Other adults with higher ACEs scores were found to have a high number of sexual partners and sexually transmitted diseases, and obesity. Furthermore, the study showed cases of heart disease, cancer, lung issues, and kidney disease. The adults with seven or more ACEs indicated multiple serious health issues (Felitti, V.J. et. al., 1998).

One major oversight of the original data is that the data does not discriminate against the adversities between White and BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, Person of Color) populations. This is important, in regards to more current studies because, "the differential experience of adversity across racial and ethnic subgroups has been largely absent from the ACEs literature, despite a widespread understanding that disadvantage is not distributed equally across groups" (Maguire-Jack, et al., 2020, p. 107). The first

questionnaire, for the original data set, included 8,056 people. Of that total, 79% were White adults. The break-down of racial/ethnic groups are: Black, .05%; Latinx, .05%; Asian, .06%; and other (not defined), .04% (Feliti, V.J. et. al., 1998).

In 2016, a revival of the study by the National Study of Child Health (NSCH) adds two more ACEs to the first framework which are violence in neighborhoods and racial and ethnic discrimination. At the time of this study, it is reported that, in 2016, 34 million children, nearly half of all U.S. children ages 0-17, had at least one of nine ACEs, and more than 20 percent experienced two or more [ACEs]" (Maguire-Jack, et al., 2020, p. 107). The major differences are presented as Latinx communities have a higher number of living in poverty, Black families are more likely to live in social isolation, Latinx and Black children are more likely to be involved in violence in their communities, and more Black men are imprisoned. It is also essential to note that those living in more impoverished communities are at a higher health risk (Maguire-Jack, et al., 2020). The original and current data do not specify if studies included immigrant adults.

### **Effects of Trauma on the Adolescent Brain**

Trauma not only causes physical conditionals to the body, it also causes differences in neurodevelopment. During the time of high stress levels, the amygdala, the part of the limbic system (which regulates emotions and memories) releases hormones that send a message to the body to flight, fight, or freeze. The same chemical reactions can result in someone going into survival mode when one is feeling in danger, and it can last a short period of time. However, if children are exposed to repetitive and consistent trauma or complex trauma, studies have found that it can hinder healthy brain

development. Souers and Hall (2016) write that the constant and high levels of stress hinder proper brain development in various ways such as "affecting learning, memory, mood, relational skills, and aspects of executive functioning (Shonkoff & Garner, 2012, as cited in Souers & Hall, 2016)—all required for success in a classroom setting" (p. 22).

### What Flight, Fight, or Freeze Looks Like in the Classroom

Flight	Fight	Freeze
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Withdrawing</li> <li>● Fleeing the classroom</li> <li>● Skipping class</li> <li>● Daydreaming</li> <li>● Seeming to sleep</li> <li>● Avoiding Others</li> <li>● Hiding or Wandering</li> <li>● Becoming disengaged</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Acting out</li> <li>● Behaving aggressively</li> <li>● Acting silly</li> <li>● Exhibiting defiance</li> <li>● Being hyperactive</li> <li>● Arguing</li> <li>● Screaming/yelling</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Exhibiting numbness</li> <li>● Refusing to answer</li> <li>● Refusing to get needs met</li> <li>● Giving a blank look</li> <li>● Feeling unable to move or act</li> </ul>

(Souers & Hall, 2016, p. 29)

### Self-Regulation

Another hindrance to student learning is the time a child is enduring trauma and the time they become a teenager, their ability to self-regulate has become compromised. Also, the teenagers' "capacity to integrate sensory, emotional, and cognitive information in new situations is impaired" (Craig, 2017, p. 20). These abilities are deemed necessary due to transition because students are going from class to class, learning in different

content areas, surrounding themselves with a variety of people—all with different social and institutional social norms and expectations.

The lack of self-regulation may also include hypervigilance in school environments. This is apparent by the constant need to keep an eye out, in their proximities, for danger or threats. When this happens, Craig writes of teenagers indicating, "symptoms of compulsive repetition or the need to engage authority figures in reenactments of past traumatic exchanges with caregivers" (2017, p. 22). The result can often be blatant "hostility or distrust" (2017, p. 22) toward the teacher or other school staff member. We also see this as students abruptly leaving the classroom for extended periods of time and other behaviors that may be seen as disruptive. It is so hard-wired in their brains that it literally needs to be, in a sense, reprogrammed.

### **Executive Functioning**

As humans, we often refer to our "minds" in reference to our brain. Our mind is scientifically called the cerebral cortex. This part of the brain, which has four lobes, allows people to have, "involuntary movement, coordination of sensory information, learning, memory, and personality" (Craig, 2017, p. 13). This area also undergoes an incredible amount of change during adolescence as it aids in higher-order thinking, executive functioning, and a solid working memory so they can remember all the information provided daily. In high school, it is expected to be able to think big thoughts and have grand ideas. Teachers also expect students to bring all the appropriate material and textbooks to class and keep them organized. When these rules aren't followed, often perceived as an expectation and appropriate for the age, this becomes a challenge for

teachers who lack flexibility. Students who have undergone trauma or are experiencing trauma need cognitive flexibility and the ability to integrate strategies that meet their needs (Craig, 2016, pp. 33-37).

### **Trauma Specific to Multilingual Learners in United States School Systems**

While some research indicates that immigrant and refugee students can also experience ACEs, there are many more types of trauma that are not related to one's home life. There are traumas that are related to natural disasters. Two examples of natural disaster traumas are from the 2019 Earthquake in Puerto Rico or the wildfires, during the same year, in Australia. Also, there are global conflicts that U.S. citizens are typically not aware of since they are not consistently aired or printed in U.S. media. According to the Council of Foreign Relations's website, there are 23 global conflicts. If a student is moving from a country at war or in conflict, teachers will need to understand and create a safe place for their student. One major group of refugees that migrated to Minnesota due to civil wars and famine are Somalis. In a 2019 Star Tribune article, it claims that Minnesota has, "52,333 people report Somali ancestry—the largest concentration of Somalis" (Rao, M., 2019, para. 1). This group left Somalia due to internal wars and continued to migrate to the United State for developing and continuous wars (Rao, M. 2019).

According to the American Immigration Council, in 2018, there were, "484, 192 immigrants comprised 9% of the population" in Minnesota (2020). While there are many countries represented in Minnesota, the majority of refugees arrived from: "Mexico (12 percent of immigrants), Somalia (8 percent), India (6 percent), Laos (5 percent), and

Ethiopia (5 percent)" (2020). The Immigrant Law Center of Minnesota writes on their website that, "Minnesota has the highest number of refugees per capita of any state, according to the U.S. Census and refugee support agencies" (2018). Many of these immigrants spent several years in refugee camps before they arrived in the United States.

Due to the nature of the process and and circumstances of immigration and being a refugee, there are high levels of stress and trauma. Specifically, these events lead to special mental health challenges in schools. When children and adolescents experience "complex trauma and toxic stress" (Mancini, 2019, p. 287) they continue to experience the trauma physiologically even after the traumatic experience is over. Mancini also writes, "Immigrant and refugee youth exposed to political or interpersonal violence are at a higher risk for mood, anxiety and behavioral problems" (Shonkoff & Garner, 2012, as cited in Souers & Hall, 2016).

### **Trauma Pre-Migration, Migration, and Post-Migration**

There are three types of trauma related to the act of migrating to another country. These are pre-migration, migration, and post-migration. The chart below will be a point of reference for this section (Healing the Hurt, 2005 as cited by Leichtle, E., 2016)

Note. "The Triple-Trauma Paradigm." Adapted from Healing the Hurt, 2005 as cited by Leichtle, E., 2016.

**Pre-Migration**

Pre-migration trauma is the collective reason families, children, or individuals deem it necessary to leave their home countries. As indicated in "The Triple-Trauma Paradigm", these reasons are often deemed necessary for under-age children who leave their home countries because of political chaos, same-country wars, gang violence, or the risk of being killed due to race, political stances, sexual preference, and religious beliefs (Franco, 2018, p. 553).

Current research locates participants in which they hear stories from refugees. Franco's research (2018) led to a story about a 15 year-old girl from El Salvador who was, "shot to death by a gang because she was selling tortillas in a rival gang's tortillas" (p. 553). Martinez's (2009) research includes a story of refugee from El Salvador who writes of the war in his home country:

Night by night when I would hear gunshots, I would run straight under my bed as if that would be the shield I needed against the deadly bullets. My older sister and

I

**FIGURE 3A**

THE TRIPLE-TRAUMA PARADIGM		
PRE-FLIGHT 	FLIGHT 	POST-FLIGHT 
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Harassment/intimidation/threats</li> <li>■ Fear of unexpected arrest</li> <li>■ Loss of job/livelihood</li> <li>■ Loss of home and possessions</li> <li>■ Disruption of studies, life dreams</li> <li>■ Repeated relocation</li> <li>■ Living in hiding/underground</li> <li>■ Societal chaos/breakdown</li> <li>■ Prohibition of traditional practices</li> <li>■ Lack of medical care</li> <li>■ Separation, isolation of family</li> <li>■ Malnutrition</li> <li>■ Need for secrecy, silence, distrust</li> <li>■ Brief arrests</li> <li>■ Being followed or monitored</li> <li>■ Imprisonment</li> <li>■ Torture</li> <li>■ Other forms of violence</li> <li>■ Witnessing violence</li> <li>■ Disappearances/deaths</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Fear of being caught or returned</li> <li>■ Living in hiding/underground</li> <li>■ Detention at checkpoints, borders</li> <li>■ Loss of home, possessions</li> <li>■ Loss of job/schooling</li> <li>■ Illness</li> <li>■ Robbery</li> <li>■ Exploitation: bribes, falsification</li> <li>■ Physical assault, rape, or injury</li> <li>■ Witnessing violence</li> <li>■ Lack of medical care</li> <li>■ Separation, isolation of family</li> <li>■ Malnutrition</li> <li>■ Crowded, unsanitary conditions</li> <li>■ Long waits in refugee camps</li> <li>■ Great uncertainty about future</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Low social and economic status</li> <li>■ Lack of legal status</li> <li>■ Language barriers</li> <li>■ Transportation, service barriers</li> <li>■ Loss of identity, roles</li> <li>■ Bad news from home</li> <li>■ Unmet expectations</li> <li>■ Unemployment/underemployment</li> <li>■ Racial/ethnic discrimination</li> <li>■ Inadequate, dangerous housing</li> <li>■ Repeated relocation/migration</li> <li>■ Social and cultural isolation</li> <li>■ Family separation/reunification</li> <li>■ Unresolved losses/disappearances</li> <li>■ Conflict: internal, marital, generational, community</li> <li>■ Unrealistic expectations from home</li> <li>■ Shock of new climate, geography</li> <li>■ Symptoms often worsen</li> </ul>

witnessed many incidents with the guerrilla. To this day, my sister often awakens in the middle of the night frightened and shouting while desperately banging on the window. She describes not recalling what she was dreaming of. Additionally, when my sister hears airplanes flying over our house, making a lot of forceful sounds, she panics and cannot stay still in one place. She begins to pace, closes her ears, and her heart rate rises. I do not have those same reactions. For me, listening to people scream or watching others in helpless situations infuriates me and I begin to perspire. I highly dislike being placed in positions where I am incapable of thinking, acting, or speaking up—it makes my skin feel hot. (p. 36)

### ***Migration Trauma***

Migration trauma are the events surrounding the act of leaving a home country. Due to the fact that the majority of immigrants in Minnesota are coming from Mexico, the focus will be on the migration of those crossing the Mexican border. Similarly, the focus will be on children migrating from the Northern Triangle area of Central America (Honduras, Guatemala, and El Salvador). In between the time of October 2013 and July 2016, 156,000 children from this area traveled alone to the United States (Cardoso, J.B., 2018, p. 1).

Many of the Latinx groups are forced into detention centers or they rely on coyotes to migrate to the United States. The unaccompanied refugee minor (URM) can be placed in very dangerous situations as they are likely vulnerable to, "being assaulted, physically and sexual abuse, and sustaining physical injuries" (Franco, 218, p. 554). URM's can be left in unknown areas trying to escape officers and may suffer from lack of

food or water. Oftentimes, URM's will take other forms of transportation aside from walking. This may include buses or a train called La Bestia. Those who take La Bestia are those who are the most impoverished migrants as it is more affordable than hiring coyotes. However, the passengers ride on top of the train and this leaves room for danger. Some of the traumatic occurrences that occur for young people during this particular journey are theft, rape, or gangs who force them to pay for extra safety (Franco, 2018, p. 554). Franco's research concludes that, "the exposure to these events only serves to exacerbate exposure to previous trauma" (Franco, 2018, p. 554).

Another major concern is URM's being detained at the U.S.-Mexico border. According to the Council of Foreign Relations, Cheatham provides data which says that, "immigration authorities apprehended a record-setting 76,020 unaccompanied minors at or near the U.S.-Mexico border during the 2019 fiscal year, an increase of 52 percent over 2018" (2020, para. 2). As previously mentioned, children are leaving "The Northern Triangle" due to poverty and violence. The children are unaccompanied because they are on their way to the United States to stay with relatives, they may be leaving domestic violence, or parents send them alone in hopes of their being granted asylum (Cheatham, 2020).

The detention centers were described in a PBS segment by law professor William Binford. Binford reports his first-hand experiences while at a detention center in Clint, Texas. At this particular cite there were, "allegedly 250 infants, children, and teenagers" (Binford, 2019, 0:28). Furthermore, Binford describes the conditions of where the children were living, "what we saw are dirty children who are malnourished, who are

being severely neglected. They are being kept in inhumane conditions. They are essentially being warehoused, as many as 300 children in a cell, with almost no adult supervision" (Binford, 2019, 1:09).

In addition, Minnesota's significant Somali population often spends years in Kenyan refugee camps. This transition before families or individuals can officially migrate to the United States, can cause additional trauma in refugee camps. A participant in Haffejee's 2015 research discloses:

in Africa we don't sleep at night because it's so dangerous. During the day we sleep . . . you must learn to survive . . . sometimes we go to school [in the camp] hungry. . . . In a refugee camp you are always around people who are struggling like I was and it put everyone into survival mode. (2015, p.10)

### ***Post-Flight***

At the post-flight stage, immigrants and refugees are now in their final destination. Once young people are transitioning to their new country, they can experience microaggressions or racial hostilities in schools, political trauma, religious beliefs, isolation, inequities in education, and the possibility of children separated from their parents (Franco, 2018, p. 551).

**Acculturation.** One of the most preceding stressors in an immigrant or refugee's post-flight experience is acculturation. Acculturation can be summed up as the process of "how individuals in the United States adopt and incorporate dominant cultural values, beliefs,

and behaviors such as individualism and self-reliance" (Liu et al., 2019, para. 1). Further research indicates that those afflicted with acculturation have depression, anxiety, PTSD, extreme fear, and addiction. There also may be a lot of stress and frustration during the process of a new language and of a new culture as well as the fear of not having legal documentation to continue living in the U.S. is also prevalent in acculturative stress.

**Negative Environments for Multilingual Learners.** In schools across the United States, racial microaggressions are occurring in the hallways, classrooms, and administrative office. The repetitive, consistent, and hurtful message from microaggressions can be received in the form of zero-tolerance policies, academic tracking, curriculum, and engagement between teacher and student as well as between classmates (Allen, A., et. al., 2013, pp.119-122).

**Microaggressions.** One of the negative impacts that can have a lasting effect on immigrant and refugee students is microaggressions. In a New York Times article written in 2020, microaggressions are defined as, "everyday slights, indignities, put-downs and insults that members of marginalized groups experience in their day-to-day interactions with individuals who are often unaware that they have engaged in an offensive or demeaning way" (Sue, 2007 as cited by Yoon, 2020). Many studies have focused on Black, Indigenous, People of Color (BIPOC) students in secondary classrooms. The studies find that while microaggressions are common and often overlooked, they have a negative impact on mental and physical health. Research also suggests that receivers of microaggressions begin to feel invisible and furthermore struggle with self-worth (Meeks, M.A., 2010, p. 49). In the same study, some of the symptoms of feeling

overlooked are "anger, depression, substance abuse, and loss of hope (Meeks, M.A., 2010, p. 50).

Schools also perpetuate racism and bias against BIPOC students. In school, Latinx students feel discriminated against for their immigration status and are overtly asked about their status. For Black students, they may feel as though people are prejudging them as being violent or criminals. The effects of these microaggressions can lead to mental health issues such as trauma, anxiety, lack of self-worth, depression, and positive racial identity (Allen, A., et al., 2013, p. 123).

Dr. Derald Wing Sue has written many books about microaggressions and is a professor at Columbia University. Sue has created a table of themes, examples, and messages that occur.

Here are some examples that may be heard in English Language Development (ELD) classrooms:

Theme	Microaggressions	Message
Alien in One's Own Land  When Asian Americans, Latino Americans and others who look different or are named differently from the dominant culture are assumed to be foreign-born	"Where are you from or where were you born?"  "You speak English very well."	You are not a true American.
Ascription of Intelligence Assigning intelligence to a person of color	"Wow! How did you become so good in math?"	People of color are generally not as intelligent as Whites. All Asians are

	To an Asian person, "You must be good in math, can you help me with this problem?"	intelligent and good in math/science
Color Blindness Statements that indicate that a White person does not want to or need to acknowledge race.	Denying the experiences of students by questioning the credibility /validity of their stories	Denying the individual as a racial/cultural being.
Pathologizing Cultural Values/Communication Styles The notion that the values and communication styles of the dominant/White culture are ideal/"normal".	To an Asian, Latino or Native American: "Why are you so quiet? We want to know what you think. Be more verbal." "Speak up more."	Assimilate to dominant culture

*Note.* "Table 2.1." Adapted from *Microaggressions in Everyday Life: Race, Gender, and Sexual Identity*, Sue, D.W., 2010.

**The School to Prison Pipeline.** Traditionally, schools dealt with discipline challenges with strict authoritative control. Students typically are assigned with detention, in school suspension, and expulsion. Chronic punitive discipline can cause more harm for students with trauma backgrounds (Ablon, 2020). Dr. Ablon claims, "It is leveraging a power differential to increase compliance" (para. 4). These methods are still found in schools nationally and globally. Consider the outcome of a student, who had been previously detained during migration. The student is unable to self-regulate due to trauma and educators and administration begin to see the manifestations of trauma. Instead of using a non-traditional form of discipline, the school places the child in detention, typically a room without windows and zero contact with other people.

**Background of The School to Prison Pipeline.** In 1994, the Gun-Free Schools Act was passed and pushed schools to begin to use a "zero tolerance" disciplinary policy

if a student brought a weapon to school. Students would receive out-of school suspension, for a year, if they brought a weapon to school. Due to the policies, it increased suspensions and expulsions because the definition of a weapon was not clear. For example, a student could be suspended for using the figure to shape themselves as a gun. The disciplinary acts by schools caused the numbers to increase for Black and Latinx students. Furthermore, the same strict policies evolved into those who were truant, late for class, or being insubordinate in class, would receive the same harsh treatment (Nelson, L. & Lind, D., 2015).

A few years later, School Resource Officers (SRO) were brought into schools. Initially, the SROs were brought into school to prevent mass school shootings such as Columbine High School (1999) and Sandy Hook Elementary (2012). However, research has found that instead of providing a sense of security, SROs are, "trained and socialized in the culture of police departments—a culture that is not always compatible and at odds with the goals of the school" (Fisher, B.W. & Hennessy, E.A., 2015, p. 218).

Teachers can also help reduce the number of disparaging disciplinary actions and are a major component in the school to prison pipeline process. One article suggests, "a teacher's decision to refer students for punishment can mean they are pushed out of the classroom—and more likely to be introduced into the criminal justice system" (Rethinkingschools.org, 2013 as cited by Berlowitz, M. J., et al., 2017, p. 9). Another article points out that teachers often lack cultural understanding of non-White backgrounds, which also leads to more office referrals for African Americans. Some of the behaviors that teachers perceive are grounds for office visits are, "excessive noise,

disrespect, disobedience, disorderly conduct, and fighting" (Fablo, et al., 2011, as cited by Pane, et al., 2014, p. 299).

### **Trauma-Sensitive Environments for Multilingual Learner**

Much of the research provided for working with students and trauma rely heavily on mental health services in the school. However, these services are not always found within individual schools and districts. There are several paths to creating a safe environment for students with trauma backgrounds that teachers can request for professional development and with hope, the district will follow suit.

### **Self-Care**

The first step that educators need to take, is to reconcile a relationship with themselves. When we are in tune with our own self-awareness, we are best suited to help kids with trauma backgrounds. Dr. Jennifer Clifden provides educators training on teacher burn-out in Minneapolis, Minnesota and surrounding areas. Clifden, in one of her presentations proclaims, "The calling of our souls should never serve to distance us from our very selves or the students we are called to serve; for this is the most profound sense of damage that exists" (2019). When we are able to exist in a state of calmness for ourselves, it will project onto the young people in our spaces.

Teachers often enter their classrooms with their own set of triggers. The key is to find your baseline and recognize which triggers are positive or negative. One of the most common complaints of teachers is exhaustion and this can be a trigger. The lack of sleep can leave teachers irritable, tired, judgmental, impatient, and with a general lack of tolerance. Another trigger is being reminded of past stressful or traumatic experiences

with students. Other triggers may happen when certain beliefs are challenged such as political or religious beliefs or other belief systems such as handing homework in on time. Sometimes an educator can be triggered when a plan falls through or when students don't cooperate as imagined (Souers & Hall, 2016, pp. 70-71).

### **Mindfulness**

Triggers in the classroom can be refocused by teachers and students while practicing mindfulness. Mindfulness can be described as "a particular state of consciousness that involves awareness and acceptance of whatever is happening in the present moment" (Jenning, P., 2015, p. 1). Some of the basic components of mindfulness that teachers can use in the classroom are body scans, deep breathing, and mindful walking. Body scans are where certain parts of the body receive attention. On a yoga mat, the class can lie on the floor and start with focusing on the toes, then feet, and continue to work up to the head. It provides a calmness to the whole body awareness and calmness. There are many recordings to guide classes through body scans. Another activity to use in a classroom is Three Breaths. Students and teachers can practice this breathing method by placing one's hand on their stomach. Then, take a deep breath in which the expansion of the lung cage expands. Breaths should be long and slow. And finally release the air from the stomach through the mouth. This is continued for two more breaths. And finally, the class can take a short mindful walk. The focus is placed on the soles of the feet. People can walk in straight lines back and forth in a room or in a circle around the room—paying special attention to the foot work. The heel is placed on the ground first followed by the

midfoot, and then the toes. Heads are down to focus on the walking and clearing of the mind (Jenning, P., 2015, pp. 24, 78,109).

### **Cultural and Linguistically Responsive Teaching**

Schools have also been implementing culturally responsive teaching. This is a concept evolved from a book titled, "The Dream Keepers" written by Gloria Ladson-Billing. Culturally responsive teaching is also heavily researched by Geneva Gay. Gay defines this type of teaching as, "the use of cultural knowledge, prior experiences, frames of reference, and performance styles of ethnically diverse students to make learning encounters more relevant, and effective for them" (Gay, G., 2000 [Culturally and Linguistically Responsive Teaching and Learning: Classroom practices for student success], 2017, p. 22).

Implementing cultural and linguistically responsive (CLR) teaching into your classroom is not just bringing in diverse texts in the classroom. To implement CLR, teachers must understand that culture is understanding a culture's, "values, traditions, communication, learning styles, contributions, and relational patterns" (Gay, 2002, p. 107). CLR is also about respecting cultural groups and having background knowledge, including factual information, about the racial and cultural communities teachers support. Gay also proclaims, "too many teachers and teacher educators think that their subjects (particularly math and science) and cultural diversity are incompatible, or that combining them is too much of a conceptual and substantive stretch for their subjects to maintain disciplinary integrity. This is simply not true" (Gay, 2002, p. 108). Curriculum needs to be scanned for authenticity, the ability to correct misrepresented information regarding

historical events, racism, followed by celebrating the movements of marginalized groups or individuals. Teachers are challenged to create a "caring and building a learning community" and directly approach issues of underserved populations and guide students through analyzation and discussions (Gay, 2002, p. 108).

### **Avoid Curriculum Violence**

Curriculum violence is, "the deliberate manipulation of academic programming in a manner that ignores or compromises the intellectual and psychological well-being of learners" (Ighodaro, E., & Wiggan, G., 2011, p. 2). For instance, a Black American writer of a *Teaching Tolerance* article reveals that she was directed to pick cotton in elementary school. Her teacher brought plants in and taught the students how challenging it is to pick cotton. Jones also describes how in classrooms around the United States, teachers are asking students to reenact treatment of slaves and removing "freedom cards" if students didn't answer questions about slavery correctly (Jones, S., 2020). Additionally, in the article, "When Schools Cause Trauma" a teacher taught *To Kill a Mockingbird* and wanted the class to describe how Black Americans experienced racism, during the setting of the book, while neglecting to hear student comments on how racism is currently affecting them in school.

### **Restorative Practices**

Another positive approach to supporting underserved populations in schools is by implementing a restorative justice program. The intent of this program is to reverse the effects of the school to prison pipeline by providing a three-tiered system that relies on

relationship building, restorative circles, mediation, and transition support when a student returns from suspension, absenteeism, or other long-term absences (Walker, 2020).

### **Talking Circle**

Talking circles allow all the people in the classroom to come together and build a strong community. The teacher plans beforehand and chooses a topic that everyone can talk about. Some of these topics are empathy, compassion, trust, and courage. The person talking must have a talking piece—and only the person who has the talking piece may speak. Everyone must stay in the circle but if a person does not want to share, they are allowed to pass. All must speak and listen from the heart and share personal stories if they feel it's necessary. The process of the circle is to provide support and model what it is like to have an ally (Woerkom, M., 2018). In a 2019 article, data indicates, "improvements in students' connections to school, lower incidents of school discipline offenses and violent behavior, and improved attendance" (Wang, E. & Lee, E., 2019, p. 182).

### **Restorative Conference**

Restorative conferences are another way to bypass traditional disciplinary actions in schools. Someone who is trained in restorative practices is able to keep the meeting structured. In this practice, the offender and the victim, along with their families, work to problem-solve and find solutions. There are specific questions that the International Institute for Restorative Practices (2002) suggest during a mediation. The first set of questions are answered by the offender. For example, these question are asked for the

offender to answer:

- “What happened?”
- “What were you thinking about at the time?”
- “What have you thought about since?”
- “Who has been affected by what you have done?”
- "What do you think you need to do to make things right?"

After the offender has been given time and answered the question, the victim is also given a chance to answer restorative questions. Some examples are:

- “What did you think when you realized what happened?”
- “What impact has the incident had on you and others?”
- "What has been the hardest thing for you?"
- “What do you think needs to happen to make things right?”

This type of mediation can be used in any type of disciplinary action in school.

## **Summary**

In order to begin to answer the question, *How can I inform colleagues about the trauma of EL students and create a trauma-sensitive classroom for multilingual students in an ELD setting?* I needed to first explore the basics of child and adolescent trauma and learn the vocabulary to explain the more complicated types of trauma. Secondly, it is important to explore traumas that are specific to immigrants and refugees because they are exponentially different from narratives of being born and raised in the United States. Then, educators must understand that there is racial trauma (including microaggressions) and trauma that can be created in the lessons that are produced in the classroom. Only with the understanding of concepts of trauma and young people with backgrounds may act in class, are educators able to create safe spaces for their students. With this information in mind, educators can create safe classrooms by recognizing

microaggressions and having a conversation about comments made, incorporating mindfulness techniques, utilizing restorative justice practices, avoiding curriculum violence, and applying culturally and linguistically responsive teaching strategies.

Chapter Three will outline a presentation during time set aside for professional development. I will provide a summary of trauma our English Learner students may be experiencing in school, what the effect of trauma looks like in a classroom, and focus on microaggressions in the classroom. Research and personal narratives indicate that Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) students face microaggressions, sometimes daily, in school settings. By having a clear understanding of microaggressions and how microaggressions in school cause trauma, teachers will have tangible resources to prevent this type of trauma in their classrooms.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **Project Description**

#### **Introduction**

My current and previous experience has led me to be in classrooms where many of the students, if not all the students, are experiencing or have experienced high levels of trauma. Trauma often disguises itself as behavioral issues, learning challenges, or causing a young person to completely shut down. In schools, this can be challenging for teachers to navigate—especially if the schools are not set up to be trauma-sensitive, or the school staff are not educated on the types of trauma and its effects. Therefore, the intention of this capstone is to answer the question, *How can I inform colleagues about the trauma of EL students and create a trauma-sensitive classroom for multilingual students in an ELD setting?* While I am not a certified trainer of trauma-sensitive strategies, I will be able to provide colleagues a foundation of how trauma is defined and what it looks like in schools— with an emphasis of the specific traumas experienced by our EL students. By using ground-breaking and current research, the literature review includes data and definitions of trauma that supports BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, People of Color) as well as outlining the traumas experienced by immigrants and refugees.

#### **Project Description and Rationale**

My intent for the project is to create a professional development session that I can provide for my colleagues. I would like to focus on presenting a brief overview of trauma, how trauma manifests in the classroom, and propose a solution to stop microaggressions that are directed to multilingual learners due to linguistic, racial, cultural, sexual, gender, and educational differences. During the presentation, I will include a relevant video that highlights voices of black, indigenous, and people of color who have been victimized by microaggressions, a New York Times article that educates readers on how to respond to microaggressions, and small group work to create dialogue and language on how to respond to microaggressions in our classrooms.

My background in education primarily exists in urban schools in and around Minneapolis, St. Paul, Minnesota metro area. The demographics of students I have worked with are predominantly BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, People of Color) and data indicates that over 70% of students receive free and reduced lunch in each school I've worked in. Furthermore, these schools have served a significant number of ELL (English Language Learners) and a notable number a Highly Mobile Homeless population. Another important piece of information is that BIPOC students are more than likely to be taught by White teachers than a teacher that looks like them. In the 2019 Wilder Research report for the Minnesota Professional Education Licensing Standards Board, there were 95.7% White licensed teachers in the state and 33.5% BIPOC students (Wilder Research, 2019, p. 5). It has reached a critical need in our current classrooms that not only do educators learn about racial and cultural groups, they need to further understand the students that are immigrants, refugees, or have a parent who was born in another country.

Several weeks into any of the schools I've worked at, I began to notice patterns in behavior, student interactions with classmates or teachers, and physical symptoms. Students were often taking extended bathroom breaks, wandering the halls, holding their stomachs, yelling "shut up" (or worse) at classmates and teachers, or shutting down. I've also had a substantial number of students who, part way through the year get so overwhelmed, they stop interacting with me and their classmates and it's as if they have completely given up.

If school districts are providing professional development on trauma, it is a basic collection of data and definitions. The speakers may rely on the research about Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) and do not provide strategies on how to help their students with trauma backgrounds. In my literature review, it is indicated that ACEs only describe traumas that happen inside a household. ACEs research, at the least the early findings, were based on responses from predominantly White adults. Even though the primary group surveyed was White, the small number of BIPOC ACEs scores showed high numbers of trauma. Recently, there has been more attention to BIPOC populations and there are now two additional types of ACEs which explores trauma caused by living in violent neighborhoods and discrimination based on racial/ethnic backgrounds (Lombardi, 2020, p. 107).

## **Theoretical Frameworks**

The primary theoretical framework for this project falls under the outlines of the social justice theory. John and David Creshell (2018) define this framework as having, "the effect of involving participants collaboratively in the research, bringing about change to address inequities, and helping underrepresented groups and populations" (p. 68). While I will be facilitating the large group of educators with the basic understanding of trauma, and providing resources about working with our traditionally underserved students; my colleagues will be working together and discussing how we can make changes in our individual classrooms. Included in the resources I have for my colleagues, they will be given examples and narratives from youth voices that resonate with our current ELL and BIPOC students.

Another framework that I will be applying is Culturally and Linguistically Responsive (CLR) teaching strategies. Based on my research in chapter two and from working in other schools, this framework is widely acclaimed. I wrote in chapter two, Gay (2000) defines this type of teaching as, "the use of cultural knowledge, prior experiences frames of reference, and performance styles of ethnically diverse students to make learning encounters more relevant too, and effective for them" (as cited in Shollkie, 2017, p. 22). By implementing CLR strategies, not only will my colleagues have new information about trauma, a tool for making changes in their classroom and in other areas of the school, they will be introduced to CLR strategies they can implement in their classrooms.

## **Professional Development Plan**

My professional development presentation will provide information regarding trauma and specifically the trauma for ELL students and BIPOC students. However, I want something tangible for teachers to use and start taking action promptly. The time allocated for my professional development will be during an after school high school meeting and the time set for these meetings is 2:30-3:15 p.m. This doesn't give me much time to cover everything I would like to cover. However, I will be giving two resources which my colleagues can preview before the meeting. One is to watch a 2017 YouTube video titled, "Microaggressions in the Classroom" and a 2020 *New York Times* article titled, "How to Respond to Microaggressions." Both of these resources, I've found, are short yet direct.

As the teachers enter the room, I will have images of various types of microaggressions around the classroom. For example, they may view an image of a young person holding a sign that reads, "You Don't Look Gay." Also, there will be similar images with other adolescents holding signs of microaggressions they've heard about themselves. This CLR strategy is called Gallery Walk or Chat Groups, and teachers will work in small groups and discuss a few reflection questions together. I will put on a timer for approximately 3.5 minutes to spend on an image with the intent that the groups are able to reflect on three images. When the final timer ends, my colleagues will stay in their small groups and sit together in a group. At this point, I will give a brief Google Slides presentation on the definition of trauma, how trauma manifests in the classroom, how ACEs exclude indicators specific to EL or BIPOC students and practice a strategy to potentially eliminate trauma by stopping microaggressions.

The first step we'll need to take as a group is to discuss reflections and thought from the YouTube video and *New York Times*. This presentation isn't about accusing each other of what has been done in the past, it will be through the lens of what we can do now. I'll preface that we can focus on facts from the video and article. After a brief discussion, I will share a hand-out that is adapted from Diane Goodman. This resource provides discussion starters that will help guide a conversation on ending microaggressions. A few examples include:

- **RESTATE OR PARAPHRASE.** “I think I heard you saying \_\_\_\_\_ (paraphrase their comments). Is that correct?”
- **SEPARATE INTENT FROM IMPACT.** “I know you didn’t realize this, but when you \_\_\_\_\_ (comment/behavior), it was hurtful/offensive because \_\_\_\_\_. Instead you could \_\_\_\_\_ (different language or behavior.)”
- **CHALLENGE THE STEREOTYPE.** Give information, share your own experience and/or offer alternative perspectives. “Actually, in my experience \_\_\_\_\_.” “I think that’s a stereotype. I’ve learned that \_\_\_\_\_.” “Another way to look at it is \_\_\_\_\_.”

After we have discussed the different types of responses, I will then provide a list of microaggressions we heard in the YouTube video and a collection of microaggressions that other teachers have heard in their schools. The groups will work together and discuss how they would have a conversation, based on the responses provided, and how they

would use this in their classroom. Finally, we will have a brief breakdown of what we learned and the further information we need to move forward to best support our students.

### **Setting and Audience**

In my current district, even though it is a suburb of Minneapolis, it is so small that the middle and high schools exist in one building. There are currently 40 teachers, 95% are tenured, and more than half of the tenured teachers have only worked in this school district. All of the teachers are White and there is one BIPOC who works as an Intervention Specialist. According to the Minnesota Department of Education, there were 687 students enrolled in 2020. Of the 687 students, 38% of the students do not identify as White. The EL population was 5.7% and the free and reduced lunch participants made up 22.3% of the student body (Minnesota Department of Education, 2020, para. 2).

Every school I have been a part of, I have heard parts of conversations or accusations that have the capability of tearing someone apart. Oftentimes this language is so common and frequently used that it is overlooked except by the person experiencing that hateful language. In chapter two, I explore the impact of microaggressions in which this type of language is racial abuse and can lead to trauma. In an article published by *Teaching Tolerance* Paul C. Gorski writes, "treating individual traumas without naming systemic injustice means schools don't just risk leaving some traumas unrecognized; it means they risk retraumatizing students" (para. 14).

In my current school district, it has only been approximately ten years since a multilingual learner arrived and four years since an EL department was formed. There is

still only one EL teacher in the middle school and one EL teacher in the high school. There has been a push for EL teachers to work with content teachers so the needs of our multilingual learners are met. As in many schools, this can be challenging due to not having scheduled time together unless it is before or after school, content teachers do not see a need to better serve EL students, or lack of general knowledge. It is a recent change in Universities and Colleges that teacher education includes a class on working with EL students in a mainstream classroom.

While trauma is the key topic in my project, this professional development time, if the topic is acknowledged and there is interest, the intent is also to help content teachers with more background knowledge on our EL population. Several times throughout the year, a colleague will email me with a student concern. The teacher will ask if I can call a family member or talk to the student about their work in another class. And while EL teachers often do have solid relationships with their EL teachers, all teachers need to build relationships of all students.

## **Conclusion**

In the next chapter, I will reflect on my project and the work I need to do in the future to support BIPOC and multilingual students in ELD classes and in all classes. I chose this topic because I've seen so many students struggle in school. The challenge may be academic or language acquisition but there are so many signs that indicate that a significant number of our students are dealing with trauma issues. This is the primary reason I struggled in school and the motivator behind why I wanted to pursue teaching. It has become increasingly evident that all types of trauma are in some way present in all

schools. Our role as educators is to teach kids content but it has evolved to so much more—especially when learning is hindered by outside factors. The professional development will be provided, not as a lecture or presentation, but as a proactive tool educators can use to promptly utilize.

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **Conclusion**

One of the reasons I was reluctant to work in education was because of the challenges and barriers I faced while I was a young student. Traditionally, schools are not places in which a young person can go to find emotional support and a safe place to learn. I faced harsh criticism and shaming as an elementary-age student while attending a strict private, religious school and confronted traumatic events in my adolescence both inside and outside of my home.

My first and second years of teaching were arduous and triggering. While these initial years of teaching were in different buildings, the message was the same: there was not enough support for scholars who were struggling and facing adversity much too grown-up for their young ages. This message continued to be consistent among the various demographic groups. However, one group of scholars became a distinct group that needed different types of guidance and support: multilingual learners. This observation became my focus area and helped me form the question, *How can I inform colleagues about the trauma of English Learners and create a trauma-sensitive classroom for multilingual scholars in an educational setting?*

### **Major Learnings**

I first learned of trauma and its effects on education during a professional development on Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs). It was a brief introduction that led me to wonder more about how schools can implement frameworks to better support their student populations. I left the session wanting more information and solutions to helping students experiencing trauma. At the time, I wasn't prepared to research this topic independently and complete my capstone. I was burned-out and needed to regroup.

My experience of burnout led me to Dr. Jennifer Clifden's *The Burn-Out Antidote* professional development series. This experience, in a brief amount of time, taught me about mindfulness and facing personal trauma while protecting myself of my students' trauma. It was life-changing.

After this experience, I was ready to begin writing my capstone. I originally intended to solely focus on the practice of mindfulness, personally and in the classroom. However, as I began my research project, the world shut down due to COVID-19 and an incident in my city ignited a global racial reckoning. Due to these major events, I found myself increasing my racial and equity work by joining groups online through webinars and in groups. The trauma stories I was immersing myself in were comparable to my students' backgrounds. I changed my focus to examining the trauma experiences of Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC)—specifically immigrants or first-generation immigrants to the United States.

I started the research process by unraveling the components and background study of ACEs. One of most surprising pieces of information I discovered is that there was a large piece missing from the original study. The original study failed to examine the toxic stresses outside of the home. These may include racial abuse, neighborhood violence or poverty. These variables are most common among traditionally underserved communities.

Another significant aspect of my research was learning more about the various stages of immigration and the trauma each of these stages include. I was able to connect the stages and the backgrounds of my students' stories. A student once attempted to give

me personal background information as we were working together. She shared that she had lived in a refugee camp in between relocating from her home country and the United States. This student was unable to recount the amount of time she was in the camp and her timeline was blurry. While researching others' time in refugee camps, I learned that some people can spend up to twelve or more years waiting for permission to move on to the next country.

The lengthy time people may spend in refugee camps was surprising but the treatment refugees experience inside these camps can be devastating. There are many traumas one might experience in camps such as: sexual assault, robbery, starvation, separation of family members, and other types of violence. My student did mention to me that during her time in the camp, she stayed with a relative that she didn't know very well. This young child was also in charge of her younger brother, and was separated from her parents. The education children receive in refugee camps is inconsistent and led by authoritative types of adults.

### **Reflection of Literature Review**

One of the most difficult tasks during this research project was to narrow down my focus. My intention is to introduce the plethora of trauma types and furthermore choose traumas specific to racial and cultural backgrounds, immigration, and finally, existing in an environment that is not consistently welcoming. There are so many experiences and effects to unpack in one chapter.

Due to the fact that there are a large number of topics relating to trauma, I was able to find significant amounts of supporting evidence. One of the most important

resources I found is *Trauma-Sensitive Schools for the Adolescent Years: Promoting Resiliency and Healing, Grades 6—12* by Susan E. Craig. This source provided much of the neuroscience surrounding the stages of trauma and its effects with an accessible approach. It helped me organize my thoughts while providing a linear process of understanding trauma and its effects. Additionally, it provides a model and strategies schools can move forward with to provide a safer space for young people with trauma backgrounds.

Another important resource I stumbled upon is a webinar on microaggressions in the classroom. I became a member of an anti-racist educators group that started in Portland, Oregon late last May. A woman named Tereza Bottman who teaches ESL in Portland posted on the group's page that she was going to host a webinar on *Interrupting Microaggressions in the Classroom*. The webinar is ultimately what I've shaped my professional development project to be. As a result of Ms. Bottman's webinar, I gained a tool that I can use in my classroom to help prevent racial trauma. Even more so, my hope is to pass this tool on to my colleagues so that our school as a whole can eliminate hostile language among the staff and student body.

An additional component of research that provided much reflection and functionality is my research on the topic of curriculum violence. During my student teaching experience for my initial licensure, I was teaching a room full of Black American students. The text study was to read and analyze the play "Fences" by August Wilson. Halfway through the play, a female student asked me, "why do we need to keep reading books and stuff about Black people and slavery?" While the play doesn't

necessary focus on slavery, the play does focus on the limited life choices for Black people and the oppression Black Americans endure; I knew what she was leading to but I truly didn't know how to answer her question sufficiently. Based on the information I now know, I could better answer her question. One example is instead of solely reading the play and talking about the characters and their struggles, I would focus on comparing and contrasting the struggles of the character and what the class currently struggles with in regard to racial abuse and oppression. Teachers hold a lot of power in the classroom and it is imperative to remove any curriculum that reenacts or places students in situations that force them to relive racial and oppressive experiences.

### **Benefits and Limitations**

It is my hope that my colleagues and administration are receptive to the idea of creating a trauma-safe school. I think many veteran teachers are reluctant to change and may object to this focus because trauma sensitivity is just another trend in education and it will not sustain. It is also difficult for educational institutions, specifically public schools, to obtain funding, resources, and time to set forth endeavors that researchers or specialists suggest to implement.

On the other hand, I chose my professional development to focus on microaggressions and how individuals and groups can have appropriate and intentional conversations and responses to the verbal attacks in schools. I feel that focusing on one specific trauma and by practicing conversations around microaggressions; educators can move toward creating safer spaces in schools.

Furthermore, if I'm able to provide a series of professional development presentations or a follow-up meeting, we can focus on practicing mindfulness in classrooms. There are many strategies that teachers can use in the short class times that greatly benefit all students—not just students with trauma backgrounds. Practicing mindfulness also helps teachers as they set the tone to the class period. Teachers need to practice consistent self-care and present their best selves when working with young people with trauma backgrounds.

### **Future Researcher**

I'm looking forward to continuing my research. As I previously wrote, this capstone just covers the surface of many types of trauma and various strategies of how to best serve students in educational settings. I would like to attend more professional development on the neuroscience of trauma. As someone who is challenged by technical science language and extensive psychology studies, I need more amateur explanations. Much of this research is quite complex and I don't have the experience to unravel all of the intrinsic details. Another element to add with learning more about neuroscience, is the scientific proof that mindfulness helps calm nervous systems. Mindfulness has become a term that is used in many different contexts but is rooted in science.

I am also interested in further researching restorative practices in schools. I read many research articles about the implications of the school-to-prison pipeline methods. I think that administration and educators would like to remove this method from practices but like most methods, it is deeply rooted in the United States educational system. I taught at a school when they were at the beginning of introducing healing circles and

mediation conferences instead of traditional disciplinary methods such as suspension or expulsion. Students with trauma backgrounds may have high-absenteeism and it would be more beneficial to keep them in school rather than push them out.

My current Superintendent is also heavily reliant on research. If an education professional would like to present a shift in the school's plans or look at a new theory, we need to write a White paper. I have many ideas and strategies that I would like to try at our school so in order to do this, I would need to research on a level similar to the work I put forth in my literature review. I have more confidence and resources now that I have completed this initial work.

### **Recommendations for Implementation**

Our students are struggling. The current pandemic and racial reckoning have caused collective trauma, and these needs need to be addressed. We are at a time where the flaws and significant gaps in our schools and support systems have been exposed. Educators have needed to address racial abuse and trauma in schools for decades, and there is a great need to put forth effort to advocate for those who are not yet ready to use their own voices.

Consistently our schools neglect the needs of our multilingual learners. By addressing the trauma backgrounds our students and our BIPOC communities experience, our scholars will have a higher increase of well-being and also performance. Our multilingual learners struggle not only with language barriers but with acculturation, microaggressions, constant relocation, and identity challenges. Schools need to be able to provide the consistency and support this group deserves.

## **Summary**

I'm pleased with the topic I have written and researched. I want to be the teacher I needed when I was facing adversities as a child and as an adolescent. My trauma background is not in comparison to the multilingual learners I share a classroom with, yet I have empathy, compassion, and determination to make our school a more comfortable place to learn.

Due to the privilege and opportunity I have received to complete this capstone project, I have been able to expand my scope of knowledge to understanding the traumas that BIPOC students endure in school settings. I have been able to join academic conversations and discussions that lead to advocating for a group that are traditionally underserved in schools. I've been pushed to reflect on previous personal experiences as well as past practices as an evolving teacher. I'm determined to continue my research as I feel I've only just begun the expedition of an educator.

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