VICARIOUS TRAUMA
IN THE CLASSROOM

Instructor Toolkit: Understanding and Preventing Vicarious Trauma Workbook

Bow Valley College

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Understanding and Preventing Vicarious Trauma

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Acknowledgements

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Welcome!

This workbook accompanies the Instructor Toolkit: Understanding and Preventing Vicarious Trauma. We created this workbook so that you will have an accessible way to revisit the content from the course. It also provides you with the opportunity to respond to questions, take notes at the end of each module, and make reflections as you work through the materials on D2L. This way, you can go back to those notes and reflections in the future, as anything you type into D2L is not saved. We hope you will find this workbook useful.

Module Overview

Module 1: Introduction to Vicarious Trauma

This module describes Vicarious Trauma and distinguishes it from Compassion Fatigue, Burnout, and Compassion Satisfaction. It looks at how to recognize Vicarious Trauma and how it might materialize in the workplace. Finally, it looks at strategies that reduce the risk of Vicarious Trauma. This module has a part A and B. Please allow about 2 hours to complete this module.

Module 2: Trauma-Informed Approaches

This module focuses on developing trauma-informed practices in the language classroom that connect to instructor mental wellness. It looks at the Four Rs: Realize, Recognize, Respond, and Resist. It shows how instructors can incorporate these practices into their teaching. It also explores the six principles of trauma-informed practice and how to use them in classrooms. Instructors will learn some common classroom practices and trauma-informed strategies. Please allow about 2 hours to complete this module.

Module 3: In the Classroom

This module describes how trauma-informed approaches apply to language classrooms. It focuses on practical suggestions for different classroom settings. It includes topics such as setting classroom boundaries and recommendations for good practices for before class. In addition, it focuses on trauma triggers and how to return to classroom activities after disclosures of trauma. This module has a part A and B. Please allow about 2.5 hours to complete this module.

Module 4: Promoting Instructor Wellness

This module focuses on wellness strategies inside and outside the classroom. It suggests ways to build support networks in and beyond the workplace. It also discusses strategies for setting personal boundaries. Please allow about 1.5 hours to complete this module.

Module 5: Supports for Students and Instructors

This module provides information on institutional and community supports for students and instructors. It describes how and where to direct students to help. The goal is to decrease the burden on instructors, so they do not have to find or provide supports themselves. Additionally, this module provides templates to create resource lists for students. Please allow about 1 hour to complete this module.

Toolkit Overview

Why We Developed These Resources

English language instructors come to their jobs via many pathways and different experiences. However, the vast majority of instructors have limited training in working with learners who have experienced trauma. This research-informed toolkit addresses this training gap. It gives instructors information and strategies to improve their practice, respond to learners, and support their own mental wellness. It is meant to empower instructors through knowledge.

How We Developed These Resources

Researchers and instructors at the School of Global Access at Bow Valley College created this toolkit based on research with instructors, program chairs, and coordinators, as well as trauma experts. Using co-creation, we engaged learners, instructors, and trauma experts.

Who This Toolkit Is For

We designed this toolkit with English language instructors in mind, especially those working in LINC (Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada) programs. That said, anyone working with people who survived trauma will find information that applies to their practices. In particular, instructors in foundational programs or those that work with people with interrupted education will find this toolkit useful. This toolkit takes a "middle ground" approach and applies to a wide range of contexts. It does not replace mental health services.

What You Can Expect from These Resources

This toolkit discusses Vicarious Trauma by sharing information and offering activities and reflection opportunities. You will learn about:

- How trauma impacts learners and teachers.
- How to integrate a trauma-informed approach into your practice.
- How to prevent and care for manifestations of learner trauma.
- How to support your students.
- How you can advocate for trauma-informed practices in your organization.

There are five modules in this toolkit to complete. We have strived to create resources that are comprehensive while recognizing that your time is valuable. The toolkit should take under 10 hours to complete. Inevitably, this toolkit is not exhaustive, but it includes further recommended resources.

Terminology

Throughout this toolkit we use "instructors" and "teachers" interchangeably, as well as "students" and "learners." This was a stylistic choice to avoid repetition. For easy reference, there is a glossary available at the end of each module.

A Word about Empowerment

This toolkit is meant to provide you with information and knowledge to support yourself, your practice, and your learners. Using this workbook, you will have opportunities to reflect on what you learn and relate the material to your own teaching and work environment. Some recommendations won't work for you; some information won't apply to your work or life. You may choose to continue some practices but change other approaches. It is not meant to leave you concerned about past practices or feeling hypervigilant or overly concerned. We hope you leave feeling empowered.

Trigger Warning

This course contains references to traumatic events. If you are experiencing Vicarious Trauma or poor mental health, this might not be the right time to take this course. Please use discretion.

Module 1: Introduction to Vicarious Trauma

This module provides an overview of the concepts of Vicarious Trauma (VT), Compassion Fatigue, Burnout, Compassion Satisfaction, and Moral Distress. There is also a brief description of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) to differentiate it from Vicarious Trauma. We look at these concepts and how they could materialize in the workplace. We provide a broad overview of these terms while focusing on how they manifest in the English language classroom. Additionally, we provide an overview of how to recognize Vicarious Trauma in ourselves and others and look at strategies which help reduce the risk of Vicarious Trauma.

Learning Objectives

- Gaining awareness of Vicarious Trauma, including how the concepts of Burnout and Compassion Fatigue contribute to a trauma response.

- Gaining the understanding of how trauma impacts the environment they are working in and what to recognize in themselves.

- Exploring how trauma impacts an individual's worldview and how this can lead to shifts in one's beliefs, values, morals, and ethics.

- Discussing the impact of Vicarious Trauma in their personal experience and in practice.

A view of a winding river and lush trees.

- Learning about Compassion Satisfaction in the context of Vicarious Trauma prevention and identification.

This module will take approximately 2 hours to complete and includes scenarios, videos, and opportunities to reflect.

Part A: What is Vicarious Trauma?

The term Vicarious Trauma was coined by Pearlman and Saakvitne (1995). They noticed that people in helping professions were often deeply affected by their exposure to others' trauma. This second-hand trauma could occur in various ways:

- Watching graphic news reports.
- Listening to traumatic stories from others.
- Viewing disturbing images, etc.

Over time, people in helping professions may develop Vicarious Trauma. It is a shift in how they view the world or a shift in their fundamental beliefs about the world. For example, they can observe a shift in the belief that they are safe. The shift in belief tends to gravitate towards the negative, and these shifts tend to play out subconsciously. Personal trauma develops during the process of shifting beliefs. The Vicarious Trauma of the instructor/helper is affected by experiences with the people with whom they interact.

VT can occur in those who work in fields that see a large amount of trauma (e.g., child abuse investigators, therapists, health care professionals). Anyone who engages empathetically with survivors of torture and trauma or materials relating to their trauma can be affected by VT. In particular, it can affect instructors that hear traumatic stories from their students. This is especially true for instructors who work with newcomers and recent immigrants to Canada.

A woman consoles a man whose head is down on a table.

People bring a past and present to anything that they do. The extent that an instructor's worldview shifts depends on their prior cognitive schemas and beliefs. It is often associated with holding three basic beliefs that can offer some extra protection to instructors who are exposed to trauma stories. People who hold these beliefs may also have a lot of privilege, and they are more likely to experience fewer VT symptoms. However, it is important to keep in mind that beliefs may shift over time, and these beliefs could be worn down if a person is no longer building resilience through self-care. These three basic beliefs are:

- I feel safe in the world.
- I view myself in a positive light.
- The world has meaning and order.

The five cognitive schemas which reflect the basic psychological needs of individuals and how individuals process information related to those needs are: **safety, trust, esteem, intimacy,** and **control.** The next pages will highlight how they apply to instructors.

Safety Needs

Shifts in beliefs about safety occur when someone is experiencing Vicarious Trauma. Notions of what a safe space is might shift due to a past event when an instructor was at harm or perceived themselves to be at risk of harm. As such, an instructor may begin responding to safe events and situations with heightened awareness.

Instructors may express that they are not safe even though they probably are. Their perspective has shifted.

A tired teacher in the classroom

Instructors may experience hyper-vigilance or awareness. They may feel a lack of safety without any recognizable cause.

This may extend to colleagues and personal relationships. For example, instructors might begin to act out of over-concern for others' safety.

Scenario: Safety

A well-liked English for Academic Purposes (EAP) teacher, Rahat, has begun to arrive to class just on time and no longer opens the classroom door for students until there is a group of students waiting. Rahat has now moved her desk closer to the door and watches the door to the point that it is starting to disrupt the lesson. She also stays behind the desk even when students need help at their own desks, requesting students come to her. Rahat now leaves class immediately after the lesson and does not engage with students after class. Rahat also tends to phone home between classes to check on family wellness.

Questions

Q. What signs indicate that this teacher might have a disruption in their safety needs?

Q. What behavioural changes do you notice that could be related to safety?

See the end of the Module 1 for sample responses to these questions.

Trust Needs

A worried teacher is having a phone conversation during class.

Trust is interconnected with all the cognitive schemas related to Vicarious Trauma. An instructor might experience shifts in their beliefs about trust. For example, they may not trust their decisions or the decisions of others. They may not trust others or may be suspicious of what others are saying. Others' information may become harder for them to accept. Instructors might also believe people are being untrustworthy. Their trust in others is not secure, and it is somewhat cyclical this way. Some examples of concerning trust schemas include:

- Over-checking lesson plans.
- Worrying about how students might react. For example, they may not trust a colleague to cover their class or may micromanage a substitute instructor.
- No longer trusting their organization's systems and processes.

Scenario: Trust

A student, Emilia, approaches her teacher, Jeremy, about a class assignment and then discloses some family needs. Jeremy knows there are supports within the institution and that he can refer the student, but he does not think the student will get timely help. Jeremy makes the referral but then keeps checking in with his supervisor to find out if Emilia got help. The supervisor confirms the referral was received but to protect learner privacy does not reveal whether she accessed services. Jeremy also checks in with Emilia and asks her to tell him if she got the help she needed. At a teacher meeting, Jeremy comments on the inefficiencies of internal resources using this scenario as an example. The supervisor explains to all the teachers that, due to limits of confidentiality, sometimes follow up is not possible. Jeremy keeps complaining.

Questions

Q. What signs indicate that this teacher might have a disruption in his trust needs?

Q. What might the supervisor say or do to alleviate the suspicion and build trust?

Q. What are your ideas about what this teacher could do to reduce the impact of mistrust on their wellness and workload?

See the end of the Module 1 for sample responses to these questions.

Esteem Needs

Instructors who experience shifts with the cognitive schemas related to their esteem needs may no longer believe they are effective teachers. They might overwork or not accept praise. After overexposure to difficult experiences, instructors may feel that their help doesn't help fast enough. They identify as helpful, but if they feel nothing works, it erodes their self-esteem. Instructors may:

A teacher is checking assignments and rubbing her eyes and looking stressed.

- Feel like they are unable to meet the needs of their students. They may ignore indicators that they have met needs.
- Create lower expectations of themselves with others.
- Over work (e.g., committees, volunteering), so that they will be noticed.

Scenario: Esteem

Robin is an experienced and well-liked teacher. They are flexible in the classroom and provide spontaneous examples and activities to meet student needs. Recently, Robin learned that two students did not meet the criteria to proceed to CLB (Canadian Language Benchmark) 4 and could not apply for citizenship. Robin knew that these students had other circumstances impacting their coursework. For that reason, Robin no longer goes off script and has very structured lessons. They stay up later than usual to prepare materials that cover everything possible, and they rework it several times. Now Robin comes to class with extra worksheets to make sure the students have more than enough materials. Robin gets to class earlier than usual to make sure everything is in place and prepared. At the same time, they have volunteered to support a newer teacher. They have been so distracted by work that they forgot about their daughter's piano recital and missed it.

Questions

Q. What signs indicate that this teacher might have a disruption in their esteem needs?

Q. What do you notice about the teacher's work-life balance?

Q. Whose responsibility is it to pass through levels?

See the end of the Module 1 for sample responses to these questions.

Intimacy Needs

Another way that Vicarious Trauma can affect people is seen in shifts with their intimacy needs.

- Instructors may experience sleeplessness, numbness, hopelessness, and symptoms of depression, which impact relationships.
- They may have limited emotional expression.
- Instructors may not have the internal resources to be in a relationship and may be unwilling or unable to be vulnerable. This may impact the relationships instructors seek out and engage in. It may also impact intimacy with oneself.

Instructors experiencing disruption in their intimacy needs might:

- Avoid being alone or paying attention to themselves.
- Avoid intimate acts such as hugs or close physical contact.

Scenario: Intimacy

The sign-up sheet is posted for the annual teachers' potluck. An English as a Second Language (ESL) instructor, Francine, is looking at the board when a colleague arrives and asks her what she will bring. She answers, "I don't know yet," only to hear the response, "Well, you have to bring your famous potato salad. Everyone loves it!" Francine continues to look at the board and does not respond. She thinks, "Hmm, usually I would smile at that comment, but I don't even have the energy to smile." Instead, she says, "Sorry, I gotta go." Francine walks

A teacher in the classroom is thinking and frowning.

away and barely says goodbye. The annual potluck comes and goes. At home, Francine's phone rings. She feels guilty for not attending the potluck and hopes it's not one of her team members. The call display shows it is actually her best friend. She doesn't answer, believing that her friend will want to get together. Francine has not been sleeping well and is often tired. As a matter of fact, her family has been complaining they are not doing enough together and she has missed events. Her family wants to know what is wrong.

Questions

Q. What signs indicate that this teacher might have a disruption in her intimacy needs?

Q. What is the teacher noticing in herself and what could she do?

Q. If you were to start to respond like this, what would you think and what would you do?

See the end of the Module 1 for sample responses to these questions.

Control Needs

Those experiencing Vicarious Trauma often see changes in their control needs. This shift extends to what instructors expect of their colleagues. Instructors may find themselves trying to control themselves or others. They may:

- Attempt to control events or their physical environment.
- Exert control over small things to feel in control of something.
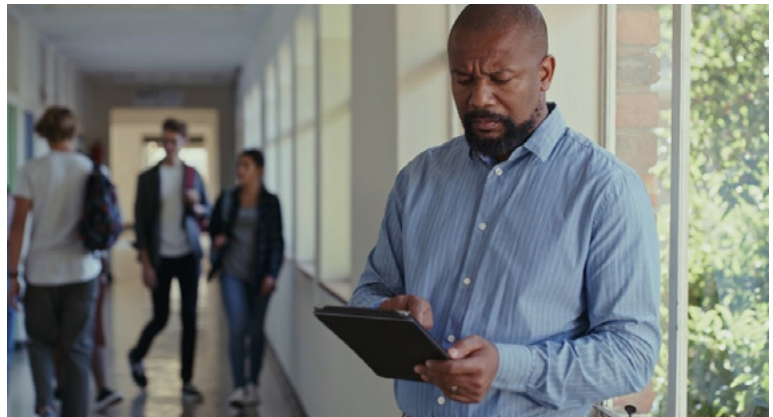
A frowning teaching stands in a school hallway, using a tablet.

Scenario: Control

A teacher, Craig, approaches his supervisor to let them know he needs a day off for a medical appointment. Craig creates a detailed list of what needs to be done and the timeline to follow. When his supervisor lets Craig know who his substitute will be, Craig follows up and gives details about how to talk to the students, what to say, and when to say it. Craig requests that the substitute call at lunch to check in on how it went. The substitute does not call, so Craig contacts his supervisor to request a discussion because he is worried that the substitute did not cover what was needed.

Questions

Q. What signs indicate that this teacher might have a disruption in his control needs?

[ ]

Q. How could the supervisor respond to this teacher?

[ ]

Q. How can this teacher share responsibility with the substitute versus taking it all on?

[ ]

See the end of the Module 1 for sample responses to these questions.

Overview of Cognitive Schemas

You may wonder how to know when a shift in schemas or beliefs is problematic. The key here is the shift. If you start to see these behaviours in yourself or someone else, you should consider them within context and over a period of time. Ask yourself if these behaviours are new. For example, if you used to have no concerns taking a day off and getting a sub but now you find yourself worried or micromanaging, that can indicate that something is going on. If you find a colleague is withdrawing from their usual activities and friends when they used to be quite active and social, that might be cause for concern. It is important to keep the context in mind. Sometimes changes are short-lived and in response to an event. In those cases, people go back to their usual ways on their own. If the issues don't resolve or seem to be progressing, this might indicate someone would benefit from focusing on their mental health.

Part B: Compassion Satisfaction, Compassion Fatigue, Burnout, Secondary Trauma, Moral Distress, and VT

This project primarily focuses on Vicarious Trauma. However, other empathy-based stresses arise from working in a helping profession. These may include Compassion Fatigue, Burnout, Secondary Trauma, or Moral Distress. We will also focus on the positive aspects of helping, such as Compassion Satisfaction or Vicarious Traumatic Growth Response. In our research, most instructors showed a high level of Compassion Satisfaction, meaning that they get a lot of satisfaction from their profession and by helping their learners.

A road winds through a forest in the autumn.

Professional Quality of Life

Compassion Satisfaction, Compassion Fatigue, Burnout, and Secondary Trauma work together to encompass your Professional Quality of Life. Compassion Fatigue, Burnout, and Secondary Trauma.
Adapted from Stamm, 2010
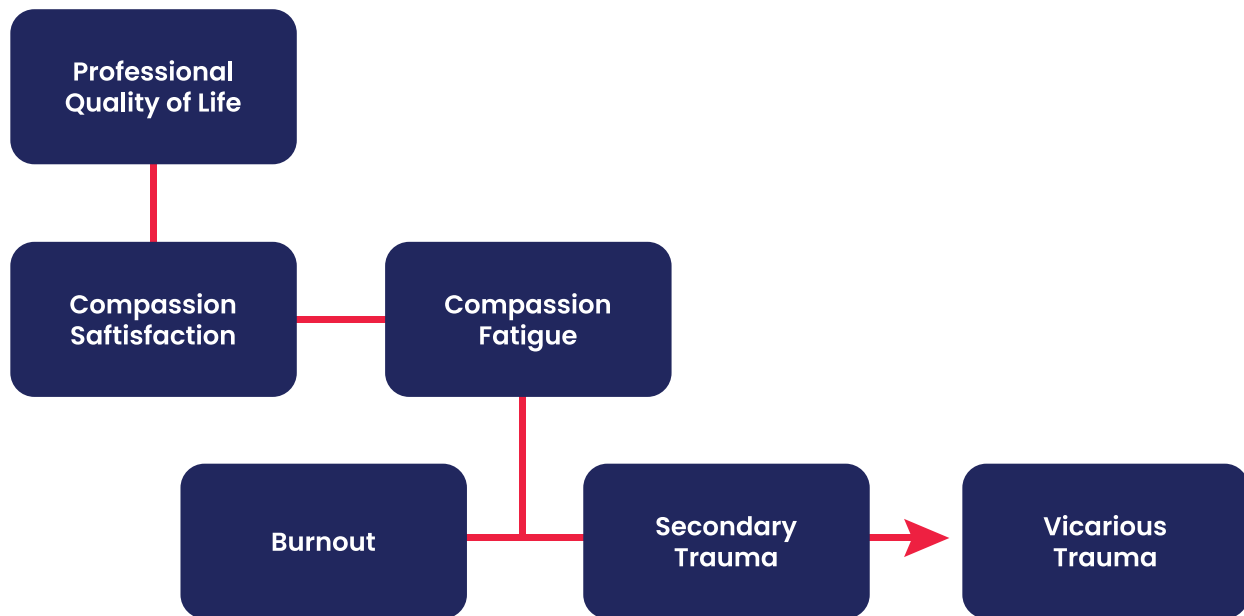
Key Concepts

Compassion Satisfaction

Compassion satisfaction relates to the positive aspects, or pleasure, that people get from their work. It can refer to satisfaction from helping others, working well with colleagues, or contributing to the workplace.

Compassion Fatigue, Burnout and Secondary Trauma

Compassion Fatigue is the opposite of Compassion Satisfaction. It relates to the negative aspects of working in a helping profession. Compassion Fatigue can be subdivided into two parts: Burnout and Secondary Stress.

Burnout is an element of Compassion Fatigue. It is often associated with feelings of hopelessness or powerlessness. Burnout leads to difficulties dealing with workplace challenges and working effectively. It often leads to employees feeling overwhelmed or stressed. Stressful working conditions, such as high workloads, insufficient pay, unrealistic demands, inflexible work schedules, or unsupportive work environments, are some causes. Burnout can happen to anyone in any workplace.

A teacher and student are speaking to each other in an office.

Burnout is a systemic issue. Therefore, employees feel the mental and physical effects of burnout, but they are due to the system in which they work. Some systems place a high demand on their employees and provide few resources. This can lead to employees feeling less supported and under-resourced while still having to do their job.

Table 1.1 Similarities and Differences between Vicarious Trauma and Burnout

Burnout	Burnout & Vicarious Trauma	Vicarious Trauma
• Can occur in any profession • Feelings of being overloaded • Progresses more gradually • Does not lead to changes in trust, control, esteem, intimacy, or safety needs	• May result in physical symptoms, emotional symptoms, behavioural symptoms, work-related issues, and interpersonal problems • Both can lead to a decline in quality of work	• Only due to work with people who survived trauma • Reaction to client/student traumatic experiences • More sudden onset of symptoms — may not be detectable at an earlier stage • Leads to changes in trust, control, esteem, intimacy, or safety needs

Note: Adapted from Matieu, 2014; The Centre for Victims of Trauma, 2021a; Trippany et al., 2004.

Scenario: Burnout

Kendall is a language instructor, and he has been working part-time at more than one language school for the past few years. Kendell is now working many hours and much of his teaching is now online or hybrid. This semester has been quite busy for him, and he has had a heavy teaching load. He wanted to turn down a class but was worried that he might not be offered more classes next semester. He currently has no teaching officially lined up for next semester. One of his classes is much larger than it used to be when it was in person, and he has had to adapt many of his materials and approaches. Kendall loves teaching. He loves being in the classroom and connecting with learners, but lately teaching seems to be mostly prep, admin work, and tech support for his learners. He got into his profession to work with people, but now he spends his time doing desk work. He no longer feels like his career is rewarding or that the work that he is doing is meaningful. He is exhausted and frustrated. Kendall is seriously considering only teaching face-to-face classes going forward, but he's also worried he won't be assigned enough classes to pay his bills.

Questions

What could you do if you were in Kendall's situation?

How do you think Kendall's supervisor or organization can support him?

Moral Distress

Moral distress was first described in the field of nursing. It occurs when:

> **"one knows the right thing to do, but institutional constraints make it nearly impossible to pursue the right action."**

(Jameton, 1984, p. 6).

To this day, most of the research about moral distress remains in the field of healthcare although it applies to other helping professions as well. An instructor might experience moral distress when they are faced with a dilemma. For example, they are bound by institutional guidelines or other rules that are at odds with their personal beliefs or what they believe is in a learner's (or their own) best interest. Moral distress exists in the gap between wanting to act in accordance with personal beliefs but having to follow protocols that conflict with those personal beliefs. A person experiencing moral distress will be torn about carrying out their prescribed duties.

A woman is sitting on a bench and thoughtfully making a list.

Scenario: Moral Distress

Malvina is teaching a CLB 3 Literacy class, and the end of the semester is approaching. A learner, Suma, has been in classes for a few years, and Malvina has worked with her a couple of times. Suma came to Canada as a refugee and had no formal education. This past semester has been difficult for Suma, and she has had some family concerns and caregiving responsibilities that have prevented her from attending all her classes and completing all her work. Suma has not submitted all the required artifacts or completed the total hours of class time required to advance to CLB 4. However, she needs that level to apply for Canadian citizenship. Malvina knows that citizenship is very important to Suma and her family, as Suma would like to travel to visit her sister who is now living in the UK. Malvina knows that Suma is not at a CLB 4 level, but she really wants to help her. Malvina's personal values are such that she doesn't agree with the language requirement for citizenship; she recognizes that it isn't realistic for everyone, even after years of language classes. She does not want to prevent Suma from getting citizenship, but she also knows that Suma hasn't met the requisites and likely won't, even with further study. Malvina is torn about what to do. She worries that if she passes Suma into the next level, there could be repercussions. Suma's next instructor might question Malvina's judgement to her supervisor, and this could jeopardize getting future teaching contracts. At the same time, Malvina thinks the requirement is unfair to Suma and others like her. Malvina feels compelled to do something to help her.

Questions

Do you empathize with Malvina's situation? Why or why not?

What do you think you would do in her situation?

Secondary Trauma and Vicarious Trauma

Secondary Trauma is another element of Compassion Fatigue. It occurs when people are exposed to others' traumatic events at work. The symptoms of Secondary Trauma are usually associated with one event.

Vicarious Trauma is sometimes used interchangeably with Secondary Trauma. However, in this toolkit, we use VT as a culmination of exposure to people's traumatic experiences. It has heightened symptoms that mirror those of post-traumatic stress disorder.

Table 1.2 Similarities and Differences between Secondary Trauma and Vicarious Trauma

Secondary Trauma	Secondary Trauma & Vicarious Trauma	Vicarious Trauma
• Symptoms tend to be more observable • Can be acute and the result of a specific event • Symptoms can be sudden and directly tied to an event or disclosure	• Result from contact with people who have experienced trauma • Negative impacts • Both result in psychological distress and PTSD-like symptoms	• Symptoms are often less observable • Cumulative – the result of continued exposure to traumatized individuals • Changes are long-term and schemas change (trust, safety, esteem, intimacy, control)

Note: information from Jenkins and Baird, 2002

Resource: ProQOL5

Self-Assessment: ProQOL 5

You can measure your own level of Compassion Satisfaction and Compassion Fatigue (including the subscales of Burnout and Secondary Trauma) using the Professional Quality of Life Scale (ProQOL). The ProQOL is the most widely used measure of positive and negative aspects of helping. There is a pencil-and-paper version here.

Understanding Your Scores on the ProQOL5

After completing the ProQOL5, you will get scores in three sections: Compassion Satisfaction, Burnout, and Secondary Traumatic Stress. This section helps you interpret your results (Stamm, 2009-2012).

Compassion Satisfaction

Compassion satisfaction is about the pleasure you derive from being able to do your work well. For example, you may feel like it is a pleasure to help others through your work. You may feel positive about your colleagues or your ability to contribute to the work setting or even the greater good of society. Higher scores on this scale represent a greater satisfaction related to your ability to be an effective caregiver in your job.

Compassion Satisfaction Score	Compassion Satisfaction Level
22 or less	Low
Between 23 and 41	Moderate
42 or more	High

Burnout

Burnout is associated with feelings of hopelessness and difficulties in dealing with work or in doing your job effectively. These negative feelings usually have a gradual onset. They can reflect the feeling that your efforts make no difference, or they can be associated with a very high workload or a non-supportive work environment. Higher scores on this scale mean that you are at a higher risk for burnout.

Burnout Score	Burnout Level
22 or less	Low
Between 23 and 41	Moderate
42 or more	High

Secondary Traumatic Stress

Secondary Traumatic Stress (STS) is associated with your work-related, secondary exposure to extremely or traumatically stressful events. Developing problems due to exposure to others' trauma is somewhat rare but does happen to many people who care for those who have experienced extremely or traumatically stressful events. For example, you may repeatedly hear stories about the traumatic things that happen to other people. If your work puts you directly in the path of danger, for example field work in a war or area of civil violence, this is not secondary exposure; your exposure is primary. However, if you are exposed to others' traumatic events in your work, this is secondary exposure. The symptoms of STS are usually rapid in onset and associated with a particular event. They may include being afraid, having difficulty sleeping, having images of the upsetting event pop into your mind, or avoiding things that remind you of the event.

Secondary Traumatic Stress Score	Secondary Traumatic Stress Level
22 or less	Low
Between 23 and 41	Moderate
42 or more	High

Recognizing Vicarious Trauma

Understanding what makes up Vicarious Trauma is one of the first steps to recognizing it. Instructors who work with people with trauma experiences should be aware of the following signs that may indicate that they are suffering from VT. These are the most commonly observed Vicarious Trauma signs, but please remember that everyone copes differently, and these symptoms could be unrelated to VT.

An exhausted teacher is holding her head and looking at a pile of books and assignments.

Exhaustion and Physical Ailments

- Constant tiredness, even after resting
- Tension in the physical body
- Headaches, back pain, and/or wrist pain
- Difficulty falling asleep or excessive sleeping
- Falling sick during chances to rest, such as on a vacation

Emotional Shifts

- Hypersensitivity to emotionally-charged material
- Feelings of disconnection from emotions and/or body
- Feelings of guilt for having more resources or opportunities than those served
- Feelings of never being able to give enough
- Feelings of helplessness or hopelessness about the future
- Increased levels of anger, irritability, resentment, or cynicism

Thought Patterns

- Difficulty in seeing multiple perspectives or new solutions
- Jumping to conclusions, rigid thinking, or difficulty being thoughtful and deliberate
- Minimizing the suffering of others in comparison to the most severe incidents or situations
- Intrusive thoughts and imagery related to traumatic material seen or heard

Behavioural Shifts

- Absenteeism and attrition
- Avoidance of work, relationships, and/or responsibilities
- Dread of activities that used to be positive or neutral
- Using behaviours to escape, such as eating, taking alcohol/drugs, watching TV, or shopping

Relationship Changes

- No separation of personal and professional time
- Having difficulty setting boundaries in the classroom
- Viewing people who work in other fields as less important
- Difficulty relating to others' day-to-day experiences without comparing them to those you serve or yourself
- Lacking a personal life outside work
- Hypervigilance and concern about the safety of those you care about
- Isolation from others or only interacting with people in the same field or those with similar experiences

If you notice a combination of these signs in yourself or a colleague, there are strategies that you can develop. They can help to reduce the risk of VT (British Medical Association, 2020; Joyful Heart Foundation, 2019).

Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder

The above noted concepts are all related to having witnessed or been exposed to someone else's trauma. It is also possible that a teacher may have had their own traumatic experience(s) that have been difficult to process. People do have traumatic events happen and typically these are worked through in time and become resolved within a few months. When a traumatic event is not resolved and symptoms are distressing and last more than a few months, then the event may have caused PTSD. This is different from Vicarious Trauma, as it is caused by a primary trauma that happens directly, not indirectly.

Preventing Vicarious Trauma

If you find yourself experiencing signs of VT, there are different strategies that may help you cope with how you are feeling. In later modules, we will learn about preventing VT in the classroom and creating trauma-informed classes.

A happy woman is laying on a bed and playing with a cat.

- **Build a support network** if you do not already have one. Make time to meet with the people in your network regularly.

- **Ask for debriefing** at work when you need it after a critical event, such as a disclosure. If a debriefing isn't available, reach out to a therapist or to your employee assistance program.

- **Find positive ways to decompress.** At the end of a long day, many of us are tempted to reach for a glass of pinot, a bowl of chips, or the remote control. In moderation, none of these are a problem, but when we start using them regularly to numb out from stressful jobs, they can become a crutch and even lead to a serious addiction. Instead, go for a run or a walk, play with your pets, journal, do yoga, meditate, spend time with children — yours or someone else's.

- **Practice mindfulness-based stress reduction:** Try it for three minutes a day and gradually build up to 10-20 minutes.

- **Reduce your trauma inputs:** Consider and reduce the amount of traumatic material you are exposed to while watching the news and your favourite TV shows, social media, or when reading for pleasure.

- **Advocate for yourself:** This might be a change in workload or more control over your schedule.

- **Increase your self-observation:** Recognize and chart your signs of stress, Vicarious Trauma, and burnout.

- **Take up professional development opportunities** or training to learn more.

Preventing Vicarious Trauma

- Build a support network
- Ask for debriefing at work
- Find ways to decompress
- Practice mindfulness-based stress reduction
- Reduce your truama inputs
- Advocate for yourself
- Increase your self-observation
- Take up professional development opportunities

Suggested Answers from Module 1

Safety

Q. What signs indicate that this teacher might have a disruption in their safety needs?

A. Low engagement, hyper-vigilance, lack of focus, strict physical boundaries, closed body language

Q. What behavioural changes do you notice that could be related to safety?

A. She no longer engages, enters and leaves the classroom with others, has become withdrawn, and is checking in with her family more often.

Esteem

Q: What signs indicate that this teacher might have a disruption in his trust needs?

A: Checking in on the processes with a supervisor, not trusting the supervisor's word for it, not trusting the service, being unsatisfied with the response or outcome, checking with the student for confirmation.

Q: What might the supervisor say or do to alleviate the suspicion and build trust?

A: Remind the teacher how the processes work, take the opportunity to educate about processes, acknowledge that trusting the system can be difficult.

Q. What might the supervisor say or do to alleviate the suspicion and build trust?

A. Remind the teacher how the processes work, take the opportunity to educate about processes, acknowledge that trusting the system can be difficult, be open to the questions about the system processes, remind the teacher about roles and boundaries, work with this person differently and address the trust impact.

Q. What are your ideas about what this teacher could do to reduce the impact of mistrust on their wellness and workload?

A. Understand that there are limits to what he can do, get educated on the system processes, (re)-establish boundaries, talk to someone outside his workplace about concerns, potentially debrief with others who have dealt with similar situations.

Intimacy

Q: What signs indicate that this teacher might have a disruption in her intimacy needs?

A: Avoiding friends, avoiding social gatherings, not answering the phone, not keeping family commitments, not being present.

Q: What is the teacher noticing in herself and what could she do?

A: Not being present, seek help.

Q: If you were to start to respond like this, what would you think and what would you do?

A: Seek help, talk to friends/professionals, take a mental health day, engage in self-care, step away from the situation.

Control

Q: What signs indicate that this teacher might have a disruption in his control needs?

A. Trying to control all parts of the class. When not contacted, he goes over and above job duties, he has rigid expectations of the substitute, and he is not taking the day off to deal with personal needs.

Q. How could the supervisor respond to this teacher?

A. Reassure him that the appropriate substitute has been put in place and remind the teacher he has a day off for good reason and can talk about it when he is back. Remind the instructor about boundaries and time off. Recognize that the instructor may be dealing with Vicarious Trauma.

Q. How can this teacher share responsibility with the substitute versus taking it all on?

A. Set boundaries and engage in self-talk to remind himself of reasonable expectations.

Moral Distress

Answers will vary.

Key Terms from Module 1

Instructor and Learner – These terms are used interchangeably throughout these modules. At times, the term learner may be referring to the learners in these instructors' classrooms.

Burnout – A persistent state of emotional exhaustion, cynicism, and inefficacy due to high work demands. It often presents as frequent absenteeism, chronic tardiness, or underperformance at work.

Compassion Fatigue – Occurs naturally for those in the helping field. People at risk may include those who are new to their field or who have been in a stressful work environment for an extended period.

Compassion Satisfaction – A feeling of pleasure and satisfaction that comes from helping others.

Schema – A representation of a plan or theory, a way in which individuals organize their knowledge, cognitive processes, and behaviours.

Vicarious Trauma – A cumulative affect that results from exposure to other people's trauma, over time. For example, we experience trauma vicariously when we hear traumatic stories from others or when we view disturbing images.

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My Notes:

My Notes:

Module 2: Trauma-Informed Approaches

This module focuses on developing trauma-informed practices in the language classroom that connect to instructor mental wellness. It looks at the Four Rs: Realize, Recognize, Respond, and Resist. It shows how instructors can incorporate these practices into their teaching. It also explores the six principles of trauma-informed practice and how to use them in classrooms. Instructors will learn some common classroom practices and trauma-informed strategies.

A view of trees in a forest with sun shining through them.

Learning Objectives

The key learning objectives for this module focus on key information about trauma-informed approaches. They include:

- Getting further information about how trauma-informed practices benefit well-being.
- Gaining an understanding of the four Rs and discussing this framework in reference to real-life scenarios.
- Exploring the six principles of trauma-informed practice to learn about classroom practices and strategies.

This module will take approximately 2 hours to complete and includes scenarios, videos, and opportunities to reflect.

The Four Rs of Trauma-Informed Approaches

The beauty of the trauma-informed classroom is that you assume learners have trauma and have already acted to work with it. Trauma-informed approaches apply to many different sectors including educational settings. An approach is trauma-informed through "Four Rs:"

A young man is speaking with a teacher and classmate in a classroom.

Realizing the widespread impact of trauma and understanding potential paths for recovery.

Recognizing the signs and symptoms of trauma in learners.

Responding by fully integrating knowledge about trauma into policies, procedures, and practices.

Resisting re-traumatization.

Developing a trauma-informed practice will look different in different contexts. Your trauma-informed practice depends on your preferences, your students, your organization, your experience, your environment, and trial and error. This module will help you understand guiding principles related to trauma-informed language classrooms. You can apply them to your practice as they relate to your context and preferences.

Let's look at each of the Rs independently.

Realize

Although some learners are more likely to have experienced trauma, anyone may be a trauma survivor. With a trauma-informed approach, we assume that any learner might have experienced some form of trauma. By realizing that trauma is common, teachers can reduce its negative effects in the classroom, both for themselves and learners. Trauma-informed practices mean teachers are knowledgeable and trained in recognizing trauma. They are then able to promote student resiliency and the pathway to recovery.

Recognize

Instructors can recognize many predictable signs and symptoms of trauma, but unpredictable topics or events can also trigger trauma. Trauma-informed teachers recognize that some behaviours or symptoms are indicative of trauma. At the same time, trauma-informed teachers know that sometimes there are no obvious signs or symptoms of trauma.

Respond

Trauma-informed instructors respond appropriately to manifestations or disclosures of trauma. Trauma-informed responses are already built into course structures, teaching practices, and program policies. They need not be time-consuming or ad hoc. They incorporate classroom practices that prevent or mitigate disclosures or trauma triggers. Trauma-informed organizations can direct learners to support and resources.

Resist Re-Traumatization

Instructors can prevent re-traumatization in many ways. This includes being proactive in designing and implementing classroom materials to avoid trauma triggers. How instructors approach and avoid certain topics is also key. Instructors can use strategies in trauma-informed classrooms. This module will provide an overview of many of them.

Reflection

Which, if any, of the four Rs do you incorporate into your teaching practice?

What can you implement into your teaching practice to start or improve on using these four Rs?

Which of the four Rs do you think would be most difficult to implement into your teaching practice?

The Six Principles of Trauma-Informed Approaches

There are six main principles to a trauma-informed approach. These principles span contexts and can apply to many situations. How the principles are implemented depends on the context. This module focuses on how to apply these principles to language classrooms with newcomers:

A young woman has her hands on her heart and is breathing calmly.

[1]   Safety
[2]   Trustworthiness and Transparency
[3]   Support
[4]   Collaboration and Mutuality
[5]   Empowerment, Voice, and Choice
[6]   Cultural, Historical, and Gender Issues

(Adapted from MentalHealth.org, 2015)

The following sections will look at each of these principles more closely and provide examples for language classrooms. Each of these sections is informed by current literature and recommendations that came out of our research.

Safety

Many instructors we spoke with shared their efforts to make the class a safe space for all learners. For learners who have experienced trauma, the classroom can be a haven. It is a place where they can develop a new future-facing identity as learners and where they will not be labelled as victims or reminded of their past. We know that when a person feels threatened or unsafe, they are often not able to learn effectively or interact appropriately. There are many types of safety: physical, emotional, relational, and cultural. All these types of safety are necessary for learning to be effective. You will also learn various practical classroom applications in Module 3.

Two students sitting at a table get help from another student.

Physical Safety

The classroom space should keep everyone physically safe. Ensure learners have enough personal space to feel comfortable. Learners may want to sit near a door or window. The door should be kept open, and light should be ample. When possible, avoid the sounds of sirens and alarms. In cases of fire or other evacuation drills, ensure students are well-prepared and know what to expect. Some learners may have difficulty sitting in one spot at length, so make sure to include breaks and opportunities to stand up and stretch.

Emotional Safety

Some topics may trigger emotional responses or distress. Try to avoid potentially triggering topics about current events, family members, personal histories, and crime, especially early in the semester when learners are still adjusting to the class. When difficult topics come up in the classroom, introduce them carefully, check in with learners, and pay attention to how they respond.

Relational Safety

This refers to a person's safety in how they relate to others. In a classroom, learners may come to depend on peers or their instructor for things beyond the scope of the class. It is important that instructors understand and communicate their role clearly with learners. Instructors may be the first person a learner approaches when they need help. Instructors should be clear about their boundaries while also appropriately directing learners to helpful resources. In our research, many instructors found connections with learners to be some of the most rewarding parts of their work; this closeness may both make them better teachers but also more vulnerable to compassion fatigue.

Cultural Safety

English language classrooms are typically diverse with learners from all over the world. It is important to recognize and accept differences among learners to improve their classroom experiences.

Good Practice: Safety

Start the class with defining/constructing what a safe classroom is. Use and elicit examples about what makes a space safe, why that's important, and how to keep a space safe. Some examples include emotions and how to deal with them, how others can be impacted, and what to do to keep the space safe for everyone.

Make sure to revisit and reinforce the safe environment. If you can put up materials on classroom walls, you can allude to the safe space that way. Before covering potentially difficult materials or before student presentations, it is a good idea to remind everyone of the safe space expectations and how they can all help facilitate that safe space. Similarly, it is best to also regularly introduce techniques that can assist with emotional regulation, so that you can draw on them if students become emotionally dysregulated. Many of these can be incorporated into other lessons or used as icebreakers/warmers/stokers.

Extra Resources: Safety

Zones of Regulation - Overview (Kuypers, 2011)
The Zones of Regulation were designed for children, but have also been used successfully with adult learners, especially in beginning levels and literacy classes.
Identifying Emotions - Mental Health and Identifying Emotions (Peterson, 2018)

There are many things you can do to avoid difficult or unsafe topics. For example, many instructors don't teach or ask about families until later in a semester when learners feel more comfortable in the class. Instructors might also teach strategies for learners; for example, letting learners know that they can step out of the classroom or take a break if they are uncomfortable.

Expect the unexpected. Even when teachers follow all good practices and are thoughtful with their approaches, learners can be triggered. Likewise, you may see learners reacting to something. In these situations, call upon the strategies listed above (zones of regulation, etc.). If there is an immediate safety concern, be sure to follow organizational guidelines to ensure that learners get the help they need. This might mean connecting with in-house counselling or social services, or it might mean contacting external wellness and safety support.

We look more closely at predictable and unpredictable triggers of trauma in Module 3.

Trustworthiness and Transparency

The next principle of trauma-informed practice is Trustworthiness and Transparency. For many learners that have experienced trauma, consistency, predictability, and boundaries are part of the safe feeling that they associate with class. As an instructor, if you say you will do something, it is important to follow through with it or explain why it wasn't done. It is also important to inform learners of upcoming events and classroom expectations. The following are key concepts related to this principle.

Some scrabble tiles spell out the word TRUST.

Predictability

Classroom experiences should be predictable over the course of the lesson, the day, the week, and the semester. At the beginning of a course, let learners know what they can expect in a typical class, what the expectations and activities will be, and how they will be assessed. At the beginning of each class, take a minute or two to share what the class will cover and remind them of any upcoming events such as guest speakers, assignment due dates, or assessments.

Consistency

Day-to-day consistency in how lessons unfold fosters predictability, but consistency goes beyond that. Instructors should be consistent in how they care for individual students and there should be consistency between instructors of different classes to prevent learners from "shopping around" for different answers. This does not mean that instructors should be inflexible. When making accommodations for individual students, be clear about why the accommodation is being made. If another student is in a similar situation, be sure to treat them similarly. This also goes for socializing with students and former students.

Boundaries

Boundaries protect learners and instructors. Be clear about your own personal boundaries as an instructor. Let students know how they can contact you and how long they can expect for you to respond. For example, you can let them know what your role entails and when you aren't able to assist them, you will endeavour to connect them with someone who can help. This may be a personal preference, but ensure that it aligns with any organizational guidelines and policies. It is best to discuss these expectations early in the semester and revisit them over the course of the semester or if issues arise.

A woman with a headset is having a conversation with a man on a computer screen.

Confidentiality

Connected with safety, learners have the right to know that what they share with you is confidential, assuming that no one is in immediate danger. When sharing information that may identify learners, be careful with what you reveal and why you are revealing it. Debriefing with colleagues, friends, and family can be helpful, but you must respect learner privacy. Likewise, debriefing can help instructors manage stress and find solutions to classroom concerns, but it should always stay within the scope of their role and respect the dignity of the student. It may be helpful to have formal and informal debriefing opportunities among colleagues where ground rules about confidentiality are clear. Many organizations have codes of conduct that include confidentiality, and some settlement practitioners may sign oaths of confidentiality to protect their clients. If you aren't sure if something is shareable, it likely isn't.

Scenario: Trustworthiness and Transparency

Zhenya has been taking English language classes for two semesters. Her first semester was difficult, and she had serious mental health struggles. She knew she wasn't her best as a student, and her relationship with her instructor was strained. After completing that class, she took a break from school to address her mental health issues. She returned a semester later and had a different instructor. Based on a comment her new instructor made, Zhenya learned that her former instructor had shared her struggles and labelled her as a difficult student to her new instructor. Zhenya was discouraged and felt that although she wasn't at her best in the first semester, she had trusted her instructor to not share personal information about her. She had hoped to have a clean start and to prove herself to be a good student. In Zhenya's words, "When trust is broken, your heart is broken. You fear. You wonder. You don't think of instructors as trustworthy people who want you to succeed."

Questions

Q. How do you think that sharing information about students might impact students and instructors?

Q. Do you think that it is good to hear about students before you meet them?

Q. What kind of information would you feel comfortable sharing about students?

Support

A trauma-informed classroom is a supportive environment where learners feel like they belong. The classroom should be welcoming and culturally representative. Materials should be relevant to learners and culturally appropriate. They should see themselves in materials and activities.

Many times, learners might need or expect more from instructors than is within the scope of within the scope of the instructors' roles. When clarifying boundaries, let learners know that other supports and resources are available for them. Make sure that you know and share information about your

A group of peers are in a library and working on a project together with their instructor.

organization's and community's supports and resources. There are often stigmas surrounding mental health, so it might be useful to bring in a guest speaker from a counselling centre or have them drop by informally before or after class so that they become a familiar face.

Interactions between and among learners and instructors should be thoughtful. Be considerate when forming groups. This also includes allowing learners the opportunity to choose who they work with in class and on projects whenever reasonable. Do not force learners to work together if they are against it and be flexible if difficulties occur.

Make sure learners know that you are there for them as an instructor. This may include scheduling check-ins, informally checking in with learners, or having office hours. Many learners have other demands such as family or jobs. When possible, be flexible with office hours availability. It might be useful to schedule an evening or weekend office hour once a semester or so.

Scenario: Support

An experienced teacher, Chenyu, notices that one of his learners, Farzaneh, is having some problems. She appears to be overwhelmed and struggles to apply strategies to manage stress and complete tasks. Farzaneh has also refused to work or build relationships with other students and is only willing to work with the other classmate from the same country of origin, but Chenyu suspects that this other student finds it draining. When Chenyu talks to Farzaneh to suggest strategies and encourage her to work with others, Farzaneh is overly negative and blames and shames herself.

A student and a teacher are having a meeting in a classroom.

Questions

Q. What can the instructor do to support Farzaneh and the student she works with?

Extra Resource: Support

Universal Design for Learning is based on the idea that what helps learners with special needs helps the rest of the class as well. This is also true of trauma-informed education. The approaches that are designed with learners who've experienced trauma (such as controlled choices or positive feedback) will benefit the rest of the class.

Collaboration and Mutuality

It is important to co-construct the classroom with the learners. Learners should have supported autonomy when choosing what they want to learn and how and what to learn. You can let learners choose topics based on their needs and within the proposed themes of your institution, using a democratic process to make choices. It's best to use a controlled choice approach, where you give learners a short list of acceptable choices. This allows for autonomy without either overwhelming learners with open-endedness or having too many conflicting possibilities.

A classroom seen from the back; everyone is holding their hands up.

Student-led activities are a large part of a trauma-informed classroom. When possible, allow learners to teach you and each other. Find topics that they are experts on and allow them to present and share information about those topics. It is crucial that students be supported and prepared to lead activities, so instructors should avoid spontaneous student-led activities.

Allow for a balance of viewpoints in the classroom. It is unlikely that everyone will agree about everything all the time. Be transparent about how decisions are made and use a democratic process when making decisions, keeping in mind that ultimately the instructor has the final say on many topics and activities.

Be aware of power dynamics in the classroom. There may be tensions among people of different ages, genders, ethnic backgrounds, and social classes. This should be factored into group projects and other interactions. When groups or pairs are working together, ensure that there are some ground rules about working together and that everyone's opinions and suggestions are considered.

Good Practices for Group Work

- Introduce group work early in the semester to set clear student expectations and explain to students how groups will operate and how students will be graded.
- Assign group tasks that encourage involvement, interdependence, and a fair distribution of tasks.
- Let students choose their peers.

- Establish ground rules for misconduct, participation, and contributions.
- Incorporate self- and peer-assessments for group members and work progress.
- Ask students to think about the best group discussions they have been a part of and reflect on what made these discussions positive interactions for the student.
- Ask students to think about the worst group discussions in which they have participated and reflect on what made these discussions unsatisfactory.
- For each of the positive characteristics identified, ask students to suggest three things the group could do to ensure that these characteristics are present.
- For each of the negative characteristics identified, ask students to suggest three things the group could do to ensure that these characteristics are not present.
- Periodically, ask the class to reflect on whether the ground rules established at the beginning of the semester are working and make adjustments as necessary.

(Adapted from Brookfield & Preskill, 2005)

Empowerment, Voice, and Choice

It is important to empower learners to use their voices and make choices. Described in the previous section on Collaboration and Mutuality, controlled choices and opportunities for sharing ideas and expertise are effective ways to empower learners.

Emotional intelligence can be woven into many classroom activities. This can be as simple as providing and eliciting rationale for activities and potential responses, looking at different viewpoints, engaging in role plays, and imagining oneself in someone else's shoes. This also includes teaching

An older learner in a classroom is smiling and has his finger raised to answer a question.

strategies to "change the channel" in case learners become overwhelmed by negative or distracting thoughts or emotions.

When providing feedback to learners, ensure it is fair, actionable, and supportive. Take a few moments to contextualize feedback and focus on the positive to reduce the potential for negative thinking.

There may be times when instructors make accommodations for learners because of personal circumstances. This may mean being flexible with assignment types and topics or providing alternative forms of assessment. Keep in mind that this needs to be balanced with program expectations and must be consistent among learners.

Cultural, Historical, and Gender Issues

This last principle overlaps with all the other ones and is especially relevant to English language classes. Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, Research and Evaluation Branch (2020) reported that relatively equal numbers of LINC students come from economic, refugee, and sponsorship immigration pathways. Their countries of origin were also variable, with most coming from Syria, China, and India followed by Eritrea, Iran, and Pakistan. Migrants in adult language classes were of all age ranges.

Two middle-aged women are sitting at a desk and studying together; behind them a man is studying by himself.

In the classroom, it is important to use inclusive practices that include all learners, not just most learners. This includes using a variety of culturally responsive approaches and differentiated instruction that reflect learning styles. This is especially true when creating trauma-informed classrooms for learners with limited formal education. Tasks should consider the whole learner and build on their strengths and existing knowledge.

Materials in the classroom should also reflect the diversity in the classroom and learners should see themselves in images used in slideshows, worksheets, and textbooks. This means that a wide range of ages, sizes, ethnic backgrounds, genders, and abilities are represented. Many tasks can include opportunities to develop intercultural communicative competence and be informed by learners' personal histories and experiences.

Instructors should keep in mind that there are many factors that impact these issues. Colonialism, patriarchy, religion, and "tradition" affect what happens in the classroom and notions about education and behaviour. Instructors can use more inclusive frameworks. For example, a couple of instructors

we spoke with mentioned that Indigenous ways of knowing or teaching with the medicine wheel allowed them a more balanced approach to teaching and learning.

Trauma-Informed Remote and Hybrid Instruction

In recent years, the delivery of many language programs has undergone considerable changes. In 2020 there was an almost overnight shift to online and remote learning. Since then, many programs have returned to face-to-face delivery, especially programs for literacy learners or those in CLB 1-4. However, many programs remain online or partially online.

In our research project, we interviewed instructors in the summer and fall of 2020 and almost all of them were working and teaching remotely.

A woman is working online and giving a thumbs up to the screen. Trauma-informed approaches look different in online environments.

We asked about their experiences around the topic of Vicarious Trauma and the shift to remote work. Some reported that they experienced fewer disclosures of trauma and found it easier to set boundaries. However, many more reported that it was harder to connect with and check in on learners. For some, this amplified their concerns and worries. For example, when learners did not attend class or turn on their cameras, instructors worried about their learners' well-being. Almost all the instructors spoke about the toll on their own mental well-being as they had to invest a lot of extra time adapting their approaches to online teaching and learning and acting as *de facto* tech support for learners. Trauma-informed approaches look different in online environments.

Safety

This is the most difficult approach to foster online. However, it is important to maintain a commitment to the class as a safe space, even knowing that learners might not be in a safe place during class time. For example, they may be in a home where violence occurs, or they may not be able to speak or participate freely. Some things you can do to make safety a priority include:

- Reminding learners to attend classes in a location where they can participate openly whenever possible.

- Encouraging learners to create time or space to focus on their lesson rather than demands at home.
- Reaching out to learners and ensuring they have access to information about supports and resources.
- Building self-care or grounding activities into online classes.

Trustworthiness and Transparency

It is even more important to build in predictability and consistency in an online environment. Here are some ideas:

- Post the class agenda to a central place that learners can access (e.g., MS Teams) and use that to guide class time.
- Remind learners about confidentiality. In most cases it is not appropriate to record classes.
- If you do record the class, make sure all the learners are informed about the recording and give them regular reminders about it.
- Build in routines in how you start and end the class and when you take breaks or do group work.

Support

Some learners may feel more distanced and less supported when studying from home, so it is important to build various types of support into online teaching. For example:

- Check in with learners regularly. This can be done with anonymous polls or informal discussions.
- Remind students about community and institutional resources and make sure those resources are available to learners (e.g., in the Files section of the course).
- Choose breakout groups thoughtfully and use the announcement feature to communicate with learners while they are in breakout groups.
- Give learners a warning before joining their breakout group.

Collaboration and Mutuality

When learners are studying from home, they might have fewer opportunities to collaborate, so it's a good idea to increase activities that foster collaboration. Some ideas include:

- Allowing learners to lead activities or facilitate discussions in small groups in breakout rooms.
- Collecting learner feedback through polls or discussions and use that feedback to inform your approach.

- Providing opportunities for learners to share their challenges and celebrations with you (or the class), so you know where to focus.

Empowerment, Voice and Choice

It is important to maintain a commitment to empowering learners in an online environment. Although it may take more time, there are many opportunities to do this. Some ideas include:

- Building in choices wherever possible. Some learners will enjoy anonymous polls, for example.
- Co-constructing online class expectations with the learners — they may be different from in a face-to-face environment.
- Offering learners more choice in how they approach assignments based on their level of comfort with technology.

Cultural, Historic and Gender Issues

Remember that each learner's experience will be quite different depending on their home life, time, space, access to technology, caregiving responsibilities, finances, etc. These might be at the forefront of their minds during class time if they are attending from home. Some strategies might include:

- Acknowledging that learners have different experiences and situations.
- Offering accommodations for learners who would benefit from them. This could be extra time for assignments or modifications to tasks to accommodate for tech skills.

Summary

The main thing to keep in mind for remote teaching and learning is that the approaches we use in classrooms are often no longer appropriate or viable. Recognize that some things may take longer online and that it is especially important to build in time and strategies for checking in with learners and directing them to appropriate supports when necessary. Be realistic about what you can cover in an online class. You may need to scale back. Whenever possible, communicate frankly with your supervisor about different demands of remote work. Although it is often outside an instructor's control, it is important to advocate for yourself and your own well-being when it comes to workload or job stress. For example, we heard concerns that class sizes might grow in online contexts because there is not a cap due to classroom space or numbers of desks. Remind coordinators that learners often need more individual and academic support in online environments.

Activity: Trauma-Informed Approaches

Instructions: The following are anonymized examples from our research. In each case an instructor mentioned using this approach.

Is it trauma-informed? If not, what changes would you make?

I always let learners choose how they want to work. If a learner wants to work in a busy hallway or sitting area instead of the quiet classroom to do desk work, that's fine with me.

I talk about similarities and tell them about a death in my immediate family. When we share these things I feel more connected to the students, and I try to go beyond my work to help them.

I like to provide extra help when needed. If it's something personal, I've learned to tell my students that's not my area of expertise.

I do a lot to take care of my students. If we are going on a field trip, I will pick some of them up because I don't think they can take public transit independently.

Extra Resource: Elena's Inclusive Classroom

The following graphic representation shows a model of an inclusive classroom that is trauma-informed and interculturally aware. It describes six inclusive practices that teachers can use and build on. It was created by learner co-creation team member, Elena Sarmiento de Mendez.

Elena Sarmiento de Mendez is a co-creation member who has been in Calgary since 2019. Originally from Venezuela, she has a postgraduate degree in education management, a bachelor's degree in education, 24 years as a high school teacher, and 11 years as a research methodologist and freelance counselor. She completed CLB 8 at Bow Valley College.
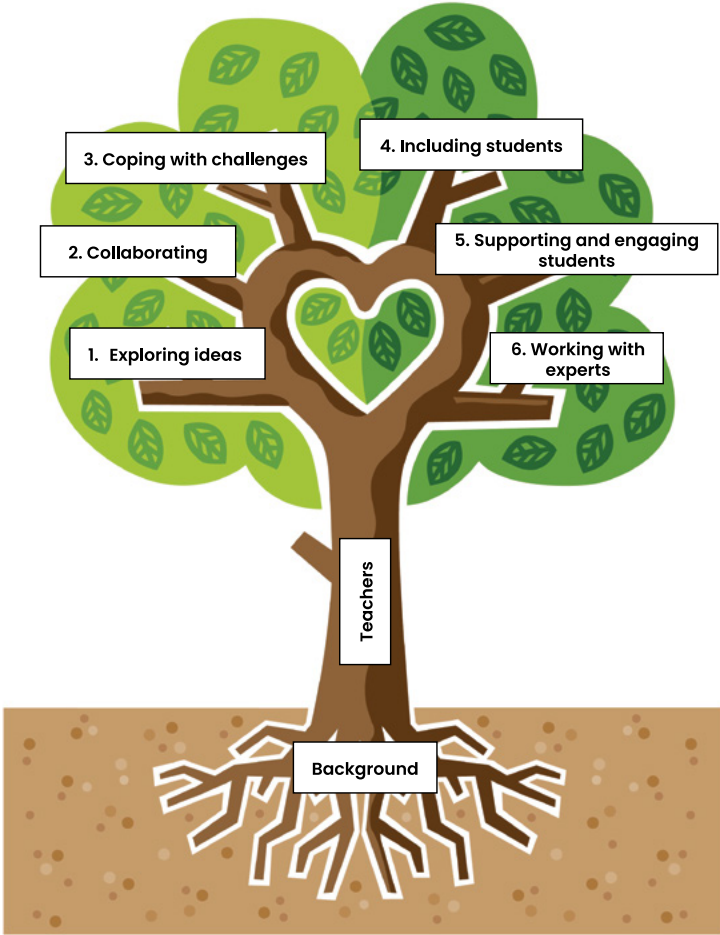
Elena's Inclusive Classroom

Suggested Answers for Module 2

Trustworthiness and Transparency

Q. How do you think that sharing information about students might impact students and instructors?

A. Sharing information can bias an instructor for or against the students. You should be careful what you share as it can have an impact on the student. Be sure to share behaviours, not judgements.

Q: What kind of information would you feel comfortable sharing about students?

A: Academic information that might help the student be successful in class; Knowing about student behaviours might also be useful.

Q: Do you think that it is good to hear about students before you meet them?

A: Answers will vary.

Support

Q: What can the instructor do to support Farzaneh and the student she works with?

A: If possible, give the student options for learning and try to engage the student in different learning scenarios (e.g., put the students in groups of 3 — the support student plus one other student — or allow the student to work independently sometimes).

The instructor needs to be sure to support both students — the student who is struggling and the classmate who is from the home country of the struggling student. For example, make sure to acknowledge the student who is constantly working with Farzaneh. Ask them if they are okay working with her. Assign random pairings at times or change the seating plan so that everyone is moving around and working with different people. Have students work not only in pairs but in small groups.

Key Terms from Module 2

Boundaries — In this context, boundaries are the limits we set between ourselves and others. Boundaries depend on context; they may be looser with family and friends but tighter with co-workers or students. Identifying and maintaining healthy boundaries contribute to better well-being.

Four Rs — Realization, Recognition, Response, and Resistance of Re-traumatization.

Inclusivity — The active inclusion of individuals in the classroom, based on mutuality and collaboration.

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My Notes:

My Notes:

Module 3: In the Classroom

This module will help you apply what you learned about trauma-informed approaches in Module 2. It focuses on practical suggestions for different classroom settings and includes topics such as setting classroom boundaries and good practices before starting class. Module 3 also focuses on dealing with predictable and unpredictable triggers of trauma and how to return to activities after a disclosure of trauma by a student.

A nature scene with trees and benches in a semi circle.

Learning Objectives

The key learning objectives for this module include:

- Applying knowledge of trauma-informed approaches by engaging in course material.
- Focusing on practical suggestions for different classroom settings by considering topics such as setting classroom boundaries.
- Understanding good practices and the benefit of considering these before starting a class.
- Considering responses when dealing with predictable and unpredictable triggers of trauma in a classroom setting.
- Exploring strategies to return to activities after a disclosure of trauma by a student.

This module will take approximately 2.5 hours to complete and includes scenarios, videos, and opportunities to reflect.

Part A: Beginning of Term Practices

Like so many other things, it's best to start as you intend to finish. The way that you set up your class and connect with new students sets the stage for the rest of the course and future interactions. Communicate clear boundaries and expectations early on to prevent confusion, burnout, or disclosures of trauma later. As we learned in the last module, learners, especially those who have experienced trauma, respond better to predictability and transparency. Setting clear boundaries and defining roles and responsibilities early in the semester lets students know what they can expect in the classroom.

A view of a woman's feet with yellow shoes standing on a sidewalk that has the word START spelled with chalk.

Roles and Boundaries

The roles and boundaries that you communicate to your learners need not be rigid. You may find that they shift as unexpected events arise. However, being clear about what your roles and boundaries are allows you to make informed decisions about when those boundaries are permeable and when your role might expand or change. You can set boundaries based on your level of comfort. However, it is important that they are professional and align with organizational guidelines and codes of conduct. Your boundaries may also shift over time, and you may find that you are comfortable with looser or tighter boundaries.

Roles

Early on, clarify to learners what they can expect from you as their instructor. Let them know what to call you and ask them what they want to be called. Some instructors may prefer to use a salutation (Ms., Mr., Dr., etc.) although most prefer their first name. Keep in mind that many learners may come from places where instructors are never called by their first name. Explaining your role and responsibilities as their teacher and their responsibilities as learners can help set expectations. When you go by your first name, it sets up a less formal and more welcoming atmosphere but may also leave students unclear about teacher-student relationships.

Extra Resource

Geert Hofstede's work on cultural dimensions demonstrates cultural differences among countries. Power Distance is a dimension that varies between cultures. For more information on cultural dimensions and power distance, check out these resources. Knowing about these aspects of culture that are typical from where your learners originate can help you better understand their perspectives and preferences.

Power Distance Index — Clearly Cultural (Clearly Cultural, n.d.)

Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions — Canada (Hofstede Insights, n.d.)

Introductions

When you first introduce yourself to your learners, remember that you are modeling what is appropriate to share. If you limit your own self-disclosure, you are setting a boundary. Students could therefore be less likely to over-share which will minimize your exposure to traumatic stories.

It is useful to ask students to provide you with some background information about themselves as well. They can fill out a form or you can have a one-on-one chat where you jot down notes. A list of examples for day 1 introductions is below. You should fill this out for yourself and share it with the class as well.

A blue background with four brightly coloured question marks in speech balloons.

- Full name
- Preferred name (for teacher and peers to use)
- Pronouns
- English language learning experience
- Country of origin
- Other languages spoken

Information: Introductions

This is what the group of students in our research project had to say about inclusive introductions in the classroom. They said they prefer general questions and can be uncomfortable with personal or very specific questions. They want to have a choice about what they share and what they choose to keep private. In the words of one student:

> "Do not be discriminatory. Teachers can say something about yourself, not 'share this, this, and this.' This is a personal and excluding approach. Me being single, married, a parent or not, where I live, etc. has nothing to do with class. Students and instructors need to know me in the class and if I share more that's okay — but don't force. When teachers are inclusive this way, it will make the class more inclusive and act as a model. How we are doing now matters in the class — it's what's great about [class]. Our background should not be as important in shaping how you are feeling in the class. You can be an instructor that is friendly, open, and makes people uncomfortable in a variety of ways [if you aren't careful]. Instructors need to be mindful in their approach to the class. Sharing personal circumstances in introductions as a teacher does not create inclusion in the way that they intend, it pressures people to be vulnerable."

It is also important to clarify expectations around communications. Let learners know that they can contact you and that you will respond but be clear about what that means to you. If you prefer to be contacted by email, MS Teams, phone calls (to a work number), or another platform, let them know. Most organizations have platforms like MS Teams or Google Classroom to send messages, and it is not advised to share personal contact information with learners.

A woman is scrolling on a phone; there are animated speech bubbles to represent text messages.

Let learners know when you check your messages and how long they can expect to wait for a response. It is good to let students know that you do not check email outside your working hours and that you may not respond on non-working days. Although you may actually check your email more often, it is important to set their expectations, so they do not assume that they will be able to connect with you at any time of the day. Decide what works for you and communicate that clearly. Provide a window of time when students can typically expect a response and remember to inform learners of unexpected changes. Predictability and consistency from an instructor will support learners and reduce potential anxieties around communication.

Resource: Contact Example

Students can contact me about class matters at teacher@organization.com or through MS Teams (username) with the chat feature. Please note that I check email from 8:00-4:30 Monday-Friday and will respond to you within 1 day on weekdays and within 3 days on weekends. Please do not call me unless we have planned a call.

Starting the Semester

Good Practice: Introductions

Here is a suggestion from the group of students in our research project about beginning of term practices. It is geared toward intermediate learners and above.

An anonymous questionnaire or survey can be sent to learners or done in class to learn about the students' preferences. The students do not have to answer questions they don't want to. It helps the teacher know about what students don't want to talk about (e.g., sensitive or fearful areas). This can help instructors better understand what learners' expectations and preferences are. The

A blue background with four brightly coloured question marks in speech balloons.

survey could include questions about topics of interest and topics to avoid, learning preferences, group dynamics, and any other information learners think instructors could benefit from. You might also include a question about what students would like to learn more about. Here are examples of questions that could be used with higher-level learners.

- If you are comfortable sharing, tell me something about yourself or your learning background.
- What are your strengths in English? Do you have any areas where you want to progress in (such as reading or listening)?
- What are your expectations for the semester? For this program?
- What are (some of) your goals? What are your academic goals?
- What kind of classroom environment would you like? What kind of classroom environment do you feel supported and comfortable in?

Instructors should actively frame these questions beforehand to show that these questions are to be inclusive and not to put students on the spot. These questions are for class participants to get to know one another. Because instructors are in a position of power, students might feel pressure to respond even if they aren't comfortable. You should make it clear that students do not need to share what they don't want to share, even if other students do.

An offshoot of this may include a discussion about what your scope of responsibility and expertise is. Again, this will vary to person-to-person and depends on experience and what other supports are available. Let students know what this is and that even if something is outside your scope of responsibility and expertise, there are other supports available to them. This is discussed further in Module 5.

Scenario: Boundaries

When Danielle, a LINC 4 teacher, first shifted to online teaching, she had to share her phone number to connect with her students and help walk them through technological difficulties. She had one student who would call her even after classes to ask for some advice or just talk. The student would also call later in the evening when she was completing schoolwork. Danielle said this was difficult for her and dreaded her phone ringing.

A smiling woman is looking at her phone in a public space.

Questions

Q: What could Danielle do to articulate clear boundaries?

Q: Is there a way to avoid sharing personal contact details with learners?

These activities are a starting point for setting learner expectations about what your role is and what you can help with, but they will also learn that other supports are available. Knowing what they can share with you provides them with greater security in the classroom.

Scenario: Permeable Boundaries

Midori has been teaching for ten years. She is clear to students about what they can expect of her and what she expects of them. Despite her colleagues saying it's a bad idea, Midori puts her personal number on the syllabus and tells her students it is there for emergencies. During the early days of COVID-19, Midori received a call from one of her students. He informed her that he had COVID-19 and was scared, confused, and at the hospital. He had no family in Canada and didn't know where to go for help. She was able to help him understand what was happening and

A woman with her eyes closed has her hands up showing her palms to indicate "stop."

listened to him. Despite it being late in the evening, Midori is glad the student called and that she was a source of comfort and help to him. To this day, the phone number has never been abused, and Midori is comfortable setting her boundaries and going beyond them when needed.

Questions

Q: How might Midori take steps to be mindful to ensure she is taking care of both her students' needs and her personal needs with this boundary?

Q: What other resources might she direct the learner to?

Before Class

It sometimes happens that instructors are anxious before classes. This may be due to a recent event in the class, a particular student, or an ongoing issue a teacher struggles with. There are good practices and techniques for how teachers can prepare for class. Having a plan that you can share with students is helpful for the teacher and students alike.

A woman is thoughtfully drinking a cup of tea.

How to Mentally Prepare for Class

This section provides an overview of mental preparations that instructors can do prior to class. There is a wide range of activities, so choose what best works for you or come up with your own. You may find it helpful to have a technique (or suite of techniques) that you use regularly before class. You may find that you only need these techniques if you are experiencing difficulties.

Regular Practices

Just like learners, instructors also benefit from a consistent routine. Creating a ritual that you associate with starting work or teaching creates a mental barrier between your work life and your personal life, which can help to prevent burnout. For some instructors, it may also be helpful to have a complementary ritual for when you finish teaching or leave work. Examples include:

- making a cup of tea before class
- turning on the lights in the classroom
- shutting down your desk computer before heading to class
- creating a list or topic for the opening of next class

- repeating a personal mantra
- taking a series of deep calming breaths

If you find yourself apprehensive about class or a particular learner because of a disclosure, an event, or a conflict, you might find it helpful to take a few extra moments to prepare yourself before class. While you do not want to dwell on these concerns or let them take up too much mental space, it may be helpful to write down your concerns and some strategies you can use for this specific circumstance. For example, if you know that a learner has just experienced the unexpected loss of a family member or if you are aware that there has been a conflict in the region your learners are from, you might find it helpful to jot down how you will express sympathy and how you can gently check in with them.

Activity: How to Mentally Prepare for Class

Put a check beside the techniques or questions that you think you could use in the moment when you need to teach.

Body scan — Check from top to bottom to know how your body feels (presence). Where are you holding tension?

Thoughts — What are you thinking about? What are your priorities?

Distractions — Are you distracted by personal or professional concerns?

Self-talk — What are you saying to yourself? Is it negative or positive?

Mood — Are you a "rain cloud?" How are you feeling emotionally? Is it impacting others?

Energy — Do you have the energy to match what you are about to encounter?

Attitude — What is your mindset toward your teaching? Do you like your job?

Teaching notes — Are you prepared?

Readiness — Do you have what you need for the lessons? Are you ready to lead?

Supports — Do you have colleagues to talk with, a supervisor, and access to support for students and yourself?

Patience — Do you have other frustrations bleeding into student interactions?

Thinking about particular students — Do you notice you are thinking about someone or their circumstances more than others?

Gravitating toward particular students — Are you reducing boundaries by gravitating toward someone in particular?

Trigger awareness — Do you know the types of encounters/stories that could act as a trigger?

Prepare for the day proactively instead of reactively — Do you have strategies to change the plan if you need to do so? Can you respond in the moment? What can you predict?

Walking to the class — Speed increases anxiousness. Are you calm as you are walking?

Self-expectations — Are your expectations realistic and will you lower them if you are not feeling well? Are you experiencing guilt when you don't meet someone's expectations? Are you being realistic? Expect that you can handle whatever comes your way.

Speeding through materials — This may indicate that you are not present. Are you reading the environment and looking for feedback?

Basic needs — Are you physically ready to teach?

Good Practice: Trauma-Informed Icebreakers, Activities, and Introductions

Introductions: Each learner shares their name, first language, and why they have come to learn English. Avoid personal questions that may be triggering. A teacher beginning this activity can share first, modeling the activity, and say how they have come to be an English language teacher.

A Grounding Activity: Some teachers may choose a different or the same grounding activity to incorporate into their lessons each week as a closing or opening exercise. A few examples

A woman with a clipboard is smiling and speaking with two other women.

include: box breathing, mindful colouring, progressive muscle relaxation, or guided imagery/meditation.

The Artifact Game: Bring common household items that learners may not know the name of or be familiar with. Students pick an item, introduce themselves to a partner and explain how they think the item is used. Their partner does the same. Learners switch partners and discover another item until all learners have had multiple small opportunities to connect and meet others.

General tips for being trauma-informed in the classroom with learners:

- Co-creating classroom rules and expectations with students.
- Reinforcing classroom rules and expectations of self, others, and the teacher.
- Focusing conversations and prompts about the future rather than the past.
- Providing a caution to learners before potentially triggering materials.
- Using smaller group activities.
- Allowing learners to opt out or not share.
- Modelling activities for the learners and providing more than one example.
- Providing controlled choice with a handful of activities where learners can select what best meets their needs.

Part B: Predictable Triggers of Trauma

As mentioned in Module 2, there are certain topics that may trigger the re-traumatization of learners. When possible, these topics should be avoided or approached carefully. This section will review predictable triggers of trauma.

Some triggers of trauma, such as discussing distressing current events about parts of the world that students are from, are obvious and should be avoided whenever possible. Other triggers of trauma are predictable but might not be as obvious. Trauma triggers in the classroom fall into three broad categories: environmental, behavioural, and teaching/pedagogical. In some cases, these potential triggers can be controlled or prepared for, but in other cases they are outside the teacher's control. The next section will provide examples of each and how to approach and respond to different triggers.

Environmental Triggers

Different aspects of the learning environment could trigger trauma. Some learners might have limited formal education or negative experiences with schools or other institutions. Simply being at a

school or in a classroom could conjure negative emotions. In addition, learners who have experienced trauma may be triggered by certain conditions or events. A list of common environmental triggers (adapted from Bow Valley College, 2017) includes:

- dark hallways or classrooms (for example, during a slide show)
- windowless rooms
- people in uniforms
- fire drills or lockdowns
- evacuation procedures
- bells, alarms, sirens
- the sound of boots in the hallway
- sudden or loud noises
- unfamiliar or unplanned visitors

While some of these things (like the sound of boots in the hallway or a school evacuation) can't be prevented, instructors can lessen these environmental conditions. When a classroom is trauma-informed and welcoming, this will help to mitigate the inevitable triggers. The following is a list of some potential ways to manage predictable environmental triggers of trauma:

Five people standing in line.

- When possible, request classrooms with windows and natural light that are in central areas of the school.
- If you know that a fire drill or lockdown drill will occur, make sure that learners are prepared for it — or plan a field trip for that day.
- Allow learners to choose where and how they prefer to sit in the classroom.
- Keep doors open.
- Play non-distracting, relaxing music during quiet activities.
- Keep lights on and only lower them minimally for slideshows/projections.
- Keep desk placement consistent — at least when students enter the room.
- Allow students to be familiar with the sights, sounds, and smells and help to identify them when possible.
- Inform learners in advance if you are having guests or stop and introduce anyone entering the room.

Good Practice: Learning Spaces

Darrel has been working as a LINC instructor for nearly a decade and is now working at a new school. He finds that the physical layout of learning space at his new job is great for students. In an interview with the research team, Darrel described it:

"[On] this particular floor, […] all the classes are joined at the back [and we have see-through glass walls all over]. The doors are at the front in the hallway, and at the back there are sliding mall doors. We keep [the sliding doors] open during the day and the students can mingle, go in and out, and then if we're teaching we [can] shut them."

Behavioural Triggers

The way instructors, peers, and other community members behave can also trigger trauma. Some examples of behavioural trauma triggers include:

- shouting or raised voices
- standing too close for comfort
- leaning over instead of crouching beside
- body language such as hands on hips or arms crossed as if angry
- touching without consent
- people experiencing a loss of control or acting in socially inappropriate ways
- racism, discrimination, or microaggressions
- power dynamics between classmates or with the instructor
- depending on cultural norms, direct eye contact

Although many behavioural trauma triggers are predictable, they may not be avoidable all the time. For that reason, keeping a calm and relaxed classroom environment is crucial. As an instructor, it is important to model calm responses and to be able to de-escalate if things become tense. As an instructor, you should never raise your voice. If it is getting louder in the classroom, you can lower your own voice. You might also walk over to the students and politely ask them to lower their voices.

As described earlier in this module, co-constructed classroom expectations can be helpful so that learners know what behaviour is appropriate. You can cite these classroom ground rules when voices are raised or if there has been disrespect between learners, for example.

An angry or serious looking woman has her hands on her hips.

Whenever possible, it is best for the instructor to deal with classroom disruptions swiftly and with a calm authority. Only resort to involving security if you believe you or your learners are at imminent risk, as the presence of uniformed security persons may escalate the scenario or trigger other students. You may need to ask for an administrator or other instructor to either accompany the learner or to watch your class for you to accompany a student out of the classroom to calm down. If no one is available, it may be appropriate to give the learners a break. Depending on your institutional guidelines, you may be able to leave them in the classroom doing a task while you briefly step out (putting a student or two in charge). Otherwise, you may need to give everyone a break to stretch their legs while you care for the individual who needs immediate attention. You should be mindful that the other learners need reassurance that you are supporting and caring for the dysregulated individual and your goal is always to keep everyone safe. It is important to debrief and process with the learners following any kind of escalating or unplanned event; do not just send students away if possible.

Information

Predicting a Disclosure

The following are potential things you might notice before a disclosure:

- Body language – observe nonverbal cues such as: Looking down or away, a shocked look (e.g., wider eyes), tearfulness, jitters, or an inability to keep still.
- Hesitation before speaking.
- Blurting instead of waiting to be called upon or asked for input.
- Student waiting prior to or after class.
- Prompts — course content and personal examples might lead to a disclosure.
- Conflictual reactions to events.
- Barriers to processing in the moment.
- Previous disclosures.
- The role you play in their life – Are you the main trusted person in their life?

How to Interrupt a Disclosure

- Be proactive.
- Tell students not to disclose personal information.
- Use the supports that are available to students.
- Let students know what supports are available.
- Tell students where to disclose.
- Guide students in what to disclose (What is appropriate for the topic being taught?).
- Give disclaimers or frame the reason for content.
- Model taking a break.
- Tell the learner to stop by saying, "hang on, before you say anything more" or "please do not go any further." It may be most supportive to redirect them to the appropriate supports and remind them of the classroom rules and boundaries. Your plan is not to negate their experience or emotion but rather to redirect them to an appropriate place and time for explicit disclosures.
- If materials are triggering, use other examples instead of asking for student examples.
- Divert your plan if you think a disclosure is about to occur (change topics, switch activities, or do a grounding or movement break for everyone).

Good Practice: Pedagogical Triggers

Here are some practical tips for mitigating classroom dynamics in a trauma-informed way. You might use these tips in cases when one student's behaviour triggers another:

- Build common understanding: create classroom boundaries and rules together while everyone is regulated.
- Develop routine and ritual: create predictability within the classroom. If dysregulation does occur, students know what to expect in their learning environment.
- Interrupt, redirect, or stop the classroom discussion or activity in the moment.
- If possible, allow other students to take a break outside of the space while you attend to learners who are dysregulated.
- Empathize and validate the learners' emotions.
- In some situations, it may be appropriate to address the entire class. Engaging in a co-regulation activity like a breathing exercise or other grounding technique may be beneficial for learners. Reaffirming the goals of teaching and learning in the space and reminding other learners can help reaffirm that the classroom is a safe space to learn even when we experience difficult emotions.
- Provide the learner with institutional or community supports.
- Ask for support from colleagues or supervisors if needed.

Pedagogical Triggers

There are certain classroom topics, activities, or events that are predictable triggers of trauma. Again, some of these are avoidable, but others are not. Examples include:

- themes such as family
- why or how a learner came to Canada
- individual-focused questioning
- current events (especially those in student countries of origin)
- too many instructions
- paperwork and forms
- abrupt changes
- a change in teacher or routines
- field trips
- an authoritative manner or control
- lack of explanation for tasks or ambiguous instructions

Themes and topics about family are some of the biggest pedagogical triggers. Many ESL (English as a Second Language) textbooks cover questions about where a person is from and about their past in the introductory chapter. Some tasks might involve current events. These themes can be distressing for learners who have experienced trauma. When it comes to such themes, approach them with care and distance. It is best to avoid pointed questions about a person's background, especially early in the term. Likewise, current events can be useful, but care should be taken to discuss ones that are not directly and negatively related to learners, their families, or cultural community. When it comes to discussing families, speak about them generally and do not ask specifics. Instead, students can learn this type of vocabulary with generic examples. Some instructors even roleplay with families where different classmates act as mother, father, brother, etc. This can be amusing and lighten the mood. Instructors should receive copies of assignments for review prior to students sharing their work with the entire class. This allows instructors to review sensitive stories or images.

A happy family of four is playing out in nature.

In general, many pedagogical trauma triggers can be mitigated by trauma-informed practices such as being clear and concise with instructions, preparing learners for upcoming events or disruptions to routines, and setting expectations. For example, if you know there is a field trip coming up, make sure learners are well informed about what to expect. Show them pictures of where they will go and how they will get there. If you know that you will be away, try to request a substitute that they are familiar with and try to use the same substitutes every time you are absent, if possible.

Good Practice: Drills

- Tell students what to expect if or when the alert comes out.
- Desensitize the students: Role-play what students should do in case of a fire drill. Make sure they know they will not be able to use the elevator and ensure they are familiar with the stairs, stairwells, and alternate exits.
- Explain to them that the alert sound is not dangerous. In fact, it helps people survive and keeps them safe.

A woman at a computer in a classroom looks stressed and her head is in her hands.

In some cases, it is preferable to prepare an off-campus lesson for the day. In case of active shooter drills, it is advised that these are not done with learners who have experienced violent trauma.

Unpredictable Triggers of Trauma

We have already covered predictable triggers of trauma, some avoidable and some unavoidable. There are other triggers that are specific to learners and that are unpredictable. In these situations, it may not be possible to identify them beforehand, but you can prevent negative reactions through your trauma-informed practice and your response. Be aware of behavioural changes or other signs that a learner may be experiencing distress. The following are examples of behaviours and signs that may indicate that a learner is experiencing a trauma response:

A sad woman in front of a window crouches with her head on her knees.

- sudden change in behaviour
- tearfulness
- reactivity
- aggression or anger
- inability to concentrate
- shutting down, unwillingness to communicate
- inability to stay still, jitteriness
- pacing
- change in voice tone (higher or faster than usual)

Many of these behaviours are common to people who survived trauma, but when it comes to trauma triggers, usually the key is that there has been a shift in their behaviour.

Scenario

As part of a class activity, the teacher read a story about a family with adopted children. Students then worked in groups to answer some questions, such as "Is adoption common in your home country?", "What are the reasons a person or family might adopt a child?", and "What are the advantages and disadvantages of fostering or adopting children?" The teacher noticed that one of the students looked tearful and asked to leave the class.

Questions

Q: How would you handle this situation if you were the teacher?

Q: Does the teacher need to know why the student is leaving?

Q: Is there anything you would do differently?

Responding to Unpredictable Triggers of Trauma

Preventing a situation from escalating or preventing a disclosure you are not prepared for is preferable, although not always possible. When a trauma-triggered situation arises, it is best for an instructor to respond calmly and swiftly to de-escalate it. Once you suspect that a trauma response might begin to manifest itself for a learner, your response matters.

A woman is holding a pen and writing in a journal while also using a laptop.

Remain in calm control. Check in gently with the learner. If possible, redirect them back to the class and the task at hand. Work with the learner to create a solution that works for them – perhaps they would like to take a short break or do their work in a familiar and safe alternate space. Be flexible and honour their autonomy.

In the class, either with individual students or with the class as a whole, there are a number of grounding techniques that can be used. It is best if learners are familiar with these techniques before they need them, so it's a good idea to choose a handful that you like and revisit them regularly so that they are familiar. You can introduce and practice them in other activities or as class warmers. The following can be used in class and take no more than five minutes.

Good Practice: Quick Grounding Techniques to Use with Learners

- Take a walk with intention for few minutes (around the room, in the hallway, outside)
- Send students to do something (put them in groups and have them work in the hallway, send them to the library to find something)
- Breathe deeply together
- Ask the learners to write down one thing they are grateful for
- Take a short break to colour a picture
- Ask students to name things if they can see, hear, smell, feel, taste or simply observe their environment in a way that grounds them
- Put on music and have the students doodle to the changes in the sounds
- Ask students to pair up and tell each other what they understand about the lesson
- Ask students to write or draw positive messages to others (on the classroom blackboard/ whiteboard, or outside on a sidewalk)
- Have everyone stand up or sit down and stretch, roll shoulders, hug themselves, and tap their arms or back

Putting the Teacher Hat Back On

Sometimes manifestations of trauma may still occur for individuals, despite best attempts to prevent them. It is important that teachers know how to deal with them, especially when events occur during or just prior to teaching. Many of the same techniques that were discussed in the last section can also be used by instructors to help them personally respond to a learner's manifestation of trauma, disclosure, or the sharing of a disturbing image.

A woman is teaching online and reviewing vocabulary on a whiteboard.

Scenario

A student's brother recently died by suicide in their home. A few days following the incident, he disclosed the story in front of his classmates and started to cry. The teacher gently and firmly interrupted. He validated the student's experience and said that his story is very important but reminded the learner that not everything is suitable to share because not all students are able to hear this information. The teacher suggested the student walk outside or take a break from class. The instructor reminded the student that for caring and safety, he should return to class in 30 minutes or so. The instructor also reminded him about support services available and let her supervisor know what had happened.

Questions

Q: How do you think the teacher should respond to the rest of the class?

Q: Do you agree with the steps the teacher took to try and manage his behaviour?

Q: Is there anything you would do differently?

Q: Do you think the teacher was right to share the student's story with her supervisor?

After a student shares a disturbing story or image, it can be difficult to put aside intrusive images or thoughts, especially when they are fresh. Instructors may feel their body tense up, a prickle of sweat on their brow, or their heart beginning to race. This is especially difficult when learners are all there and ready to start class. The following techniques can help instructors to put these thoughts aside and teach the class. Teachers should model, practice, and expose students to a wide variety of grounding experiences during times of non-crisis and have them evaluate techniques that are helpful to themselves as individuals. The next module will review some grounding activities that can be used by teachers for themselves in class. The quick grounding techniques just presented can also be used after activating incidents.

Suggested Answers for Module 3

Boundaries

Q: What could Danielle do to articulate clear boundaries?

A: *She could let the students know that her number is only for emergency purposes; stop answering the phone when she knows that it is a student who is calling.*

Q: Is there a way to avoid sharing personal contact details with learners?

A: *Yes. Make sure that contact information always goes through the institution (e.g., institutional email address, chat features)*

Putting the Teacher Hat Back on

Q: How do you think the teacher should respond to the rest of the class?

A: *Acknowledge that the student has experienced some bad news and that we're going to move on with class.*

Permeable Boundaries

Q: How might Midori take steps to be mindful to ensure she is taking care of both her students' needs and her personal needs with this boundary?

A: *Midori should check in with herself at the beginning of the semester to decide if she wants to provide learners with a phone number. She should not feel obligated to continue doing what she's always done in the past if it no longer works for her. If she is still comfortable, she can choose to share her contact information.*

Q: What other resources might she direct the learner to?

A: *She can provide learners with a list of local resources that they can use. Likewise, she can direct them to services at her organization that can help students navigate available resources.*

Key Terms from Module 3

Triggers – A trigger is a stimulus, such as a person, place, thing, or situation, that elicits an intense or unexpected emotional response. Triggers are reminders of past trauma, and trauma-informed practice can help prevent and mitigate triggers.

Environment – In this toolkit, it refers to the English language classroom. The environment is considered through each instructor's experience.

Grounding Techniques – Self-care strategies that promote mindfulness, such as focusing on each breath for a minute or two.

Pedagogy – The method and practice of teaching, especially as an academic subject or theoretical concept.

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My Notes:

My Notes:

Module 4: Promoting Instructor Wellness

This module focuses on wellness strategies inside and outside of the classroom, highlights some suggestions inside and outside of the workplace for building support networks, and discusses strategies for setting personal boundaries.

Learning Objectives

The key learning objectives for this module include:

A view of a mountain, lake, and trees with blue sky.

- benefitting from the wellness strategies discussed in this chapter and considering the good practices for personal self-care
- considering suggestions inside and outside of the workplace to build a personal support network
- exploring and discussing strategies for setting personal boundaries inside and outside of the classroom

This module will take approximately 1.5 hours to complete and includes scenarios, videos, and opportunities to reflect.

Quick Classroom Wellness Strategies

At one point or another, most instructors feel overwhelmed and could benefit from strategies and tips for dealing with challenging situations. In fact, approximately 80% of people who experience trauma get through it without medical intervention (Gonzales, 2012). Instead, they rely on self-care, get support inside and outside of the workplace, and develop an effective, individualized understanding of personal and workplace boundaries.

A young woman beside a window with her reflection is thinking and looking away.

Reflection

Have you ever used any classroom strategies to help ground yourself in a challenging situation?

What wellness strategies have you tried before? Which ones have been successful? Why were they successful?

Which ones have not been successful? Why weren't they successful?

We all experience bad days. Sometimes a difficult situation arises in class; other times a particular activity didn't work as planned. Sometimes we just need to take a minute and refocus ourselves and stay grounded. Here are some quick ideas that you can try out in class or on a short break. Not every idea on the list will work for everyone, but there are many options to choose from, as outlined in the following table.

Table 4.1 Classroom Wellness Strategies

Physical	Emotional
• Wiggle your fingers and toes • Purposefully feel your feet on the floor • Tap your feet • If sitting, tap your knees • Touch your forefinger to your thumb and tap • Rub your hands together	• Smile • Hug yourself and rub your arms or tap • Squeeze a stress ball • Bring a meaningful picture and look at it
Social	**Spiritual**
• Assign a student assistant every day • Join in a small group or pair • Initiate a conversation with a student during independent work time • Invite other classes to your class to do fun activities together	• Take four deep breaths imagining the stress leaving your body when breathing out • Have a mantra you can say to yourself

Sensorial	Other
• Mentally note 5 things you can see, 4 things you can hear, 3 things you can smell, 2 things you can touch, 1 thing you can taste	• Colour • If you have a window, look outside • Turn your back to the class and erase the whiteboard • Go wash your hands in warm water • Find "Me" time during class break

General Wellness Strategies

When life gets busy and an instructor's sense of well-being and balance is affected, they often forget to take care of themselves or they look for quick fixes or solutions to problems. Building self-care into a daily or weekly routine can greatly improve resilience and prevent burnout.

Instructors can create a self-care plan. Use the list below and pick a few activities to focus on for the next few weeks. If you take time to discover these supports and activities now, they will be easier to access when you need them. See the following table for some ideas and put a checkmark beside ones from each category that you think you could use. This is about connecting to a different part of the brain where stress is not as present as it is at work. Be mindful of this as you choose.

Table 4.2 General Wellness Strategies

Physical	Emotional
• Acupuncture or other complementary treatments • Exercise – walking, hiking, biking, etc. • Getting a massage • Dancing • Working in the garden • Increasing healthy food choices • Taking the stairs whenever possible	• Cuddling with pets • Treating yourself to a nice meal, buying yourself flowers • Getting creative: drawing, painting, writing a song, or cooking a new meal • Wearing something that makes you feel confident • Browsing your local music store or bookstore

Social	Spiritual
• Joining a social club • Writing a blog • Having a movie marathon with friends • Joining a support group • Having a games night with friends • Spending time with children – reading to them, listening to their laughter, playing with them, etc.	• Meditating or listening to guided visualization • Listening to enjoyable podcasts or videos • Practicing yoga • Going for a nature walk, lying in the grass • Taking a fresh air break, spending time outdoors, especially in nature
Professional	**Other**
• Taking days off • Taking short breaks throughout the working day • Using planner apps • Limiting overwork	• Turning off electronic devices • Taking a nap • Trying a new hobby • Reading a good book • Volunteering for a meaningful cause • Having an adventure day • Going for a drive • Creating a poster with images of a positive vision • Making a gratitude list • Bringing in a plant for your desk

Activity: Develop Your Self-Care Plan

My top self-care practices/strategies/resources	When will you do this? How? Who/What can support you?
Physical	
Emotional	
Professional	
Spritual	
Social	
Other	

Boundaries and Dual Relationships

Modules 2 and 3 discussed the benefits of having clear boundaries with learners. However, the benefits of boundaries extend beyond the classroom. Personal and workplace boundaries can protect instructors from burnout, compassion fatigue, secondary traumatic stress, and Vicarious Trauma. Just like it is important to articulate classroom boundaries and let students know the scope of your responsibilities and what they can expect from you, you can set similar limits with your friends, family, colleagues, and activities in your life. For some instructors, boundaries can be pushed by learners or colleagues. For others, boundaries might become blurred when it comes to family obligations, personal activities, or commitments.

Reamer's (2003) research about social workers, boundaries, and dual relationships may also be relevant to instructor and student relationships, which may have dual or multiple aspects. An example of a dual relationship would be an instructor who also attends the same church as a learner. They have a learner-instructor relationship as well as a congregational relationship. Dual relationships tend to be more common in rural areas and smaller communities. The table below outlines central themes in dual relationships.

Table 4.3 Central Themes in Dual Relationships

Themes in dual relationships	Associated behaviour/action
Intimate relationships	• Physical contact • Preferential treatment • Intimate gestures • Sexual relationships
Personal benefits	• Monetary gain • Exchanging goods and services • Gaining useful information

Themes in dual relationships	Associated behaviour/action
Emotional and dependency needs	• Extending relationships • Promoting dependence • Confusing personal and professional lives • Reversing roles with learners
Altruistic gesture	• Performing favours • Providing nonprofessional services • Giving gifts • Being extraordinarily available
Unanticipated circumstances	• Social and community events • Joint affiliations and memberships • Mutual acquaintances and friends

Professional Boundaries

When it comes to professional boundaries, the following list outlines some strategies for instructors.

- Take regular breaks from work duties. This includes vacation time as well as lunch and coffee breaks, all of which can help you reset. Schedule these into your calendar.

- Use a calendar to compartmentalize your time. For example, set fixed times for responding to students or catching up on email.

- Make limits when it comes to marking; for example, set a timer to keep yourself on track while marking and aim to spend no more time on individual assignments than necessary and only during working hours. Do not respond to or fix every error but prioritize the most important ones. Set reasonable expectations for returning material to students.

- Use software or programs such as Trello to keep track of what needs to be done and focus on what should get done first.

- When possible, don't bring work home or keep it in a designated area of your home. It may also be useful to have a leaving work ritual. This can be as simple as mindfully turning off a light or shutting down your computer.

- Be comfortable saying no or maybe. You do not need to answer immediately; you can think about the request first. If a colleague or supervisor asks you to take something on, be honest about your ability to commit to it. Let them know that it may impact your other duties.

Personal Boundaries

When it comes to personal boundaries, the following list outlines some strategies for instructors.

- Set aside time to do hobbies or activities that you enjoy that are not work-related.
- Spend time with friends and family regularly.
- Spend less time with friends or family that are emotionally draining. Be comfortable saying no and being honest about your capacity to make commitments. If you have care-giving responsibilities that are exhausting, look into extra support.
- Reject perfectionism. It is ok if something isn't done perfectly, your children watch some TV, you eat take-out for dinner, or you ask a friend for help.
- Consider where your time and energy go. If you have activities that are no longer bringing you joy, take a break from them.

Reflection

What do you do now, if anything, to organize your time? What can you change?

Do you feel aware of where your time and energy goes?

What boundaries do you need to set to ensure a good work/life balance?

What can help you set boundaries to ensure a good work/life balance?

Who are the people that you have a hard time saying "no" to? How can you approach them to express that you might need to say no on occasion?

Do you have any dual relationships with your learners? If so, how does that impact your ability to set boundaries with them?

Support in the Workplace

Most organizations and schools have a variety of supports available to instructors, including supervisors or managers, counselling centres, and colleagues.

Supervisors/Managers

A supportive manager can make a very big difference. Unfortunately, many instructors feel like their managers are well-meaning but may not understand the demands and realities of teaching – especially when it comes to teaching learners who have experienced trauma or who have special learning needs. When possible, be open with your supervisor about what you can commit to and what your needs are.

Two women are having a formal conversation together. One woman has a clipboard.

Counselling Centres

Many workplaces have a counselling centre, although quite often these resources are dedicated to learners. Some organizations provide access to mental health supports; for example, faculty and staff at Bow Valley College have access to Homewood Health, which provides remote mental health support. Many organizations do not have such supports, and coverage for mental health supports are often limited, especially for part-time or contract instructors. That said, most communities have counselling services that are offered on a sliding scale based on income.

Colleagues

Colleagues are usually the most common and helpful sources of professional support. In our research, instructors told us that they often connect and debrief with colleagues because they have shared experiences and understand the demands of instruction. These connections allow them to give and receive support as well as develop resiliency. Many people we interviewed mentioned the benefits of these relationships or expressed a desire to build such connections with colleagues. There are different ways to promote and benefit from peer support, such as a "buddy system" described in greater detail below.

Good Practice: Buddy System

Peer Support Systems and Buddy Programs

Informal peer support systems may organically arise as colleagues develop relationships and turn to each other to talk about work and support each other. More formal peer support programs can help those with shared experiences draw support from each other. A classic example is a peer support program for cancer patients to make navigating the health system and living with the disease less difficult and isolating. That said, buddy systems are not just for those who are suffering. Developing a supportive network in your life can give you the opportunity to share experiences that you are going through and help you

Two happy women are having a conversation at a table.

manage during challenging times. The buddy system is intended to be mutually beneficial. It can be a forum to share ideas, not just a forum for discussing stressful times.

The Peer Support System, or Buddy Program, that we are proposing is:

- a mechanism for instructors to talk shop with colleagues about teaching, working with students who have survived trauma, etc.
- an opportunity to find meaningful connections with others who are going through similar experiences – positive or negative.

Benefits of a Buddy System

Each group will benefit in different ways, but the overall goal is to have a safe venue to process events and thoughts with like-minded individuals with shared experiences. Some benefits include:

- the opportunity to process things at work, instead of bringing them home with you.
- reduced isolation.
- the opportunity to share experiences that you are going through and help you manage during challenging times.

Some Tips for Setting Up a Buddy System

Here are some suggestions for how to build a peer support network.

- It is recommended you work in a triad; however, a pair will also work. Find a person or people that work with you and that you trust. These people should not just be friends you would vent to in another capacity.
- Treat all information confidentially. We want to support each other, build trust, and not feel betrayed. This applies to information shared about colleagues, learners, and other community members.
- When listening, do not be judgemental about how your buddy reacted or what they did or did not do.
- Keep in mind that the buddy system is a forum for discussion, not necessarily a place to give advice – unless someone is seeking advice.
- Talk about guidelines/boundaries for your time together such as:
  - *How do we show each other respect and trust?*
  - *How do you like to be heard (e.g., ask questions, just listen)?*
  - *How do you set boundaries for permission (e.g., can I share this with you?).*
  - *What are the boundaries of our time together (e.g., time, content)?*
  - *Are there any triggers that you are aware of that we should not talk about?*
- Connect in a space or platform where you feel safe, can cope, and can learn. This might be face-to-face in or near the workplace, or it might be over the phone or online.
- Decide when, and how often, you will check-in, and make it a habit, if possible. For example, first thing on Monday morning or at the end of the day, check in with your buddies. In some cases, a short regular interaction like text messages might suffice, whereas other groups might opt for regularly scheduled longer conversations face-to-face or virtually. Set aside a regular time to meet or check in with your buddies. We found that meeting on a weekly basis was beneficial to participants.
- Some discussions may happen organically; other times it may be necessary to ask questions to check in with your buddies. Some questions that you can ask each other include:
  - *How are you doing today? How is everything going?*
  - *How has your week been?*
  - *Is there anything pressing that anyone would like to discuss today?*
  - *Are you having any workplace challenges that you'd like to discuss?*
  - *What is working well right now for you?*

These tips and questions are just a starting point and might change depending on personal preferences and your relationship with each other.

Please keep in mind your buddy is not a mental health practitioner and is just there to listen and to provide support. If you are feeling distressed and the buddy conversation is not helping relieve the distress, then consider seeking support from a professional.

(CDC National Institute for Occupational Safety, 2014; Mathieu, 2012)

Support Outside the Workplace

Although professional support can be very helpful, it may not address an instructor's needs. Instructors can also get support outside of work. For example, the buddy system discussed above is designed with colleagues in mind, but some people might prefer to draw support from trusted friends or family members. Mutually beneficial relationships of support with those in your personal life can be helpful for many reasons. For example, you likely have more trust in those in your personal life and may be more comfortable talking with them. Loved ones and friends can provide personally tailored advice and support, and they can also be neutral observers when it comes to professional issues. They likely have a different perspective and can help you see issues from other angles.

However, there are some considerations when it comes to leaning on friends and family for support. They might not be familiar with a teaching context and might not be able to give reasonable advice or understand the situation. Furthermore, just like in their professional lives, instructors must be thoughtful with the information they share and be considerate of learner and colleague privacy. Relying on friends or family for this kind of support can also put strains on relationships and blur work-life boundaries. Any sort of interpersonal support should be mutually beneficial. Sometimes instructors need more support than what is available in their personal or work spheres. In these cases, seeking mental health support or counselling is warranted.

A fully developed and well-functioning individual shows the passion to pursue a variety of interests, the capability to accomplish daily duties in line with self-care, and the skill of having mature insight into the inside and outside world (Chowdhury, 2021). This Mental Health Continuum can help you determine where you are in terms of mental health and if you should seek additional help.

Mental Health Continuum Model

HEALTHY	REACTING	INJURED	ILL

Signs and indicators

HEALTHY	REACTING	INJURED	ILL
‣ Normal fluctuations in mood ‣ Normal sleep patterns ‣ Physically well, full of energy ‣ Consistent performance ‣ Socially active ‣ No trouble/impact due to substance use	‣ Nervousness, irritability, sadness ‣ Trouble sleeping ‣ Tired/low energy, muscle tension, headaches ‣ Procrastination ‣ Decreased social activity ‣ Limited to some trouble/ impact due to substance use	‣ Anxiety, anger, pervasive sadness, hopelessness ‣ Restless or disturbed sleep ‣ Fatigue, aches and pains ‣ Decreased performance, presenteeism ‣ Social avoidance or withdrawal ‣ Increased trouble/impact due to substance use	‣ Excessive anxiety, easily enraged, depressed ‣ Suicidal thoughts and intentions ‣ Unable to fall or stay asleep ‣ Exhaustion, physical illness ‣ Unable to perform duties, absenteeism ‣ Isolation, avoiding social events ‣ Dependence

Actions to Take at Each Stage of the Continuum

HEALTHY	REACTING	INJURED	ILL
‣ Focus on task at hand ‣ Break problems into manageable chunks ‣ Identify and nurture support systems ‣ Maintain healthy lifestyle	‣ Recognize limits ‣ Get adequate rest, food, and exercise ‣ Engage in healthy coping strategies ‣ Identify and minimize stressors	‣ Identify and understand own signs of distress ‣ Talk with someone ‣ Seek help ‣ Seek social support instead of withdrawing	‣ Seek consultation as needed ‣ Follow health care provider recommendations ‣ Regain physical and mental health

Mental Health Commission of Canada / Commission de la santé mentale du Canada

THE WORKING MIND™

Workplace Mental Health and Wellness

(Mental Health Commission of Canada, 2019)

Instructor Self-Advocacy

Although organizational structures and the accessibility of services are beyond an instructor's control, there are a few key things that can help you advocate for yourself. This section provides a few thoughts and quick tips that can help ensure instructors are able to integrate what they have learned into practice. This does not imply that the burden of change rests on instructor shoulders, and this section is written with the goal of reducing instructor load when it comes to managing concerns that are beyond the scope of their role as instructors.

Working Conditions

Working conditions vary greatly between instructors and schools. For example, some instructors work on a contractual semesterly basis. In these cases, they often do not have knowledge in advance about about what level they will teach, or if they will teach at all because their roles are typically contingent upon student enrolment and level placement. Other instructors, especially those working in LINC programs, are employed contractually on an annual basis. These two groups of instructors are most likely to experience precarity in their work. They often work part-time, at more than one school, or on evenings and weekends to earn a living. The pay for prep time in these roles is often negligible or non-existent. Such instructors are also less likely to have access to extended benefits including coverage for mental health services. Arguably, contract instructors work in conditions that are more stressful but also have access to fewer resources to manage that stress. It is important that you know

your rights and responsibilities in these cases so that you can advocate for what is most appropriate and also meets your needs. For example, does your organization have a collective agreement, and how does it support part-time instructors?

The other main type of instructor role is continuous. These positions are typically senior positions or faculty positions that often provide access to extended benefits, such as mental health support. Those working in continuous roles have often been employed by the same organization for many years and are more likely to be part of a faculty association or union. As noted, when possible, speak to the faculty association to let them know about the stressors of your job.

Many instructors report overwork. We heard from many that over time administrative tasks, class-sizes, workplace demands, and student needs have increased. We also heard that instructors work many more hours than those they are officially paid for in order to plan their classes, communicate with learners, provide feedback, and keep up with other work-related tasks.

Regardless of working conditions, teaching can be stressful. As discussed previously, maintaining a work-life balance is a challenge for many and the work rarely feels "done;" it seems as though there is always more feedback to give, another task to design, more materials to find or develop, and professional development to take part in. Given that the work is never "done," you can therefore remind yourself that there will always be more to do, so a break is needed.

Responding to Working Conditions

Despite the constant workload, instructors can advocate for themselves. When asked to take on another course or pivot, instructors should be clear and honest with their supervisor. Let supervisors know that taking on additional responsibilities may mean that you are unable to complete other tasks. The same goes with increasing class sizes or extra responsibilities or administrative tasks such as Portfolio Based Language Assessment (PBLA) and committee membership. It is ok to say no or to request extra remuneration. In general, supervisors and chairs recognize that good teaching depends on teacher well-being. In the long run, it is also more financially and logistically feasible to have supported and thriving instructors rather than instructors that end up having to take leave for mental health concerns or burnout, for example.

When you advocate for a fair workplace, you are increasing awareness of those who are in administrative roles, who may not understand or who may have forgotten the stress of being an instructor. They cannot assist if you do not make a request. There is strength in numbers. Collegial support networks can serve many ends. They can help instructors decompress, share their experiences, and reduce isolation. When instructors have a network of colleagues that they can either formally or informally debrief with, this can help them put their concerns into perspective and share ideas and resources. Likewise, such support networks can also work collectively to advocate for their own well-being in the workplace.

Supervisors and policy makers need to be aware of the realities of teaching. We recognize that not everyone is in a position to speak up for their needs. As such, we call on people to work collectively to share their situations. We especially encourage instructors with unionized or continuous positions to use their privilege to speak up for their counterparts and equity in the field.

Optional Activity

This is based on the scenario at the end of module 3. In this part of module 4, there is a table with all the potential choices and their outcomes for you to review.

What did you learn about choices/ options now, having walked through this module?

What are some of the other options that could have worked?

What are some of the outcomes that you could have predicted and which ones were unpredictable?

What options are within your control?

What are some strategies that you could use for your own wellness if you found yourself in a similar situation?

***Note: in some responses when the teacher accessed professional help, it resulted in immediate resolution. However, sometimes it may take more than one attempt to find a professional that works well with your needs.

Key Terms from Module 4

Boundaries – In this context, boundaries are the limits we set between ourselves and others. Boundaries depend on context; they may be looser with family and friends but tighter with co-workers or students. Identifying and maintaining healthy boundaries contribute to better well-being.

Buddy System – Informal language that is sometimes used interchangeably with peer support program or peer support network in the course. This was a useful strategy employed by instructors in this project.

Dual Relationship – In the context of the ELL Instructor's role, a dual relationship occurs when an instructor has an additional and distinct role. For example, they may inadvertently take on a counsellor's role in response to an unexpected disclosure or they may know their learner in another context (such as through their children's activities).

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My Notes:

My Notes:

Module 5: Supports for Students and Instructors

This module provides information on institutional and community support for students and instructors. It describes how and where to direct students to help. The goal is to decrease the burden on instructors, so they do not have to find or provide support themselves. This module also provides templates to create resource lists for students.

A view of a river running through a landscape of green trees.

Learning Objectives

The key learning objectives for this module include:

- discovering the support that exists in the community.
- assisting students by finding an appropriate resource to direct or refer to.
- using an intentional template for referring students in need.

This module will take approximately 1 hour to complete and includes scenarios, videos, and opportunities to reflect.

Support and Resources

Teachers are often a main contact point for newcomers in their early settlement. Learners come to trust their teachers and see them as a source of comfort and information as they navigate life in a new country. Language instructors have a wealth of cultural and local knowledge to share with learners. Instructors also know that when their students are secure and supported, they learn better. Similarly, instructors often find it rewarding to help and support their learners, not just with language learning, but also with settlement and other matters. This is an example of compassion satisfaction, discussed in Module 1.

A teacher is explaining an assignment to two male students sitting at their desk.

When it comes to mental health, however, most teachers are not trained experts and are not expected to become so as part of their job. Furthermore, providing the right kind of support in a timely manner is resource-intensive, and instructors run the risk of overextending themselves if they repeatedly do so. In other cases, attempting to provide counselling or assistance to learners can cause harm, so it is important that teachers know their limits and how to make referrals to appropriate resources and supports.

When it comes to mental health resources across Canada, there are useful information and resources available at: https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/mental-health-services/mental-health-get-help.html

Although there are often many supports available to learners, teachers may find themselves researching them and helping students access them, which is typically beyond the scope of their roles as instructors. When students can access such support either on-site or through referrals, this reduces the load on instructors and can prevent or mitigate things like burnout, compassion fatigue, secondary traumatic stress, and Vicarious Trauma.

Every organization and community is different, and the resources that are available vary; however, this module provides information about general types of support and how to connect learners to them. There are typically far more resources available in major urban centres, and those working in rural areas will not have the same kind of access to support services. This is discussed in a separate section later in this module. In general, the information in this module is organized into two broad categories of referrals for students: institutional supports and community supports.

Institutional Supports

These resources include accessible and direct on-site services to respond to crises or provide ongoing mental health support. Other intuitional supports include staff with localized knowledge (e.g., social workers or settlement practitioners) who can connect students to community services.

Community Supports

These resources include food and housing, financial aid, medical care, interpreters, employment services, mental health practitioners, religious and/or ethnocultural organizations, occupational therapists, etc.

Reflection

Have you ever had to help a learner access a support service? Did you know where to direct them or did you have to do your own research?

How aware are you and your learners about the supports that are available?

Does your school provide instructors and learners with a list of organizational or community resources?

Institutional Supports

The following are examples of institutional support services available from Bow Valley College and Calgary Immigrant Women's Association. While the two organizations both do a lot to support newcomers and offer many services for learners, their organizational structures and approaches are quite different. In this section you will see how these two organizations approach learner support beyond the language classrooms. You need not click on all the links below, but this should give you an idea about the range and types of available services. Services in different areas and contexts vary greatly, and they change over time. For that reason, we hope these examples help you to consider what the services in your context are.

Bow Valley College

Bow Valley College: Bow Valley College is a relatively large college located in Calgary, AB. The college serves almost 20,000 people who are domestic and international students, including many immigrants to Canada. Besides career preparation and vocational programs, it offers a wide variety of English language and LINC courses in the School of Global Access and upgrading options in the School of Foundational Learning. All supports available to learners can be navigated to from this central page: Student Resources

Learner Success Services is the place to go for learners to connect with a variety of services. The college has a mental health strategy called HIVE. It is an overarching strategy that includes many different services and supports.

All Bow Valley College learners have access to free counselling and other mental health supports. For example, Learner Success Services offers a free online mental health screening that can help learners connect with appropriate services. There is also 7 Cups, an online platform for peer and emotional support that is available 24/7 and in 140 languages. Learners at the college can connect for free to receive or give support as trained volunteers. There are also free mental health training programs, drop in sessions, and workshops that are available to learners, faculty, and staff at the college. Additionally, a lot of health information is available to college learners at Student Health 101.

Besides counselling and mental health services, the Learner Success Centre also offers academic, financial, and career information support. For example, the [RISE program](#) can help learners make plans and succeed at college and beyond.

The Learner Success Centre is not the only resource for college students. There is also:

[Iniikokaan Centre](#): A gathering place for Indigenous learners, with a variety of programs on offer

[The Intercultural Centre](#): A centre for learners of all backgrounds with a variety of events, workshops, and volunteer opportunities to increase intercultural competence

[Students' Association](#): A student-led association of representatives that offers many supports and programs for learners

[Multi-faith Space](#): A space that can be booked and used for spiritual practices

Calgary Immigrant Women's Association (CIWA)

CIWA is a non-profit organization that is a culturally diverse settlement agency which "recognizes, responds to, and focuses on the unique concerns and needs of immigrant and refugee women, girls, and their families" (CIWA, 2021). CIWA offers [more than 50 programs](#) for newcomer women, and language

CIWA's logo

and educational classes are just part of that, as they also offer counselling, domestic violence support, in-home support, and community engagement opportunities. Childcare and first language interpretation in 37 different languages are also available for individual and group appointments. Because CIWA is primarily a settlement organization, the resources offered are more directly targeted to newcomers and responsive to their specific needs. Most clients at CIWA are aware of other resources because of the first language support and other settlement programming available. Learners access services and information about services through the association, and because of this structure and organizational focus, learners often know how to access other services, reducing the burden on instructors.

Good Practice: The Warm Hand Off

These two organizations were presented because they reflect two very different learning contexts. Regardless of the context in which instructors work, they may find themselves in a situation where they need to make a direct on-site referral. In these cases, a "warm hand off" can go a long way to ensuring that a learner feels comfortable. This means letting the learner know that there are others

that can provide them support by accompanying them to the counselling centre or relevant resource and helping them introduce themselves. Due to privacy laws, instructors cannot ask counsellors to keep them updated about if and how the learner has continued to access services.

Reflection

How do these on-site supports compare with where you work?

Does your workplace offer different support?

Were you familiar with the term "warm hand off?" What do you think you could do to make referrals successful?

Educational organizations might have a website or list of available on-site resources, but if staff members, instructors, or learners are not aware of the list, they are less likely to refer to or access them. Find out from your organization if such a list is available. If so, it is good practice to keep it on hand, share it with all learners proactively at the beginning of a semester, remind learners about it periodically, and check for updates annually.

If your organization doesn't have a list of onsite resources, you may want to consider using the following template to create one.

Emergency	• Main contact for Student Support Services within the organization:
Academic	• Academic and Writing Support: • Academic Accommodations and/or Services for Learners Living with Disabilities: • Peer Mentorship Programs: • Interpretation Services: • Students Associations and Benefits: • Additional Training Programs (e.g. workshops, academic skills):
Social Services	• Financial Aid Information: • Volunteer Opportunities: • Culturally-Specific Resources (e.g. Indigenous student centre, Intercultural centre; Centre for Diversity, Equality, Inclusion; LGBTQ+ centre/groups on campus):
Career Services	• Career Planning and Support:
Medical/Dental	• Mental Health and/or Counselling Services:

Please note that each institution's support services will look a little different, but this template provides a general overview of the types of on-site services often available.

Community Supports

Just like there are differences among in-house resources, the resources in different communities also vary across Canada. However, there are typically many resources for newcomer learners in urban centres across Canada. The following link directs to a list of useful websites compiled by CIWA that could be useful for instructors to share with their learners or use themselves when seeking resources for learners in Calgary.

A group of people with their hands crossed and linked.

Useful Links - Calgary Immigrant Women's Association - CIWA (ciwa-online.com)
Useful Links: CLIP (Calgary Local Immigration Partnership) Newcomer Guide

Although CIWA's list is an excellent starting point and should cover most needs, situations might arise that require supports that aren't listed. Likewise, many of these links do not apply to those outside of Calgary. The following is a template instructors or organizations could use, filling in their own local contacts as needed.

Template for Community Services

Emergency	• Emergency numbers: • Community information contact (i.e. 311): • Healthline (411 in Alberta): • Crisis/Distress lines and/or centres:
Academic	• Language assessment and classes: • Local school boards, post-secondary admission information: • Interpretation and translation services:
Social Services	• Affordable daycare: • Food banks: • Clothing banks, low-cost furniture with: • Women's shelters: • Sexual abuse support centres: • Homeless shelters: • Counselling (family, personal): • Settlement and integration counselling: • Parenting support programs: • Youth and children's groups, supports, and programs: • Maternity and family planning programs: • Ethnocultural organizations: • Religious organizations: • Affordable housing: • Citizenship classes and support: • Sponsorship applications and support: • Drug and alcohol counselling and/or support groups: • Municipal, provincial, and federal low-income supports: • Local public libraries and services:

Career Services	• IQAS (International Qualification Assessment Services):
	• Pre-employment and employment programs:
	• Employment networking events and job fairs:
	• Government resources (labour standards, human rights, Immigration Refugees and Citizenship Canada [IRCC]):
Immigration	• Legal Aid (immigration, family dispute, etc.):
	• Provincial association of immigrant serving agencies:
	• Refugee specific supports:
Medical/Dental	• Provincial Healthcare Services (e.g. online information about finding a family doctor or getting a health card, getting referrals to specialists, etc.):
	• Low-cost dental service:
Other	

A Note for Instructors in Rural Areas

Filling out this template in a major urban setting might be relatively easy. In Canada's largest cities, there are many settlement agencies to choose from, and newcomers usually have larger ethnocultural communities to draw on. This is simply not the case in rural areas. Even cities of 100,000 might only have one settlement agency. Additionally, those settlement agencies might be understaffed or inadequately resourced.

A teacher is standing in front of a chalkboard with chalk.

Instructors in rural areas may quickly realize that similar services do not exist or are not accessible to their learners. For example, connecting with a faith-based practitioner may be

impractical; the nearest mosque could be an hour's drive and an individual might not have access to personal transportation, sufficient funds, or time to travel such distances.

In these situations, there is no overarching solution. Instead, you may find that services and resources are available through various channels outside the settlement sector. This might include public library programs or services, church or religious organizations, or community associations.

Barriers to Access

Even when excellent supports are available, learners may be reluctant to access them. There are many different reasons for this hesitation. For example, mental health may be stigmatized, and learners might be worried about accessing those supports for fear of reprisal from their community or family. Learners may also worry that accessing such resources could lead to problems with their immigration status or that of their family members. They may also have fears that accessing mental health services could lead to the apprehension of children or other family problems, especially in cases of domestic violence.

Other barriers to accessing services include logistical issues. Newcomers may have competing demands like employment and childcare during business hours. Limited access to transportation around the city and language proficiency can be real barriers, even when interpreters are available. For example, when it comes to accessing mental health support, newcomers might not want to use an interpreter or find first-language support, especially if the ethnocultural community is small in their area. There can be fear that their needs and personal information will not remain confidential.

Instructors can help learners access these services by reiterating the value of mental health support and underscoring that it will not impact immigration status. It may be helpful for instructors to bring in members of organizational support services as guest speakers. More informally, these individuals can drop by (and be introduced) between, or following class so that learners can come to know more about the services that are offered, while gaining a sense of who provides them.

A teacher is at a table with two students and is listening to one of them.

Advocating for Learners

Teachers, especially in full-time LINC programs, spend a lot of time with their learners. They come to understand and know them and their needs. Instructors can recognize when learners need more or

different support. For example, an instructor may recognize that the learning space is not set up for all learners or groups. It makes sense that newly arrived refugees be prioritized to be in classrooms that have windows and where the doors can be left open. Supervisors may not be aware of these concerns when scheduling classes and allocating spaces. When instructors flag these things to a supervisor, it may be an easy fix.

Instructors may also see that a learner would benefit from extra support or a different approach. This might involve requests for learning accommodations or a third-party assessment for a learning disability. In many cases, a simple solution may exist that allows learners to stay in a program. For example, an instructor might see a learner struggling to write. Having a session or two with an occupational therapist, or even just access to mechanical pencils, can make a big difference for that learner. Similarly, an instructor might have a learner that experiences a high level of test anxiety. In such a case, exemptions from traditional assessments or interviews could be granted with alternative assessments put in place.

Professional support networks can be effective not just for instructors themselves but also for their learners. Co-workers can come together to effect organizational change that benefits students as well.

Key Terms from Module 5

HIVE – Healthy Institution Valuing Engagement, a BVC student life resource that advocates for mental health and well-being of their school community as a collective responsibility.

2SLGBTQIA+ – an acronym for Two-Spirit, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer and/or Questioning, Intersex, Asexual. The plus reflects the many affirmative ways in which individuals self-identify.

My Notes:

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