

Trauma Informed Teaching: An Overview, Strategies, and Suggestions

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### **Abstract**

Each year as a teacher I encounter at least one student who has experienced some instance of trauma in their short lifetime. ELLs have unique experiences that can potentially make them more susceptible to traumatic events in their lives. This capstone explores the overarching research question: How can teachers use trauma informed instruction to promote success with ELLs. The problem associated with trauma and ELLs is a lack of knowledge or preparation to utilize trauma informed teaching practices to create a productive learning environment for ELLs. ELLs who have experienced trauma experience behavioral issues, academic issues, and teachers who do not know how to properly care for and teach a traumatized student. This capstone includes a PD for teachers to learn about the impacts of trauma on the student; how to respond in a trauma informed manner; and classroom strategies that are trauma informed that can help mediate the effects of trauma on the student. Today trauma is prevalent in all student populations. Creating a trauma informed classroom environment through the use of student choice, trauma informed assessment, trauma informed writing, and advocacy can help mediate the negative effects of trauma. When teachers implement trauma informed teaching practices, all students, particularly ELLs who have experienced trauma, will benefit and achieve academic success.

*Keywords:* Trauma, ACEs, Student Choice, Expressive Writing

## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

Since I began my professional career in 2018, I have had a student lose a relative every single year to an overdose. Each year, I learn of students whose parents are in and out of jail, alcoholic, or addicted, students whom have lost a sibling tragically, or students whom have lost a parent among so many other potential traumas. While I value the emotional support I am able to provide my students, negating the impacts of trauma takes a strong effort and more could be done in the classroom and through learning experiences to make students more comfortable, and mitigate the impacts of trauma they experienced. Trauma impacts so many students, as one in four children have experienced some sort of traumatic event that has the potential to negatively affect learning and behaviors (The National Child Traumatic Stress Network [NCTSN], 2018).

Trauma becomes even more consequential when considering ELLs, because ELLs who are immigrants have an increased likelihood for traumatic events (NCTSN, 2018). For instance, immigrant ELLs may experience trauma that forces their family to flee the country, they may experience trauma during the process of leaving the country, or may experience trauma after having left the country after having to leave so much behind during the resettlement process (NCTSN, 2018). In this capstone I will explore the overarching research question: How can teachers use trauma informed instruction to promote success with ELLs. The problem associated with is trauma and ELLs is that not all teachers have the knowledge or preparation to utilize trauma informed teaching practices in order to create the most productive learning environment for ELLs.

Trauma is defined as an experience or reaction to an event that was disturbing or dangerous in nature, and the negative associated effects can last a life time. Adverse childhood events (ACEs) are experiences undergone by children that are characterized as being traumatic in

nature, with many negative lasting impacts throughout life. One way to mitigate the negative effects of trauma and ACEs is through trauma informed teaching practices. These are defined as learning about the impacts of trauma and then using that knowledge to make informed classroom decisions based upon the needs of the students.

I hope to mediate this issue by showing teachers the importance and reasoning for utilizing trauma informed teaching practices in the classroom when working with ELLs. Additionally, I will provide strategies, unit plans, lessons, and opportunities for brainstorming regarding centering the students in the classroom and making them feel valued as individuals. Teachers need to utilize trauma informed teaching practices to promote academic success and personal comfort in ELLs so that the students reach their maximum academic potential, by reducing the stress and anxiety students feel as a result of their ACEs (Mason, 2021).

### **Significance of the Problem**

Trauma poses a significant issue for teachers and language learners in the classroom because of the drastic achievement gaps that exist between native and non-native English speakers (Soland, 2020). The achievement gap is not because of knowledge ELLs are lacking, rather the gap persists because of linguistic differences ELLs have that create knowledge gaps (Soland, 2020). I feel strongly that centering the learning process around the student through trauma informed practices is one manner in which the effects of linguistic differences can be mediated. Such is true because trauma in students will create classroom challenges for the student including challenges related to emotional regulation, anxiety that disrupts problem solving, vocal expression challenges, and challenges when working with others (Bloom, 2007). By implementing a practice that is informed by trauma, it will ease students' level of comfort in the classroom, possibly working to better support them through past traumas so they reach their

maximum academic potential. The increased comfort level will also allow learners to be more comfortable with practicing and trying the language, contributing to more rapid language growth, resulting in a reduction of the achievement gap discussed above.

### **Purpose**

I plan to mitigate the effect of the problem by providing professional development (PD) that promotes trauma informed instruction. The approach to trauma informed teaching is guided by the goal to create a more comfortable and student centered learning experience. Therefore, the PD presents research on trauma, ACES, and trauma informed teaching. The PD will also provide strategies and opportunities for brainstorming revisions for unit and lesson plan concepts. Teachers will also have opportunities to brainstorm, collaborate in editing and revisiting instructional materials through the lens of trauma informed methods. My desired outcome for the PD is that teachers are able to make adjustments to current lessons and units to increase the level of trauma responsiveness. Another PD goal is to affirm that trauma informed teaching should be utilized with ELLs. Lastly, I hope that teachers will take this information to reflect upon their own practice and create new units of study and materials that incorporate the vast and diverse social emotional needs of ELLs.

### **Summary**

Teachers are not prepared to create a trauma informed learning environment. Often educators lack access to information about trauma informed practices, which can have tremendous benefits on the education of ELLs. Trauma informed instruction offers the opportunity for students to work in environments that promote a healthy and positive environment in which language can be developed. Without a welcoming environment, students will likely be less comfortable with practicing the language, leading to linguistic challenges that

prevent ELLs from being successful, as opposed to an absence of knowledge. If students do not feel comfortable using the language, they will never be able to grow and develop their English language capabilities, thus further preventing academic success. The consequences of lacking a supportive and positive environment to learn and practice language can be even more dire, leading to language fossilization or dropping out of school. Through my PD I aim to explain why trauma informed teaching should be used with ELLs by providing information about immigration, trauma, and ACEs. The PD aims to provide teachers with strategies, unit and lesson plan concepts to recreate instruction that is trauma informed.

In this capstone, chapter 2 presents a review of the literature on trauma informed education. Chapter 3 will provide a detailed description of the PD and associated tools and materials, a justification for the utilization of tools and materials, as well as how the tools and materials will aim to solve the problem I have presented. In chapter 4, I will provide the implications for student learning, teaching, and final thoughts and recommendations regarding future use of trauma informed teaching. Finally, it is important to note that all PD materials will be included in the Appendix.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

### Introduction

In this capstone I will explore the overarching research question: How can teachers use trauma informed instruction to promote success with ELLs. The problem associated with trauma and ELLs is that not all teachers have the knowledge or preparation to utilize trauma informed teaching practices in order to create the most productive learning environment for ELLs. First, readers will learn about ACEs, trauma, and how common they are in children in our society. After learning about ACEs, trauma, and their frequency in education, readers will be exposed to how ACEs and trauma in ELLs manifest in problematic classroom behaviors that can prevent an ELL from being successful academically. In order to reduce these problematic behaviors, readers will read about potential classroom strategies to implement so that ELLs who have experienced ACEs or trauma feel safe and comfortable to express themselves in the classroom. Besides focusing on the classroom environment, the next trauma informed teaching practice the reader will learn about is the importance of offering student choice in several dimensions of the daily academic routine. The next section readers will engage with revolves around assessment and the importance that assessment is framed for ELLs in an ability perspective and what they are capable of, rather than framing assessment in a deficit perspective. Readers will then learn about how writing is a daily classroom strategy that can be used to help ELLs heal from ACEs and trauma. Lastly, readers will learn about the importance of advocacy and how they must serve as an advocate to ensure that their ELLs are receiving all of the proper mental health resources that they require. Following these steps in the creation of a trauma informed teaching practices for ELLs will ensure that teachers have the knowledge and preparation to utilize trauma informed

teaching practices in order to create the most productive learning environment for ELLs to promote academic success.

### **ACEs and Trauma**

The Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC, 2021) conducted a study called the Kaiser Permanente (ACE) study from 1995-1997 in which there were over 9,000 humans participating in the survey. Seven ACE categories were studied related to physical, psychological, or sexual abuse, violence against family members, living with household members who are substance abusers, mentally ill or suicidal, or who have been imprisoned. ACE data showed that people experienced one or more of the seven childhood adversities more than one would expect, as more than half of the participants experienced at least one ACE in their childhood. Of the more than 9,000 participants, 25% had experienced two or more ACEs when they were children. These numbers were then taken and compared with statistics about adult risk behavior, health status, and disease and it was found that those who experienced more traumatic events as a child are far more likely to have more severe health risk factors as adults. These health risk factors included many, and they also include social challenges such as alcoholism, drug abuse, depression, smoking, diabetes, heart disease, and cancer among so many others. Therefore, the more traumatic events experienced as a child, the more likely that person will have health complications as an adult leading to an earlier death (Felitti et al., 1998). This data can be extrapolated to envision that regardless of whether an ELL is born in the United States or elsewhere, it is likely there will be students who have experienced trauma and could benefit from trauma informed practices in a classroom.

The likely rate of ACEs in the classroom is enough to justify using trauma informed teaching in TESOL but when factoring in immigrant experiences and stressors felt by language

learners, the justification for trauma informed teaching becomes even clearer. The unique experiences of immigrants reveals many instances for increased opportunities of trauma that align with ACEs including before leaving a country, during the deportation of a country, and after having settled in another country. This is supported by Aragona et al. (2013) study of 391 first generation immigrants, in which 60% of the participants reported experiencing at least one traumatic event in their lifetime. Examples in a report from the American Medical Association (2019) include pre-migration traumatic events which are events that happen to the child or family that forces them to leave the country including, but not limited to being victim of war, torture or separation. Other pre-migration traumatic events that could be experienced by TESOL students include living through poverty, natural disasters, violence, and forced labor among so many other potential traumatic events. If this was not enough, there are then opportunities for traumatic events during the migration which could include experiencing family separations, the death of family members, lacking basic needs for survival during the migration, as well as a feeling of complete lack of safety. Finally, once arriving to a new country there are traumatic events and stressors a child may experience including hatred, racism, depression, loss of sense of culture, self, and community, as well as language barriers and potentially living in poverty (MSS Committee on Global and Public Health, 2019). Given the statistics of the ACEs study and the experiences of immigrants coming to the United States who are learning English, the practicality of using trauma informed teaching to help promote success in ELLs becomes evident.

### **Trauma Manifestations in Class**

#### ***Behavior Issues***

Trauma informed teaching could be justified and used to support ELLs with problematic classroom behaviors. As indicated earlier, ACEs may emerge in students who have experienced

a traumatic event. The potential trauma experienced by students in an ELL classroom can result in behavior challenges that do not allow them to properly reach their full academic potential. Generally, trauma can impact a student's behaviors and behavioral patterns, their level of academic, social, and personal engagement, as well as their overall academic achievement (Kostouros et al., 2022). Additionally, ELLs who have experienced trauma may not respond well to new school rules and routines (Mendenhall et al., 2016). According to Wilbur (2016) specific behaviors that can be connected to students who have experienced trauma include concentration inability, difficulties with learning new information, behaviors that go against socially acceptable or school appropriate actions, and mood swings. For example, one teacher involved in Kostouros et al. (2022) study discussed traumatized learners who call out randomly in class, who are easily startled, and who pace around the classroom. In addition, Wilson (2020) maintains that academic challenges that result from ACE/adverse behaviors include problems with maintaining focus, learning verbally, and memory challenges which poses vast and various negative academic and language outcomes.

### ***Concentration and Memory Issues***

Memory challenges can be a specific manifestation of trauma in the classroom. According to Finn (2010) trauma that ELLs have experienced can directly impact concentration and memory allowing for extremely limited concentration spans and memory loss in both the long and short term. This is significant because as Finn (2010) says, language acquisition is directly impacted by short and long term memory, meaning that ELLs who have experienced trauma are not having their needs met, preventing them from properly acquiring English. Trauma informed teaching can mitigate academic challenges because trauma informed teaching is a system of considering and understanding the impact trauma has on an individual and using that

knowledge to help support them both socially and academically. According to Ridley et al. (2019) having knowledge about trauma and its impacts better allows us to teach students who are traumatized through trauma informed teaching approaches. For example, language learners who have experienced trauma and are struggling to learn or achieve the same results as their peers may turn to cheating or copying in order to demonstrate achievement. A typical classroom would be critical of this behavior and punishments would follow. However, a trauma informed teacher might know that the actual reason the student copies arises from strong desire for academic success, not a disregard for schools rules. Therefore the situation can be approached in a positive manner where the learner is supported and encouraged and does not feel criticized or discouraged (Ridley et al., 2019). When the teacher does not take the cheating personally they can view the student through the lens of questioning what the student needed, but did not have. This way the teacher can ensure the student has what they need the next time so that they can be successful in the future (Kostouros et al., 2022).

Students who have experienced trauma can demonstrate behaviors that challenge classroom teachers. Utilizing trauma informed teaching is a way of mediating negative behaviors because it approaches the student as an individual who requires care, comfort, and respect. A teacher using trauma informed teaching is aware of trauma's severe negative impacts on learner attention span, verbal learning, and short and long term memory processing (Wilson, 2020). Having this basis of knowledge about trauma informed teaching then allows the educator to implement actual trauma informed practices to begin to mediate the problem.

### **Classroom Environment**

Due to the behaviors that can manifest in the classroom in ELLs who have experienced trauma, learning can be severely disrupted for both those students and their peers. The goal of

trauma informed teaching is creating a learning environment in which the learner can thrive academically and socially. Therefore, a teacher's knowledge about the importance of creating a learning environment that is safe and comfortable for ELLs who have experienced trauma, as well as the knowledge of how to do so is a central principal of trauma informed teaching (Kostouros et al., 2022).

Khatri (2016) affirms that creating a safe and comfortable learning environment is important. The author indicates that ELLs who have experienced trauma need to feel comfortable and supported when learning and using English. Hanus (2016) furthers justification for a safe learning environment because it encourages ELLs to take risks when learning English which continues to support language expression and acquisition. Aside from risk taking, a safe learning environment increases students comfort, allowing them to better learn because their behaviors and memory are not as negatively impacted. When the ELL feels grounded and safe, they will feel more comfortable to ask questions in class in order to support their own learning.

There are some important strategies to consider when attempting to create the optimal safe and supportive learning environment for ELLs who have experienced trauma. ELLs who were forced to leave their country may have experienced imprisonment, in spaces that are void of light, or that are very tight and allow little movement (Canadian Centre for Victims of Torture [CCVT], 1995). Experiencing dark classrooms, small, tight, or unorganized classrooms, or being forced to stay in the same place for extended periods of time may serve as stressors or triggers of trauma for students. Khatri (2016) suggests organizing classrooms so that classroom furniture like chairs desks, couches, and others can be easily moved to other locations of the classroom without creating major disruption. Doing this mediates potential trauma stressors or triggers for students by allowing them to easily and freely move throughout a larger sized classroom.

According to the British Columbia Ministry of Education (BCME, 2022) potential trauma triggers including school areas that are not lit, school emergency drills, particular body language movements, the wearing of masks, as well as bright lights or loud noises should be avoided as much as possible in the classroom. In a trauma informed classroom environment, a teacher would want to be sure they were not turning the lights off in the classroom, especially if there were no windows and it meant the room would be pitch black, because it could accelerate a trauma response in a student that negatively impacts their education and language acquisition. Another trigger for refugees or ACE ELLs that could lead to a trauma response are surprise classroom activities, especially one with a grade that is attached to it. Therefore, it is recommended by Khatri (2016) that a teacher follows a daily class schedule that is highly routinized is one way to create a more safe and supportive classroom environment so that an ELL with trauma can succeed. Cole et al. (2005) adds that by posting a daily agenda on the board to review before class, it establishes routine and also lets students know if a major change is coming to the typical classroom structure.

One final suggestion to help create a safe and supportive learning environment for ELLs who have experienced trauma is to take the academic pressure off of students and allow them to relax and have fun. During the school day, it is likely that those ELLs who have experienced trauma have both a mentally and emotionally exhausting day. Instructors can at the very least remove some of the academic pressure by allowing students a brief period of free time at the end of the class as a way to decompress and allow them to do what they would like to make them comfortable and happy. Another option at the end of the class period would be a chance for students to simply chat and talk with one another in pairs or small groups (Hitchcock et al., 2021). Utilizing either one of these strategies does a few things to create a supportive learning

environment through a trauma informed approach. It considers the impact that trauma has on a student's day to day schooling, recognizing the mental and emotional exhaustion that comes with experiencing and adjusting to a school setting. It also provides the students choice which shows understanding and care on the teacher's part and work to make the student feel like they are individually cared for by the teacher. Lastly, it allows ELLs to speak with their like-minded peers who speak the same language as them, which helps to alleviate some of the post migration stressors ELLs may face when coming to a new school. These actions have meaning to the students and when they are taken by the teacher it shows the students that the teacher both understands the need for and supports creating a safe and supportive learning environment. Doing so ensures that all ELLs can thrive academically, regardless of whether they have experienced trauma or not.

### **Student Choice**

Another aspect of trauma informed instruction that teachers can use to promote academic success with ELLs is allowing student choice because it increases student engagement and better meets immediate student needs (Lee & Hannafin, 2016; Mercer-Mapstone et al., 2017). The study by Patall et al. (2010) found that students who perceived that teachers gave students more independence and choice described greater levels of intrinsic motivation for academic work. Not only did the students have higher levels of motivation, it was found that they even had increased levels of enjoyment and interest in the academic work, and were thus more likely to complete it. The authors note that students scored higher on unit tests when being given choices between two homework assignments of the same difficulty.

The traditional schooling model dictates that a teacher teaches content, students practice that content, eventually learning it, before being expected to demonstrate mastery of content on

an assessment. For the student, this reinforces the importance and pressure of the assessment and takes interest, motivation, and enjoyment out of the learning process. Then, when the ELL takes the assessment they feel that pressure which causes anxiety and potential trauma responses, making it nearly impossible for the student to remember or demonstrate what they learned (Hanewicz et al., 2017; Haynes & Macleod-Johnstone, 2017). Both Hanewicz et al., (2017) and Lee and Hannafin, (2016) agree that giving student choice makes them more responsible for their own learning. ELLs being responsible for their own learning though student choice can lead to reduced trauma responses and an increase in intrinsic motivation. Reduced trauma responses and an increased sense of personal motivation to succeed academically and with language allows the student to better learn despite the traumatic experiences they have lived through. Hitchcock et al. (2021) affirms that there are multiple aspects in which teachers can offer ELLs choice including seating, assignment choice, assessment choice, and modes of modality in which work is both taught by the teacher and completed by the student. Hitchcock et al. expresses the rationale for allowing the student choice is that the seat they choose may make them feel more comfortable and safe in the classroom which is going to promote academic success. In addition, ELLs should have choices about the type of assignment they complete and the way in which it is completed, whether it be an essay that is typed or written by hand, a video presentation, a slideshow oral report, or something else (Hanewicz et al., 2017; Lee & Hannafin, 2016). For instance, Hanewicz et al. (2017) indicates that ELLs can also have choice in assessment. By allowing students to identify what grade they would like to achieve and then having the teacher show students the options for how they can achieve the desired grade through the work the student. Hanewicz et al. proposes a cafeteria style arrangement of assignments for students to complete. ELLs can then choose what meals or assignments they desire to complete from the cafeteria to work toward

their desired grade based on the guidelines and expectations set by the teacher. Allowing student choice reduces trauma responses in students and creates an increased sense of personal motivation to succeed academically and with language. Through this fundamental aspect of trauma informed teaching the needs of ELLs can better be met so that academic success is promoted with ELLs.

### **Assessment in Trauma Informed Teaching**

Assessment is another aspect of educating ELLs that could be reframed through the lens of trauma informed teaching. In a typical educational setting, assessment begins by the teacher teaching content to the students, the students taking in and learning that content, and then demonstrating knowledge and mastery of the content by succeeding on an end of unit assessment. For the ELL, this exacerbates the pressure, stress, and anxiety they feel for the assessment which causes anxiety and potential trauma responses, making it nearly impossible for the student to remember or demonstrate what they learned on the assessment (Hanewicz et al., 2017; Haynes & Macleod-Johnstone, 2017). This results in the student not maximizing their full academic potential which can lead to behavioral issues, increased academic challenges, lack of interest, motivation, and enjoyment out of the learning process, possibly inhibiting language development.

Trauma responses can have negative effects on outcomes of assessments for ELLs. It is important that in the classroom the trauma informed approach of using assessment to demonstrate what a student can do, rather than what they cannot, should be implemented. In a traditional school model after the assessment, teachers go over with students what they got wrong and why. If an ELL is struggling academically and gets much of the assessment wrong, going over everything they got wrong is going to overwhelm the student and make them feel

incapable. Even more so, these feelings can lead to trauma responses, mental and emotional exhaustion, which then lowers the ELLs ability to take in, process, and properly use the given feedback (Hitchcock et al., 2021). Rather than using summative assessment with ELLs, more formative assessment should be given to be used as windows into the great things ELLs are capable of. Rather than assessment being doors to ELLs, preventing them from reaching their desired levels of success, and focusing on what they cannot do, teachers can celebrate with students all that they achieved and have learned since initiating the new learning (Rousseau, 2018). By framing assessments as windows rather than doors, it allows ELLs to feel less stressed or anxious when taking it, because they are not concerned about achieving mastery. Instead, the ELLs know in their minds that their goal is to show the teacher what they can do, and once they have done that they will go over their learning and value and appreciate the learning and progress the student has made in order to improve upon future learning (Hitchcock et al., 2021).

Assessment feedback and grading is critical to trauma informed assessment because the feedback is going to convey and give off a sense of assessments being windows, than doors for ELLs. Faez and Karas (2020) conducted a study where they surveyed 42 pre-service teachers who were observing the best practices in TESOL. The data showed that 36 teachers noted their host teachers providing appropriate and prompt feedback, which was the second most commonly identified strategy. Consequently, Hitchcock et al. (2021) argues that due to the importance and the effect feedback and grading can have on an ELL, careful care and consideration should be given to each individual student's grade and feedback. Hitchcock et al. also suggests that teachers may need to place more value on student relationships when grading and giving feedback. For an ELL who is struggling with trauma, this might mean grading an assignment for completion rather than accuracy or reviewing all of the things a student got right on an

assessment rather than got wrong. Doing this helps alleviate potential trauma responses, it makes the student feel capable and proud, and it continues to motivate them to learn the content they are still yet to master. Moreover, Karakaya (2020) proposes that when grading allow for flexible due dates in order to prioritize relationships. This is an important piece of trauma informed teaching because there are so many factors that might prevent a traumatized ELL from completing their work including anxiety attacks, inability to sleep at night, among many other trauma responses. The above mentioned practices deserve consideration when an ELL turns in their work because they should not be punished for these environmental factors that are out of their control, preventing them from achieving academic success. One other way to frame assessment and feedback through a trauma informed lens is by providing students the opportunity to make corrections and turn their work in again in order to receive a new grade (Robinson et al., 2020). One reason this strategy would be beneficial to ELLs is because they have a desire to learn as much and receive as high of a grade as possible. Allowing opportunities to correct and resubmit their work gives students the opportunity to learn from their mistakes and receive a higher grade for what they have since learned. This also supports the students' learning and overall grade in the future.

### **Writing**

When students feel safe in the classroom and a supportive, comfortable, and trusting relationship with their teacher, there are often cases in which students will disclose an important life event to their teacher they have not told anyone else. Sometimes a student may request a private conversation with a teacher, but in many cases students are more willing to disclose a negative life event in writing. Pennebaker (1997) demonstrated positive physical and psychological health benefits when engaging in sustained writing about traumatic experiences.

For this reason, another trauma informed teaching approach that teachers should have ELLs engage in is writing. Soliday et al. (2004) supports writing as way of students coping with trauma. In their study 106 students were assigned to either write about a negative emotional moment or a neutral moment in their lives. The students who wrote about the negative emotional moment were found to report that their negative mood decreased more than the group who was writing about a neutral life experience. Hirai et al. (2012) would also agree with utilizing writing to hope ELLs heal from traumatic experiences. In the study participants were directed to either write about a traumatic event emotionally or factually for three consecutive days for five weeks. After the five weeks the authors reported that trauma symptoms decreased more in the participants who wrote about the traumatic event through an emotional lens. This data can be extrapolated to reveal the importance of writing as a trauma informed teaching practice to best support ELLs in their academic and language education.

Teachers are not therapists but when a student expresses trauma through writing the process can appear like a mental health therapy session. ELLs in particular may have a lot to write about, given the fact that they could have experienced trauma before leaving their country, during the process of leaving their country, or after having arrived in a new country (MSS Committee on Global and Public Health, 2019). Just like in talk therapy, the teacher needs to respond to the students writing in a manner that is caring, thoughtful, and informed. Additionally, the student will likely have a response to what the teacher has to say, whether that be vocally or in writing. Littrell (2009) agrees with the mental health benefits that come with writing about trauma, but only in cases in which there is follow up to the writing and the student is able to develop new learnings or discoveries about the traumatic event. Murray (2002) also highlighted the importance of writing while also insisting upon the necessity of talking and

thinking about the writing to experience new learnings, thoughts, and emotions surrounding the traumatic experience. Furthering the use of writing and talking about the writing to heal from trauma, Murray asserts that people who write about traumatic events without attempting to deal with meaning or emotions experience poorer health than those who are able to form new ideas and conclusions about their trauma. Therefore, writing as a trauma informed teaching practice in the classroom will only support ELLs when meaningful discoveries are made about the traumatic experience through follow up discourse on the original student writing.

### **Advocacy**

The final and possibly most important aspects of trauma informed teaching is the teacher's understanding of their role as an advocate for their ELL students. ELLs, who have experienced trauma need trusted teachers to serve as advocates to inform other professionals who work with the student about their unique background and strategies to effectively work with the student. Additionally, ELLs need advocates because according to Louie (2016), more than 50% of students with parents who are immigrants live in low-income housing. Louie complicates this issue even further by adding that when students are living in an area that is low income, it is likely the school that serves the area is a low income school that the ELL is attending. Besides teachers advocating within the school, ELLs also require teachers to advocate for them outside of the school because some ELLs come from new countries, school systems, or may have parents who do not speak English. The result of this is that ELLs are less likely to obtain information that is critical to their success than those of their native speaking peers (McCall-Perez, 2000). This means that ELLs and their families at home may miss out on critical information about receiving available mental health resources that could support their student both personally and academically. Parents of ELLs may not know what resources are available publicly, in the

school, and may also be unaware of economic resources that they could access to ensure their child receives the proper mental health care that they require.

The economic issue above becomes far more serious and complex when considering possible impacts on ELL's mental health. In a report, Rapfogel (2022) makes the claim that because so often mental health appointments are paid for out of pocket, proper mental health care services are only available to higher income families. This is extremely problematic because it excludes at least, but likely more than 50% of ELLs from receiving proper mental health care based on the above data from Louie. I would agree that the economic status of the family and school makes it harder, and possibly prevents ELLs from receiving the proper mental health care that they require in order to become a successful student and global citizen. For instance, when a family is living in low socio-economic conditions, money is stretched thin and can only be afforded to be spent on the utmost important necessities for continuation and survival. For this reason, ELLs who have experienced trauma and are living in low socio-economic conditions may not receive the mental health care that they need because it is not a priority. Mental health may not be the utmost important priority in the household of a low socio-economic ELL because the family needs to put all of the money towards the basic necessities for survival, like water, food, heat, and electricity.

Given that the family of an ELL and their school may not be able to provide a traumatized student with the proper mental health care they need, it highlights the importance of individual teachers serving as advocates to ELLs. The importance of advocacy is most clearly shown by the fact that in low income homes and schools, resources will be stretched thin and it is likely mental health care will not be a priority due to affordability. What this then means according to Loewus (2016), is that ELLs who have teachers and other support staff advocating

on behalf of their mental health needs, are more likely to receive what they need compared to students who have no one advocating for them on their behalf.

## **Conclusion**

In this capstone I continue to explore the overarching research question: How can teachers use trauma informed instruction to promote success with ELLs. The problem associated with is trauma and ELLs is that not all teachers have the knowledge or preparation to utilize trauma informed teaching practices in order to create the most productive learning environment for ELLs. First, readers learned about ACEs, trauma, and how common they are in children in our society. After learning about ACES, trauma, and their frequency in education, readers were exposed to how ACEs and trauma in ELLs manifest in problematic classroom behaviors that can prevent an ELL from being successful academically. In order to reduce these problematic behaviors, readers learned about potential classroom strategies to implement so that ELLs who have experienced ACEs or trauma feel safe and comfortable to express themselves in the classroom. After focusing on the classroom environment, a transition was made to the importance of offering student choice in several dimensions of the daily academic routine. Then readers learned about trauma informed assessment and the importance that assessment is framed for ELLs in an ability perspective and what they are capable of. Next readers read about how writing is a daily classroom strategy that can be used to help ELLs heal from ACEs and trauma. Lastly, readers learned about the importance of advocacy and how they must serve as an advocate to ensure that their ELLs are receiving all of the proper mental health resources that they require. Following these steps in the creation of a trauma informed teaching practices for ELLs will ensure that teachers have the knowledge and preparation to utilize trauma informed teaching practices in order to create the most productive learning environment for ELLs to

promote academic success. Chapter 3 will provide a specific look at the professional development, activities, pertinent information related to learning for participants, as well as the researched rationale behind the information and each activity.

### **Chapter 3: Description of Product and Tools**

In this capstone I am exploring the overarching research question: How can teachers use trauma informed instruction to promote success with ELLs. The problem associated with trauma and ELLs is that not all teachers have the knowledge or preparation to utilize trauma informed teaching practices in order to create the most productive learning environment for ELLs. Chapter 3 is meant to serve as a preview of the one day PD and activities that will go along with it. One activity was created for each of the following topics: ACEs and trauma, behavioral manifestations of trauma in the classroom, the classroom environment, student choice, assessment, writing, and advocacy. Each paragraph that will follow describes in chronological order what the activity is, learning goals, why the activity was chosen, as supported by research, and how the activity meets the learning goals and addresses the overall question and problem posed above. The materials created for this PD are listed as Figures and can be found in the Appendix.

#### **Before Attending**

Before teachers attend the PD, teachers will complete the Kaiser Permanente (ACE) Quiz at home. Teachers will complete the ACE Quiz before coming to the professional development with the purpose of exposing participants to the idea that ACEs and trauma in ELLs are far more prevalent than they may realize. Upon arriving at the PD, participants will complete an anonymous survey (see Figure 1) in which they respond to how many childhood ACEs they experienced. The class data will then be compiled together and displayed to the participants. When the (CDC, 2021) conducted the ACEs study, it was found that of the more than 9,000 participants, 50% had experienced one ACE before turning 18 and 25% had experienced two or more. Aragona et al. (2013) found that in a study of 391 first generation immigrants, 60% of the

participants reported experiencing at least one traumatic event in their lifetime. The numbers above are particularly important because it reveals that ACEs and trauma are fairly common in school aged children, far more common than many teachers may realize. ACEs and trauma in school aged ELLs is a dire issue because people who experienced more traumatic events as a child, are more likely to have health complications as an adult, which will lead to an earlier death (Felitti et al., 1998). By having participants complete the ACEs Quiz before attending the PD, teachers realize the high frequency in which ACEs and trauma impacts their ELLs. Once this revelation is understood by teachers, the solution of trauma informed teaching can be introduced as a way to mitigate the many harmful effects of trauma in the classroom.

### **Day 1**

Day one will start by going over the agenda that clearly lists learning targets and activities (see Figure 2). Each topic the PD covers will have an agenda and learning targets. After going over the agenda, an opening activity will be used to begin to talk about ACEs and trauma. At the end of the professional development session, a closing activity will follow for participants to complete before leaving. The first learning target is that ACEs and trauma are likely more common in school aged children than they previously realized. By having participants take the ACE survey, post anonymous results, and discuss their learnings with their peers, the goal is that teachers will become more aware of the common role that ACEs and trauma play in their students' daily lives.

### **Activity 1**

In order to further convey the understanding that more students experience ACEs and trauma, participants will be shown a video about potential pre-migration, during migration, and post-migration traumatic events that immigrant ELLs may experience when going to the United

States (MSS Committee on Global and Public Health, 2019). This sets the rationale for trauma informed teaching as a way to mitigate the impacts of trauma on ELL's academic progress and success.

## **Activity 2**

The second activity participants will engage in is an analysis of teacher behavior responses to problematic classroom behaviors that may result from trauma. Specifically, teachers will be provided flashcards with problematic classroom behaviors on each card that are demonstrated by students who have experienced traumatic events (see Figure 3). On the provided handout, participants will write the behavior problem, how they would address the behavior issue, the intended result of addressing the behavior in the manner in which they chose, and anticipated student reactions to the teacher's response (see Figure 4). After doing this, teachers will turn and talk with their peers to address the three questions they were writing about. Each time a respondent volunteers to read aloud, I will critique the participant responses and will suggest a trauma informed response for each scenario.

This activity was created so that PD participants can learn how to address problematic behaviors with the goal of minimizing classroom problems, build a relationship with the student, and support their social-emotional, and academic progress. The learning from this activity is significant because according to Wilbur (2016), specific behaviors that can be connected to students who have experienced trauma include concentration inability, difficulties with learning new information, behaviors that go against socially acceptable or school appropriate actions, and mood swings. Additionally, trauma can generally impact a student's behaviors and behavioral patterns, their level of academic, social, and personal engagement, as well as their overall academic achievement (Kostouros et al., 2022). The activity address the desired learning goals in

several ways. First, the activity exposes participants to behaviors that can be anticipated from students who have experienced ACEs or trauma in their lifetime. Second, it demonstrates to teachers the potential negative consequences of not addressing traumatic behaviors in a manner that is trauma informed. Third, it provides participants an opportunity to learn about alternative responses to trauma that are informed by the research to achieve the goal the teacher is setting forth. By providing PD participants with this learning, the problem of not all teachers having the knowledge to utilize trauma informed teaching practices begins to be mediated.

### **Activity 3**

Following the behavior analysis, the third activity that participants will complete is related to creating a comfortable and safe learning environment that is trauma informed. Participants will be shown pictures or text of normal classroom actions that are taken by teachers (see Figure 5) For each one displayed, participants will raise their right hand if they feel that the action is a safe one to take in a classroom that has students who have experienced trauma. Participants will then be called upon to explain and rationalize why the action is reasonable in a trauma informed classroom. If participants deem the action as unsafe for students with ACEs or trauma, participants should raise their left and be prepared to explain why they feel the action may not be advisable in a trauma informed classroom.

This activity is being implemented because teachers often take actions in class that seem neutral but can actually be very harmful towards the wellbeing of a traumatized ELL. For example, in a normal classroom a teacher may turn off the lights to watch a movie which is not advisable in a trauma informed classroom. Such is true because according to the British Columbia Ministry of Education (BCME, 2022), potential trauma triggers include school areas that are not lit, school emergency drills, particular body language movements, the wearing of

masks, as well as bright lights and loud noises. Awareness of these facts and of the importance of creating a safe and comfortable learning environment is supported by Hanus (2016), who considers a safe learning environment to be essential. This is because it encourages ELLs to take risks when learning English which continues to support language expression and acquisition, which will not happen when students are unwilling to make attempts in the classroom. The desired learning outcome from this activity is for participants to learn about some actions that would seem appropriate in any classroom, but actually could be very harmful in a trauma informed environment. The knowledge from this activity addressed the problem because it can then be applied by the teacher to their own classroom. This way teachers can ensure they are doing everything they can to create a safe and comfortable learning environment that is trauma informed so that all ELLs can experience academic success in class.

#### **Activity 4**

After completing an activity related to establishing a trauma informed classroom environment, participants will begin to learn how they can use classroom strategies during teaching to create a classroom that is friendlier towards students who have experienced trauma. One specific classroom strategy is utilizing student choice with relation to seating, assignment choice, and assessment choice. For this activity, participants will have been asked to bring a copy of their class seating chart, a classwork assignment, and a unit assessment prior to the PD. Participants will be expected modify each in a manner that offers student choice. For the class seating chart, participants will be expected to brainstorm and take notes on a creative way to offer students a choice in where they sit in class. Next, PD participants will need to brainstorm and take notes on a way to modify one aspect of a classwork or homework assignment so that it offers more student choice, allowing students multiple ways to demonstrate knowledge of the

target content (see Figure 6). Lastly in the activity, participants will brainstorm and take notes about concepts for modifying student assessment in a variety of manners, allowing for students to demonstrate the desired content in the manner that works best for them.

The reason for this activity is because of the fact that in a study by Patall et al. (2010), it was found that students who perceived that teachers gave students more independence and choice, described greater levels of intrinsic motivation for academic work. Not only did the students have higher levels of motivation, it was found that they even had increased levels of enjoyment and interest in the academic work, and were thus more likely to complete it. On top of this, Lee & Hannafin (2016) and Mercer-Mapstone et al. (2017) agree that allowing student choice is beneficial for an ELL who has experienced trauma because it increases student engagement and better meets immediate student needs. This activity was chosen so that participants could first have knowledge about the benefits of offering student choice, as well as the various dimensions of education in which choice can be offered. Additionally, the activity was designed for teachers to use their brainstorming to make actual modifications to seating charts, class assignments, and class assessments. This activity addresses the problem by providing teachers information about the trauma informed classroom strategy of offering choice, while also offering various practical concepts in which student choice can be offered so that the most efficient learning environment is established for ELLs.

### **Activity 5**

After discussing concepts teachers came up with about offering student choice in assessment, the PD will transition to an activity where teachers have the opportunity to discuss and consider ways in which assessment can be reframed to better support ELLs who have experienced trauma. Before engaging in discussion, participants will watch the TED Talk from

Nikki Adeli called “What Standardized Tests Don’t Measure” independently. After watching the TED Talk, participants will return to discuss the philosophy of utilizing assessment as windows, rather than doors. The other part of the discussion will be about ways in which an assessment can be reframed so that it reflects the progress students are making, rather than reflecting what students do not know.

The rationale for using this activity is that the typical assessment model for ELLs creates unwanted and unnecessary stress, anxiety, and pressure, which can lead to a trauma response in the ELL. These trauma responses make it nearly impossible for the student to remember or demonstrate what they learned prior to the assessment (Hanewicz et al., 2017; Haynes & Macleod-Johnstone, 2017). Furthermore, the trauma responses can lead to mental and emotional exhaustion which according to Hitchcock et al. (2021), lowers the ELLs ability to take in, process, and properly use the feedback they are given on the assessments. This activity was designed in mind so that participants could be exposed to the assessment as windows not doors philosophy, and then to give them knowledge about strategies to form assessment in that way. Presenting this knowledge to participants gives knowledge to teachers about how to provide ELLs who have experienced trauma, the best opportunity at demonstrating their knowledge on an assessment so that they can experience academic success.

### **Activity 6**

The next activity of the PD is for participants to put student practice in their own hands. Specifically, participants will take five minutes to free write about their biggest stressors, anxieties, or challenges they are facing in their life, personally or professionally (see Figure 7). Once the five minutes are up, participants will not be expected to share about what challenges they are facing, though they will need to discuss how the writing felt for them. After sharing

around the room for a few minutes, participants will watch a video independently and then reflect upon the benefits of expressive writing by Dr. James Pennebaker. With this activity, the goal is for participants to learn about how writing can be used by ELLs to heal from ACEs and trauma.

The activity is being conducted because according to Soliday et al. (2004), students who wrote about a negative emotional moment were found to report that their negative mood decreased more than the group who was writing about a neutral life experience. Furthering justification for the implementation of this activity, Hirai et al. (2012) reported that trauma symptoms decreased more in participants who wrote about a traumatic event through an emotional lens, rather than a matter of fact manner. This activity meets the desired learning goals by exposing teachers to the benefits of sustained expressive writing and how it can support ELLs who have experienced ACEs or trauma. The problem is addressed by providing teachers more knowledge about a classroom strategy they can implement on a daily basis to make their classroom trauma informed to ensure that all students have the best possible chance of experiencing progress and success.

### **Activity 7**

In the next activity participants will consider their roles as advocates for ELLs. Specifically, participants will analyze school scenarios, potential support staff in the building, as well as outside resources that may be able to provide support to ELLs who are struggling in school due to ACEs and trauma. Participants will view each slide with one of the above items on the slide (see Figure 8). They will turn and talk with their shoulder partner about how they would hypothetically utilize each advocacy resource that is presented, before sharing aloud with the entire audience.

The rationale for this activity originates from McCall-Perez (2002), who when discussing the economic disadvantages faced by ELLs asserted that ELLs are less likely to obtain information that is critical to their success than those of their native speaking peers. Furthering the need for advocacy with relation to ELLs with ACEs or trauma is the claim from Rapfogel (2022), who states that because so often mental health appointments are paid for out of pocket, proper mental health care services are only available to higher income families, leaving many ELL families and students out of the loop.

The desired learning outcome of this activity is for participants to realize the resources that are available to them to support ELLs. The second learning outcome is for participants to learn about how they can use the available resources to them and the community so they can ensure their ELLs are getting the best academic experience. This activity addresses the learning target because it utilizes real resources in the school of the participants to inform them about what is available to them. Additionally, it provides hypothetical scenarios that teachers can expect to experience with ELLs who have ACEs or trauma. By having teachers discuss how to advocate or use the advocate in each scenario, it allows teachers to gain knowledge on their own about how to best advocate and support ELLs who may be struggling due to ACEs or trauma. This knowledge can then be applied when the teacher needs to advocate on behalf of a traumatized ELL, ensuring that the teacher can utilize the trauma informed teaching practice of advocacy.

### **Closing Activity**

For the closing activity, participants will be emailed a survey (see Figure 9) in which participants respond to seven questions about the professional development. The seven questions include: What questions do you have for me, what concerns do you have with implementing

trauma informed teaching practices in your own classroom, how do you feel about the practicality of trauma informed teaching, if you were to implement these practices into your own, what would you first start with, what would you anticipate being the easiest thing to transition to in a trauma informed teaching environment, what do you feel would be the most challenging thing, what were two of your most important takeaways about trauma informed teaching, and what two trauma informed teaching strategies would you be most willing to implement into your own practice? After responding to each question, a full class discussion will take place.

### **Conclusion**

To conclude, one activity for participants of the PD was created for each of the following topics: ACEs and trauma, behavioral manifestations of trauma in the classroom, the classroom environment, student choice, assessment, writing, and advocacy. Each aspect provided critical knowledge to ensure that teachers had the new knowledge and skills to implement trauma informed teaching practices into each of the categories. Chapter 4 is a presentation of the conclusion to this capstone. Chapter 4 will begin by reminding readers of the overarching research question and the attached problem. I will then go on to discuss what findings emerged from the research question and problem before discussing implications for students. After discussing student implications, chapter 4 will conclude by providing implications for teachers, future recommendations, and final thoughts regarding the overarching research question and associated problem.

## **Chapter 4: Conclusion**

### **Introduction**

In this capstone I have been exploring the overarching research question: How can teachers use trauma informed instruction to promote success with ELLs. The problem associated with trauma and ELLs is that not all teachers have the knowledge or preparation to utilize trauma informed teaching practices in order to create the most productive learning environment for ELLs.

### **Conclusions**

After conducting research related to adverse childhood events (ACEs) and trauma, it became clear that many students would likely be able to benefit from trauma informed teaching practices. As stated in the problem, it appeared that many teachers lacked the proper knowledge or preparation strategies to utilize trauma informed teaching within their own classroom. Trauma informed teaching practices have the ability to create the most productive learning environment for all students, but particularly ELLs who may have experienced trauma during their lifetimes (Hanus, 2016). Once teachers were provided knowledge about the what trauma informed teaching is and the need for it, several trauma informed teaching strategies were researched and reviewed so that teachers could better use trauma informed instruction to promote success with ELLs. Several principal pieces of information related to trauma informed teaching strategies were researched and reviewed including trauma manifestations in the classroom, how to create a trauma informed classroom environment, using student choice, trauma informed assessment, writing and advocacy (Hanewicz et al., 2017; Kostouros et al., 2022; Patall et al., 2010; Soliday et al., 2004; Wilbur, 2016).

Specifically related to trauma manifestations in the classroom, trauma presents issues for students related to behavior, concentration, and memory. In many cases, unwanted behaviors

may arise from the student due to no fault of their own. Often times, these students also struggle with concentration and memory issues and thus, more frequent memorization strategies should be used with these students. With regards to creating a trauma informed classroom, the central concept is that students cannot learn until they feel safe and comfortable in a classroom and with their teacher (Hanus, 2016). There are many actions a teacher takes on a day to day basis that would be acceptable in a normal classroom, yet unacceptable in a trauma informed classroom. One action could be a teacher turning off a light to watch a video or movie during class. This would be an unacceptable action to take in a trauma informed classroom because it could likely trigger a trauma response in one of the traumatized students. One strategy to create a classroom that is more trauma informed to promote success with ELLs is by utilizing student choice. Allowing for student choice gives students more independence and thus makes them more willing to complete work. Student choice can be offered in areas like seating, classwork and homework, as well as assessment, all with the purpose of better promoting academic success among ELLs. Trauma informed teaching is about creating avenues for students so they can be successful academically. One of the biggest stressors for ELLs and things that hold them back the most is assessment (Hanewicz et al., 2017). Trauma informed assessment has the ability to reframe assessment for ELLs so that they no longer are made to feel like they are not up to standard, and instead are able to celebrate all they have learned and accomplished thus far. Doing this allows ELLs to feel more confident going into an assessment so that they can maximize their potential and show the teacher all that they know. Writing is another trauma informed teaching practice that can be used to better support ELLs academically (Soliday et al., 2004). Having a student write about their trauma or challenges in life can be beneficial, but only when a new discovery is made about the trauma or challenges Littrell (2009). Therefore, the teacher plays an

important role in providing feedback to students and continuing ongoing discourse about the trauma or challenges students are writing about (Faez and Karas, 2020). The final trauma informed teaching strategy that is covered was advocacy. Teachers are not psychologists and thus it is important that when a teacher identifies a student who has undergone trauma, they connect with the proper advocates and support staff to ensure the ELL student gets all they need with regards to both personal/mental health assistance, as well as the proper academic assistance too (Rapfogel, 2022).

### **Implications for Student Learning**

All students, but specifically ELLs who have experienced ACEs or trauma in their lifetime will greatly benefit from trauma informed teaching practices and experience increased academic success. It is said that trauma can impact a student's behaviors and behavioral patterns, their level of academic, social, and personal engagement, as well as their overall academic achievement (Kostouros et al., 2022). For example, a student may start pacing around the room after having sit down for longer than thirty minutes. Disciplining that student in the same manner, day after day is not only not going to support the student, it will fail to support a resolution of the issue from the teacher's perspective as well. In fact, going through the same cycle of discipline for unwanted behavior may actually deteriorate the relationship between the traumatized ELL and their teacher. According to Ridley et al. (2019) having knowledge about trauma and its impacts better allows us to teach students who are traumatized through trauma informed teaching approaches. Thus, by the teacher having the knowledge that the student is not defying class rules, and is instead having a trauma response, the teacher can approach the student in a positive manner where the learner is supported and encouraged and does not feel criticized or in trouble.

The classroom environment itself has the potential to better support students in meeting their full academic potential for success. According to the British Columbia Ministry of Education (BCME, 2022) potential trauma triggers including school areas that are not lit, school emergency drills, particular body language movements, the wearing of masks, as well as bright lights or loud noises should be avoided as much as possible in the classroom. Thus when students experience these triggers in their classroom, they have the potential to provoke a trauma response within the students. A teacher's knowledge about the importance of creating a learning environment that is safe and comfortable for ELLs who have experienced trauma, as well as the knowledge of how to do so is a central principal of trauma informed teaching (Kostouros et al., 2022). Such is true because they would be aware of classroom actions to avoid in a trauma informed classroom, which makes those students who experienced trauma feel less fearful and safer. A safe learning environment consequently increases students comfort, allowing them to better learn because their behaviors and memory are not as negatively impacted.

Utilizing student choice better allows teachers to use trauma informed instruction to promote success with ELLs immediately. Patall et al. (2010) found that students who perceived that teachers gave students more independence and choice described greater levels of intrinsic motivation for academic work, which supports ELLs making academic progress. Intrinsic motivation is important because it means the students want to complete the work for their own personal desires, not to please their family or teachers. When students experience this intrinsic motivation, they are experiencing increased interest in their own academic work. Patall et al. go on to say that the focusing of attention on academics takes students' minds off of the trauma they have experienced, and thus are more able and more likely to complete it.

Assessment is often one of the biggest roadblocks preventing ELLs from achieving success (Hanewicz et al., 2017). The typical schooling and assessment model exacerbates the pressure, stress, and anxiety ELLs feel for the assessment which causes anxiety and potential trauma responses, making it nearly impossible for the student to remember or demonstrate what they learned on the assessment (Hanewicz et al., 2017; Haynes & Macleod-Johnstone, 2017). However, trauma informed assessment relieves much of the stress, pressure, anxiety, and potential trauma responses students feel before, during, and after taking an assessment. In trauma informed assessment, rather than the assessment serving as a barrier to the academic progress of the ELL, the assessment is viewed and framed as a way for the ELL to show their teacher all they have learned and all of the progress they have made. Some suggestions made during the PD that would improve student academic performance is to allow flexible due dates (Kayakaya, 2020), provide students the opportunity to make corrections and turn their work in again in order to receive a new grade (Robinson et al., 2020), and to prioritize student relationships when grading and giving feedback (Karakaya, 2020). These strategies make it more likely students will complete an assessment, that they will use assessment to learn from it to support future learning, and that students will feel less anxiety, pressure, and stress surrounding the assessment.

### **Implications for Teaching**

Professional development (PD) participants began the PD session outside of class, taking the ACEs Quiz and then completing an anonymous opening survey for discussion upon arriving at the PD. One of the problems that I identified early on was that teachers do not have the knowledge or preparation to utilize trauma informed teaching practices in an ELL classroom. The desired implications for teaching from this activity was for teachers to realize the high frequency in which ACEs and trauma impacts their ELLs, which then set the groundwork for

trauma informed teaching as a way to mediate the problem. The Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC, 2021) Kaiser Permanente (ACE) study found that more than half of the participants experienced at least one ACE in their childhood. The likely rate of ACEs in the classroom is enough to justify using trauma informed teaching in TESOL but when factoring in immigrant experiences and stressors felt by language learners, the justification for trauma informed teaching becomes even clearer.

The next section covered in the PD was about how trauma manifests in class, including behavior, concentration, and memory issues. Teachers likely benefitted from the learning in this section because often times teachers will misinterpret behaviors that result from trauma responses as intentional defiant behavior. For example, one teacher involved in Kostouros et al. (2022) study discussed traumatized learner behaviors including students who call out randomly in class, who are easily startled, and who pace around the classroom. A teacher using trauma informed teaching is aware of trauma's severe negative impacts on learner attention span, verbal learning, and short and long term memory processing (Wilson, 2020). Therefore, when a student cannot stay focused or exhibits an unwanted classroom behavior, the teacher can approach the learner with care and desire to create a solution, rather than disciplining the student for something that is out of their control.

Due to the trauma responses that can be exhibited in the classroom, creating a learning environment that is safe and comfortable for ELLs who have experienced trauma, as well as the knowledge of how to do so is a central principal of trauma informed teaching (Kostouros et al., 2022). As stated previously, certain behaviors displayed by traumatized students may appear as defiant behavior, but is instead a trauma response the student is experiencing due to a trigger in the environment. This is why the knowledge of how to create a safe and comfortable learning

environment for students is so important, so that trauma responses exhibited by students occur with much less frequency. Some traumatized ELLs may have experienced imprisonment, in spaces that are void of light, or that are very tight and allow little movement (Canadian Centre for Victims of Torture [CCVT], 1995). Thus the knowledge that experiencing dark classrooms, small, tight, or unorganized classrooms, or being forced to stay in the same place for extended periods of time may serve as triggers of trauma for students is essential so that the teacher can eliminate these instances in their own classroom.

One classroom strategy that participants learned about was utilizing student choice to better promote academic success among ELLs. I see teachers benefitting from learning about student choice because they were provided motivating researched benefits about utilizing student choice. For example, allowing student choice increases student engagement and better meets immediate student needs (Lee & Hannafin, 2016; Mercer-Mapstone et al., 2017). After having participants understand the importance and benefits of utilizing student choice, they were shown ways in which student choice could be offered with regards to seating, classwork, and assessment (Hitchcock et al., 2021). The implications of this for teachers were that they now had knowledge about the benefits of utilizing student choice, as well as gained knowledge about aspects and ways in which student choice can be utilized in the classroom.

Another trauma informed classroom strategy with significant implications for teachers was approaching assessment in a manner that is trauma informed. The implications for participants was for teachers to view assessment as a window into what the student can do, rather than assessment being doors to ELLs, preventing them from reaching their desired levels of success. Rather than focusing on what they cannot do, teachers can celebrate with students all that they achieved and have learned since initiating the new learning (Rousseau, 2018), which is

the desired implication for participants to implement in their classrooms in the future. Presenting this knowledge to participants gives knowledge to teachers about how to provide ELLs who have experienced trauma, the best opportunity at demonstrating their knowledge on an assessment so that they can experience academic success.

Writing is another classroom strategy that can be used in a trauma informed classroom to better support ELLs in their pursuit of academic success. The implications for writing in a trauma informed classroom are the many benefits that writers experience when doing repetitive sustained writing about a negative life event. Pennebaker (1997) demonstrated positive physical and psychological health benefits when engaging in sustained writing about traumatic experiences. This in turn will allow the traumatized ELL to better cope and learn from their trauma so that they can focus their attention on academics to experience success in school. Another significant implication for teachers was that Murray (2002) asserted that people who write about traumatic events without attempting to deal with meaning or emotions experience poorer health than those who are able to form new ideas and conclusions about their trauma. Therefore, writing as a trauma informed teaching practice in the classroom will only support ELLs when meaningful discoveries are made about the traumatic experience through follow up discourse on the original student writing, which needs to be completed by the teacher in a caring, thoughtful, and respectful manner.

Lastly, with regards to advocacy, the first principal implication for teachers is that proper mental health care services are only available to higher income families (Rapfogel, 2022). The necessity of advocacy is most clearly shown by the fact that in low income homes and schools, resources will be stretched thin and it is likely mental health care will not be a priority due to affordability. What this then means according to Loewus (2016), is that ELLs who have teachers

and other support staff advocating on behalf of their mental health needs, are more likely to receive what they need compared to students who have no one advocating for them on their behalf. ELLs who have experienced trauma are already at a disadvantage. Teachers must realize the lack of mental health care services to support their ELL students, as well as the need to serve as advocates for these students. This way the teacher can ensure the student gets the proper support they need to deal with their trauma, so that they can be successful personally and in school.

### **Recommendations**

This field still requires more research. There should be more updated studies about trauma and ACEs in all school children. Additionally, more studies need to be conducted about ELLs and the trauma they have experienced, as well as immigrant ELLs and the trauma they have experienced. Writing is shown to be beneficial for students who have experienced ACEs or trauma, though I feel that more research is needed to learn more about how writing helps ELLs cope with ACEs and trauma, and whether they should be writing in their first language or the target language. Finally, I think more research needs to be conducted about available mental health resources for traumatized ELLs. There are likely many ELLs who do not receive the proper mental health services they receive due to financial costs and lack of advocacy, and they suffer personally and academically as a result.

### **Final Thoughts**

ELLs attending schools from kindergarten through high school are not having their needs met and are suffering personally, academically, and linguistically as a result. One consideration to be made is that ELLs who have experienced trauma are at a greater disadvantage, due to not all teachers having the knowledge or preparation to utilize trauma informed teaching practices.

Knowledge about ACEs and trauma informs the need for trauma informed teaching because it reveals just how many students would benefit. The principal thing to know for ELL teachers who are teaching in a trauma informed classroom is how trauma impacts behaviors in school of students, how to create a trauma informed classroom environment, as well as using the classroom strategies of student choice, assessment, writing, and advocacy. The implementation of these strategies by a knowledgeable teacher in an ELL classroom has the power to mediate the serious negative impacts of trauma so that all students can experience academic success.

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## Appendix

### Figure 1

ACEs Anonymous Opening Survey

Respondent Name:

**DIRECTIONS:** Please complete the survey based on your own results to the ACEs Study, the video we watched, and the information provided. When you are done, we will come together as a group to discuss.

1. What did you notice, find interesting or learn while taking the ACEs quiz?
2. What have you learned that has surprised you so far?
3. How many ACEs did you have before turning 18?
4. What role do you think ACEs can play in education for children?
5. What are some reasons immigrant ELLs may have more ACEs?

**Figure 2***PD Agenda and Learning Targets*

## PD AGENDA:

1. ACEs/Trauma Opening Survey, Discussion, and Video
2. Teacher Behavior Response Analysis
3. Creating a Trauma Informed Learning Environment
4. Student Choice Modifications
5. Trauma Informed Assessment
6. Trauma Informed Writing
7. Trauma Advocacy for ELLs

## Trauma and ACEs Agenda:

1. Define ACEs/Trauma
2. Opener: Video and Opening Survey
3. ACE Study Results
4. Whole Group Discussion (10 Minutes)

## Trauma and ACEs Learning Targets:

1. ACEs and trauma are likely more common in school aged children than they previously realized
2. Teachers will become more aware of the common role that ACEs and trauma play in their students' daily lives
3. Establish rationale for trauma informed teaching as a way to mitigate the impacts of trauma on ELL's academic progress and success

## Trauma Manifestations in Class Agenda:

1. What is trauma informed teaching?
2. How does trauma manifest in class?
3. Teacher Behavior Response Analysis

## Trauma Manifestations Learning Targets:

## Learning Targets:

1. About behaviors that can be anticipated from students who have experienced ACEs or trauma in their lifetime
2. Potential negative consequences of not addressing traumatic behaviors in a manner that is trauma informed

3. Address problematic behaviors with the goal of minimizing classroom problems, building a relationship with the student, and supporting their social-emotional, and academic progress

Creating a Trauma Informed Classroom Environment Agenda:

1. Why is it important?
2. Review Classroom Actions for teachers

Creating a Trauma Informed Classroom Environment Learning Targets:

1. The importance of a trauma informed classroom
2. Some actions seem appropriate in any classroom, but actually could be very harmful in a trauma informed environment

Utilizing Classroom Choice Agenda:

1. Benefits of Offering Student Choice
2. Rationale for Student Choice
3. The 3 Aspects of Student Choice
4. Classroom Choice Modification Activity

Utilizing Classroom Choice Learning Targets:

1. Knowledge about the benefits of offering student choice
2. Various dimensions of education that offer student choice
3. Make actual modifications to seating charts, class assignments, and class assessments

Trauma Informed Assessment Agenda:

1. Why Trauma Informed Assessment?
2. Trauma Informed Feedback
3. Assessment as Windows Activity

Trauma Informed Assessment Learning Targets:

1. Expose participants to the assessment as windows not doors philosophy
2. Provide knowledge about strategies to form assessment in that way

Trauma Informed Writing Agenda:

1. Trauma Informed Writing Activity
2. Video and Discuss

3. Importance of Trauma Informed Writing
4. Giving Feedback for Trauma Informed Writing

Trauma Informed Writing Learning Targets:

1. Expose teachers to the benefits of sustained expressive writing
2. How writing can be used by ELLs to heal from ACEs and trauma

Advocacy for Traumatized ELLs Agenda:

1. Importance of Advocacy
2. Trauma Advocacy Activity

Advocacy for Traumatized ELLs Learning Targets:

1. Resources that are available to them to support ELLs
2. How they can use the available resources to them and the community
3. How to best advocate and support ELLs who may be struggling due to ACEs or trauma

**Figure 3***Teacher Behavior Response Analysis Flashcards*

1. Cheating on a test
2. A student with memory loss has to memorize fifty vocabulary words
3. A student keeps looking out the window when they should be taking class notes
4. Students keep calling out of turn
5. Student frequently gets up and leaves the classroom without asking permission
6. Student paces around the room when the lights are turned off

**Figure 4**

*Teacher Behavior Analysis Response Note Catcher*

<p><b>Describe the Problematic Behavior:</b></p>	<p><b>How would you address the issue:</b></p>
<p><b>What is the intended result of addressing the behavior in this way?</b></p>	<p><b>What do you anticipate the student's response/reaction will be?</b></p>

**Figure 5***Creating a Safe and Comfortable Learning Environment*

1. Class Schedule
2. Pop Quiz
3. Student pick where they sit on a weekly basis
4. A class movie with the lights off
5. An unannounced fire drill

**Figure 6**

*Offering Choice Note Sheet*

<p>Describe how you arrange your class and the philosophy behind it:</p>	<p>Brainstorm ways you could implement student choice into your seating chart:</p>
<p>Describe a homework assignment you currently use:</p>	<p>Brainstorm ways you could implement student choice into the assignment:</p>
<p>Describe an assessment that you currently use:</p>	<p>Brainstorm ways you could implement student choice into the assessment:</p>



**Figure 8***Advocacy Scenario*

Scenario: Your new student who is an ELL has been in the class for two weeks. Despite the school routine and continually going over the expectation for behaviors and class rules, the student still stands up and paces around the room when you are trying to teach. When you pose questions to the class, the student shouts things out that are not related to the topic of learning or question.

Advocates:

1. The Science Teacher
2. The Principal
3. The Family
4. The School Psychologist

**Figure 9***Closing Activity Survey*

**DIRECTIONS:** Please complete the survey sent to your email in which you respond to the following questions:

1. What questions do you have for me?
2. What concerns do you have with implementing trauma informed teaching practices in your own classroom?
3. How do you feel about the practicality of trauma informed teaching?
4. If you were to implement these practices into your own, what would you first start with?
5. What would you anticipate being the easiest thing to transition to in a trauma informed teaching environment? What do you feel would be the most challenging thing?
6. What were two of your most important takeaways about trauma informed teaching?
7. What two trauma informed teaching strategies would you be most willing to implement into your own practice?