



PROJECT NEWS

Vicarious Trauma in the Classroom

Project Team

Research Team

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Vicarious Trauma in the Language Classroom The Research Plan

We have reached the halfway point of Vicarious trauma in the classroom: Exploring language instructor experiences. We have completed Phase 2 working with project partners and co-creation teams of learners and instructors to review and analyze data, identify themes, and develop an instructor toolkit. This toolkit is informed by relevant literature and data from 52 interviews with instructors and stakeholders. During the fall of 2021 the team is piloting these resources with instructors from Bow Valley College and project partner, Calgary Immigrant Women's Association (CIWA).

Instructor Toolkit

This toolkit was designed for English language instructors, especially those working with newcomers in LINC programs. However, anyone who works with learners who have experienced trauma will find the toolkit useful, particularly instructors in foundational programs or those that teach potentially triggering material. Taking a "middle ground" approach, the toolkit can be applied to a wide range of contexts and practices. It does not replace mental health services.

Built in and hosted on the learning platform D2L, the toolkit contains five modules with a variety of information and activities. It approaches trauma in the classroom from many angles. Pilot participants will learn about how trauma affects learners and teachers, how to integrate a trauma-informed approach into their practice, how to prevent and deal with manifestations of learner trauma, how to support their students, and how they can advocate for trauma informed practices in their organizations. Our aim was to create useful, comprehensive resources that recognize that instructors' time is limited and valuable. It will take pilot participants approximately 10 hours to work through the materials.

This project is funded by the Government of Canada, Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada.

Developmental Evaluation

Because of the scale and complexity of this project, we are using Developmental Evaluation to understand and evaluate how our research and toolkit address community needs. Developmental Evaluation embraces the dynamic and iterative nature of social research to systematically explore how it can benefit multiple stakeholders in the community.

Our Developmental Evaluator by Noor Al-Haymoni, Research Assistant

For Vicarious trauma in the classroom: Exploring language instructor experiences, Dr. Rida Abboud is supporting School of Global Access with her expertise as a developmental evaluator. She will be working with pilot participants to gather their feedback to evaluate the toolkit and make recommendations.

Dr. Rida Abboud is a professional consultant with more than 20 years of experience supporting not-for-profit and government organizations with her practice focusing on research, designing programs, evaluating and monitoring processes. She also engages in organizational learning, facilitation of staff capacity, writing reports, and strategic advising. Rida is a reflective, committed professional who is value-driven, passionate, and works with integrity. She loves to work in environments where she can think outside of the box.

As a committed life-long learner who constantly seeks opportunities to enhance her knowledge and skills, Rida has worked as a strategy lead, researcher, evaluator, sessional instructor, community development worker, and consultant on different projects. She has worked with other organizations and clients on their projects such as Alberta Association of Immigrant Serving Agencies, Antyx Community Arts Society, Aspen Family and Community Network Society etc. In addition to that, Rida is a member of the Canadian Evaluation Association. With a PhD in Social Work, Rida has long had a passion for research and learning frameworks, program design and evaluation, and strategy and organizational development.

Key Concept: Trauma Informed Classroom Practices

A trauma informed approach in the classroom benefits learners and instructors, regardless of whether they have personally experienced trauma or vicarious trauma. With this approach, the underlying assumption is that anyone in the class may have past traumatic experiences that could affect the classroom and/or learning in that environment. This universal design approach meets everyone's needs and is built upon safety, trust, support, collaboration and mutuality, and empowerment. It also considers cultural, historic and gender issues. Some practices to incorporate into a trauma informed classroom include consistency and predictability in how classes unfold. Additionally, instructors can encourage learners to be empowered through controlled choices when selecting projects and working with classmates. Instructors can provide learners with support by incorporating regular check-ins into their practice, while maintaining explicit and reasonable professional boundaries. They should also be aware of potentially triggering materials or topics, identify such material beforehand, or select more inoffensive alternatives. Likewise, emotional regulation activities can be incorporated into the language classroom in warm-up activities and learning materials. Although manifestations of trauma and resulting vicarious trauma cannot be fully anticipated or avoided, a trauma informed approach that underlies all instruction can significantly mitigate and prevent language instructors from experiencing vicarious trauma.