



# PROJECT NEWS

*Vicarious Trauma in the Classroom*

## Project Team

### Research Team

Dr. Katie Crossman (Researcher)

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### Collaborators

Mount Royal University

Calgary Immigrant Women's Association (CIWA)

### Partners

Immigrant Services Association of Nova Scotia (ISANS)

NorQuest College

Toronto Catholic District School Board

TESL Ontario

Vancouver Community College

### Questions? Contact:

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## Working and Learning Together: Project Partner, Dr. Patricia Kostouros

Our project partners from Mount Royal University, Dr. Patricia Kostouros and student research assistants Bria Scarff and Nathan Millar, have been an invaluable part of our team. Over the last two years, they have provided us with subject matter expertise around trauma in the classroom and vicarious trauma.

**Dr. Patricia Kostouros** is Full Professor in the Department of Child Studies and Social Work at Mount Royal University. Patricia's research includes intimate partner violence, post-secondary student wellness, vicarious trauma/compassion fatigue, and trauma-sensitive teaching. She co-chaired the post-secondary student mental health initiative across Canada. Prior to academia, Patricia managed a youth shelter, a women's shelter, and was the Executive Director of a residence for women with a trauma history and a dual diagnosis. Her publications include a variety of articles and edited books.

**Nathan Millar** holds a Bachelor of Child Studies, with a major in Child and Youth Care Counselling from Mount Royal University. He has worked as a Child and Youth Care Counsellor in varying roles for 20 years. In addition to emerging interests around the use of simple puppetry in counselling, Nathan illustrates and colors independent comics and works as a Research Assistant studying vicarious trauma.

**Bria Scarff** is a recent graduate of the Child and Youth Care Counselling degree program at Mount Royal University and has worked as a Research Assistant for the past two and a half years. Bria's areas of research include vicarious trauma as well as pedagogical teaching and learning in a post-secondary setting. Bria has a strong belief in personal strength and resilience that can be achieved through education. Through community and personal involvement, Bria has established work and volunteer relationships the Calgary Board of Education, Children's Village School, Wood's Homes Schools, and William Roper Hull School.

## Creating Outcomes Together

The final phase of this project is now well under way. This fall, we are welcoming 100 pilot participants from across the country to work through our *Vicarious Trauma in the Classroom Instructor Toolkit*. In the coming three months, instructors, tutors, and administrators from our partners at Vancouver Community College, NorQuest College, Immigrant Services Association of Nova Scotia, Toronto Catholic District School Board, and TESL Ontario will be reviewing the toolkit. We will support them as they work through the resource. Likewise, we will also invite them to share their feedback through surveys, focus groups, and/or interviews. We are delighted to share our work with so many pilot participants, and we are looking forward to learning together to produce a resource that is meaningful and helpful to English language instructors working with learners with trauma experiences. The feedback and insights we will gain in this last phase of the project will guide any final revisions and inform policy recommendations.

As we look towards the final chapter of this project, we are grateful to our research and pilot participants who so generously shared their experiences and expertise. As such, we have been able to contribute to the body of knowledge about this under-studied topic with a peer reviewed article in the academic journal, *Traumatology*, as well as a book chapter in *Teacher Well-Being in the English Language Classroom: An Ecological Approach*, which is in the final stages of production.

Kostouros, P., Scarff, B., Millar, N., & Crossman, K. (2022). Trauma-informed teaching for teachers of English as an additional language. *Traumatology*. Advance online publication. <https://doi.org/10.1037/trm0000381>

Crossman, K. (2023). Vicarious Trauma and the Unregulated Education of Preservice Adult Language Instructors. In L.J. Pentón Herrera, G. Martínez-Alba & E. Trinh (Eds.), *Teacher Well-Being in English Language Teaching: An Ecological Approach* (pp 121-146). Routledge Taylor & Francis Group.

### Key Concept: Start of Semester Practices & Trauma-Informed Icebreakers

Learning in a new setting with unknown expectations can be uncomfortable. To that end, icebreakers can ease the tension of the new experience and build community. There is no formula for a perfect icebreaker activity, but there are general guidelines you can follow to make activities inclusive and trauma-informed.

Engaging a class that brings together diverse backgrounds and histories requires consideration of the techniques that a teacher might utilize. As discussed in previous newsletters, trauma can exist in the language classrooms and impact the teacher, so a trauma-informed approach should consider the potential existence of those triggers or catalysts. The beginning of the school year is a great time to build new and lasting trauma-informed habits that promote an inclusive learning environment.

A suggestion when planning icebreakers is to consider consistency, choice, and regulation opportunities. Consistency relates to an activity's tone, timing, and intention. Predictability and repetition provide structured regulation and check-in opportunities for students in the classroom. With choice participants have the right to choose their level of involvement with the activity and exercise voice and agency. Providing regulation opportunities is less about the specific activity and more about making space and time within the day to promote regulating our brains and connecting with others. Icebreakers take minutes out of the day to engage and support students' ability to learn throughout the semester.