



PROJECT NEWS

Vicarious Trauma in the Classroom

Project Team

Research Team

Dr. Katie Crossman (Researcher)
 Dr. Patricia Kostouros (MRU)
 Laurent Wall (Research Officer)
 Danica Macdonald (English Language Instructor)

Research Assistants

Bria Scarff (MRU)
 Eman Ibrahim (BVC)
 Nathan Millar (MRU)
 Noor Alhaymoni (BVC)

Collaborators

Mount Royal University
 Calgary Immigrant Women's Association (CIWA)

Partners

Immigrant Services Association of Nova Scotia (ISANS)
 New Brunswick Multicultural Centre
 NorQuest College
 Toronto Catholic District School Board
 Vancouver Community College

Questions? Contact:

Dr. Katie Crossman
sgaresearch@bowvalleycollege.ca

Learn more:
globalaccess.bowvalleycollege.ca

Vicarious Trauma in the Language Classroom

Vicarious trauma in the classroom: Exploring language instructor experiences is a three-year project funded by the Government of Canada. Vicarious trauma is an adverse impact on the mental health of people who work with survivors of traumatic events. English language instructors are not immune to the distressing stories they hear in the classroom. We define vicarious trauma in detail on page two.

In partnership with Mount Royal University's Dr. Pat Kostorous and CIWA, the project will create suite of resources for immigrant serving agencies and community organizations providing English language learning programs. Throughout, instructors and newcomers will participate in a co-creation process that aims to provide skills in research, program design and development, community-building, evaluation, and knowledge mobilization.

The project's overall outcome is to create an increased capacity for service providers to deliver responsive and coordinated settlement and community services. We aim to achieve this through co-creating resources that lead to improved language learning outcomes and integration for newcomers accessing language classes.

This quarterly newsletter will report on our progress and our goal is to both share information about the work and to help create awareness to an issue that effects so many of our colleagues in the language classroom every day. In future issues we will profile our process and progress, key terms and concepts, and reflections on how this work contributes to our shared community beyond the classroom.

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

Project Goals

Language instructors are at risk of experiencing vicarious trauma because of their close classroom work with learners who have experienced trauma. Our overall project goal is to create and pilot resources specific to vicarious trauma and language instruction for education institutions and service agencies so they can better support English language instructors both in and out of the classroom.

Further, outcomes will provide funders and policy makers with evidenced-based research and strategies that can inform future program design. Finally, the knowledge created will provide scholars with a greater understanding of an understudied area and will contribute to the broader fields of mental health, adult education, and immigration and settlement studies.

Project Timelines

The research team has worked hard to successfully begin this project while navigating the changing landscape throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. The team is currently working with the support of our collaborators and partners to recruit language instructors across the country for interviews. We welcome you to share this project with your colleagues.

Email sgaresearch@bowvalleycollege.ca for more information.

Phase One: Data Collection

- ▶ Interviews and analysis will take place from April 2020 to December 2020

Phase Two: Resource Co-creation

- ▶ Co-creation bi-weekly meetings will take place from January 2021 to June 2021

Phase Three: Resource Beta Pilot and Evaluation

- ▶ Regional piloting and evaluation will take place from July 2021 to March 2022

Phase Four: National Pilot, Evaluation, and Knowledge Transfer

- ▶ This phase will take place between April 2022 and March 2023

Key Concept: Vicarious Trauma

Vicarious Trauma refers to the trauma a person may experience when being indirectly exposed to a traumatic event. It is closely connected to compassion fatigue and directly speaks to an extreme empathy. The term 'vicarious trauma' is one way of describing the collective adverse impact on the mental health of people who work with survivors of traumatic events. There is an increasing recognition those who work with traumatized populations are at risk of experiencing vicarious trauma. Even when workers are highly trained, skilled, and qualified, they are not immune to the distressing stories they hear through their work. Little is known about professionals – beyond interpreters and health and mental professionals - who work with newcomers regarding vicarious trauma. There is no research specific to educators who work with refugees in educational or classroom settings. The scant research in this area suggests that those who work closely with refugees feel overwhelmed by the stories told to them by their refugee clients and working with this population can lead to feelings of hopelessness, helplessness, impotence, and fear.