

***Increasing Teacher Capacity in Trauma-Informed Practices for Multilingual Learners:
Implications for Professional Learning & Development***

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Abstract

This study addresses the challenges posed by mass migration and its impact on K-12 schools, especially in New York, where diverse students, including refugees and asylum seekers, require specialized support. The primary objective is to enhance the capacity of in-service teachers to support Multilingual Learners (MLs) and immigrant students who have experienced trauma through trauma-informed pedagogies. A professional learning initiative was implemented in Spring 2023 to strengthen teacher capacity in culturally and linguistically diverse classrooms. Qualitative case studies were conducted with 12 New York in-service teachers who participated in four trauma-informed pedagogy workshops. Analysis of their written reflections revealed key themes that inform the refinement of professional development in trauma-informed pedagogies. The findings also have implications for incorporating this approach into teacher preparation programs. This research bridges the gap between trauma-informed practices and the needs of Multilingual Learners, particularly in the context of increasing migration. The insights gained in this study offer valuable tools for educators to create more inclusive learning environments. Additionally, the research has the potential to influence policies, practices and teacher training programs, ultimately leading to improved educational experiences for students in diverse and evolving classrooms.

Keywords: Trauma-Informed Pedagogies, Multilingual Learners, Mass Migration

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Introduction

The purpose of this study is to delve into the intricate landscape of trauma-informed pedagogies within the context of Multilingual Learners. As educators grapple with the diverse needs of students who may have experienced trauma in the midst of the contemporary era's mass migration, understanding and implementing trauma-informed practices have emerged as critical components of effective classroom instruction (Sherwood et al, 2021). The study involves 12 in-service teachers in New York, who actively engaged in professional development workshops during the Spring 2023 semester. Through qualitative analysis, this research has uncovered six overarching themes that encapsulate the teachers' experiences and perspectives, offering valuable insights into the application of trauma-informed practices in their classrooms. These themes address diverse aspects, ranging from redefining trauma to the immediate implementation of trauma-informed practices, all while considering the distinct challenges faced by teachers in supporting Multilingual Learners. In this introductory exploration, the study has endeavoured to bridge the gap between research and practice, creating a cohesive narrative that paves the way for understanding the impact of trauma-informed pedagogies and charting the future direction of this essential research.

Mass Migration and the Impact on K-12 Schools

In recent years, the world has witnessed a significant surge in mass migration driven by a variety of factors, including natural disasters, armed conflicts, political instability, and economic hardships. This global phenomenon has placed unprecedented demands on the United States' education system, challenging educators to adapt swiftly to evolving circumstances (González, 2021). Refugees and asylum seekers have arrived in the United States from diverse geographic regions, each compelled by unique reasons for migration. Notably, in 2021, the largest numbers of individuals granted asylum in the United States hailed from Venezuela, China, and El Salvador, while the majority of refugees originated from Congo, Syria, and Afghanistan (Baugh, 2022). More recently, New York City has grappled with an asylum seeker crisis, with over 130,600 migrants estimated to have arrived in the city as of mid-October since the spring of 2022 (Meko, 2023). In light of these complex migration patterns and the continuous influx of refugees and asylum seekers, the educational landscape in the United States faces an ongoing and dynamic transformation, necessitating educators to remain flexible and responsive in meeting the evolving needs of their students.

Providing adequate services to the expanding culturally and linguistically diverse student populations has long been a challenge for many schools, primarily due to the shortage of teachers and personnel trained in these specialized areas (Garcia & Weiss, 2019). Multilingual Learners, comprising students whose primary language is not English, now constitute one in five students in the United States (Thompson & Kieffer, 2018). Among these, English Language Learners (ELLs), who are in the process of acquiring proficiency in English, represent one in ten students in the U.S. (Thompson & Kieffer, 2018). It is essential to note that all ELLs fall under the category of Multilingual Learners, although not all Multilingual Learners are ELLs (Midgette & González, 2023). The ELL population is rapidly expanding across the United States (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2017). However, a critical shortage of teachers certified in Bilingual Education and English as a New Language (formerly known as English as a Second Language) persists, exacerbated by the nationwide shortage of general teachers (Fortin & Fawcett, 2022). As a result, current in-

service teachers are engaging in professional development to create inclusive content and instruction accessible to Multilingual Learners across different levels of English proficiency.

Trauma and Trauma-Informed Pedagogies for Multilingual Learners

In the work of ensuring equity and access to content and instruction for Multilingual Learners in the process of acquiring proficiency in English, educators encounter an additional challenge: providing support to students in classrooms who may be experiencing traumatic stress. Trauma, in this context, encompasses a broad spectrum of events, experiences, and their ensuing effects (St. Andrews, 2013). These events or circumstances can encompass actual or perceived threats of physical or psychological harm, as well as severe deprivation of resources necessary for healthy development. What constitutes trauma can vary from person to person and is heavily influenced by cultural beliefs and the individual's developmental stage. Adverse effects may manifest immediately or evolve over time, impacting the physical, mental, emotional, cognitive, behavioral, and social dimensions of those affected. For individuals experiencing forced migration, Foster (2001) identifies three stages laden with traumatogenic potential: premigration, trauma during transit, and resettlement. Events, experiences, and their associated effects can manifest at any of these stages or span multiple stages throughout the migration process. Midgett and González (2023) shed light on the current New York State (NYS) Multilingual Learner-related traumatic events (Figure 1), emphasizing how trauma can be a consequence at various stages of migration.

When K-12 students find themselves in a triggered state due to trauma, their access to the higher cognitive functions of the prefrontal cortex, the region responsible for learning, can be impaired (St. Andrews, 2023). This impairment may lead to reduced concentration, memory, and language abilities—key elements for a successful educational experience. Gaining insights into the profound impact of trauma enables educators to better comprehend the underlying causes of certain children's learning difficulties, behavioral issues, and relationship challenges. A survey conducted across 11 U.S. states revealed that 98% of educators believed that training in trauma-informed classroom practices should be an essential part of every teacher's skill set. Paradoxically, seven out of ten educators reported feeling inadequately prepared to implement trauma-informed approaches in their teaching (Ezarik, 2020). Notably, there exists a research gap in the realm of trauma-informed education, specifically pertaining to immigrant Multilingual Learners, as well as within teacher preparation programs.

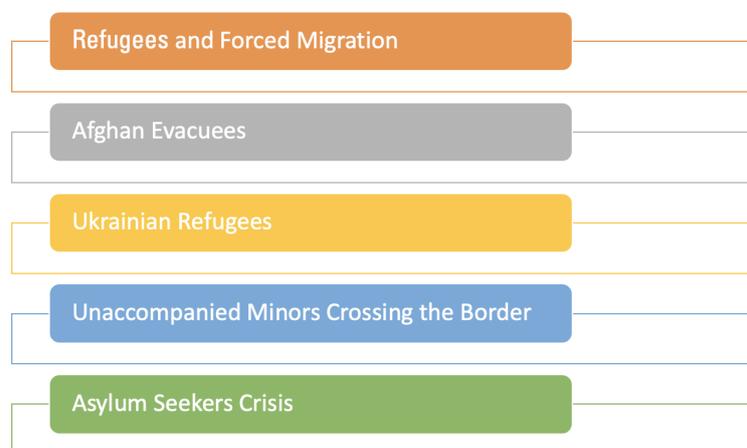


Figure 1. Current NYS Multilingual Learner-Related Traumatic Migrations (Midgette & González, 2023).

Study Design

Given the pressing need to enhance the capacity of in-service teachers to effectively support Multilingual Learners who may have experienced trauma, this research seeks to address the following key inquiries. These inquiries primarily revolve around uncovering and comprehending teachers' beliefs, perceptions, and definitions concerning trauma-informed pedagogies and their application within classroom settings for Multilingual Learners.

Research Questions: The following research questions guided this study:

1. Research Question Number One: How do teachers conceptualize trauma and trauma-informed practices within the context of Multilingual Learners?
2. Research Question Number Two: Which trauma-informed pedagogies do teacher perceive as readily integrable into their classrooms for Multilingual Learners?
3. Research Question Number Three: In what aspects of trauma-informed pedagogies do teacher feel the need for additional professional development opportunities to effectively serve Multilingual Learners?

Intervention

During the Spring 2023 semester, a professional learning program was implemented to support in-service teachers in New York as they sought to enhance their capacity in Trauma-Informed Pedagogies for Multilingual Learners. These four professional development workshops were designed to complement the ongoing graduate-level coursework in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) that many of the participants were concurrently pursuing to gain additional certification for serving English Language Learners in New York State. Table 1 outlines the workshop topics offered, each of which was accompanied by a designated reflection prompt for participants to complete.

Workshop Titles

Understanding Trauma, it's Impact on Learning, and ELL Strategies

Trauma-Informed Student -Teacher Relationships

ELL Strategies for Building a Trauma Informed Classroom Environment (Part 1)

ELL Strategies for Building a Trauma Informed Classroom Environment (Part 2)

Table 1. Trauma-Informed Workshops, Spring 2023.

Each workshop session was conducted over the course of one hour and facilitated through a synchronous telecommunication platform, allowing active participation and engagement. To accommodate participants' varied schedules and accessibility, all sessions were recorded and made available for review. This feature served as a valuable resource for both revisiting the content and addressing the corresponding reflection questions, ensuring that all attendees, including those unable to attend in real-time, could benefit from the workshop. Table 2 contains the reflection writing prompts that accompanied each session.

Session	Workshop Reflection Prompts
1	Based on the presentation and discussion on trauma, its effects on learning, and practices for ELLs, what is one major take away for you that will directly impact your work as a teacher moving forward? Explain why.
2	Based on the presentation and discussion on trauma-informed student-teaching relationship building, what is one practice that you think would be easy for you to implement. Name one practice from today's session that would be challenging for you to implement. Discuss why for both.
3	Based on today's session, what does a trauma-informed classroom environment mean? How can we build a classroom environment that support students who have experience trauma? Why is this important?
4	Considering today's session, as well as the 3 other sessions, what are two major take ways from this series that have increased your capacity to support ELLs who have experienced trauma? What 2 areas or topics reviewed across the 4 sessions would you like further professional learning opportunities and mentoring? Explain why.

Table 2. Participant Workshop Reflection Prompts, Spring 2023.

Participants

This study engaged a cohort of 12 in-service teachers certified in New York State, all of whom were actively enrolled in a post-master's graduate program with a dual focus on Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) and school building administration. These participants offered a diverse range of teaching experiences, with some boasting as much as 25 years in the field, while all met the program's admission requirement of possessing a minimum of three years of classroom teaching experience.

Method

This research adopts a qualitative approach aimed at exploring the unique perspectives and experiences of current educators, a hallmark of qualitative inquiry. Qualitative research, particularly within a case study framework, prioritizes the pursuit of profound insights into a specific phenomenon within its authentic real-world context (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). In this instance, the focus is on the intricate dynamics of teaching and learning with Multilingual Learners who may have undergone traumatic experiences. To achieve this, we employed a case study methodology, whereby each participating teacher composed a reflection paper following each of the four workshops. Participant reflections were collected via file upload unto a Learning Management System. Consequently, the dataset comprises a collection of four written reflections from each participant, offering a multi-faceted view of their experiences and insights. Participant information was redacted and placed into a case file. Each case was given a code for anonymity.

Analysis

The data analysis encompassed the examination of 12 individual cases, with each case consisting of four written reflections. The objective was to scrutinize these reflections to gain deeper insights into the participants' experiences and viewpoints concerning the application of trauma-informed pedagogies within their specific classroom settings. The analysis unfolded in two distinct cycles. The initial cycle involved the systematic reading of case profiles and the iterative labelling of data segments until discernible themes surfaced. This

process enabled us to engage in activities such as pattern recognition, explanation construction, categorial consolidation, intra-case investigation, and direct interpretation, as outlined by Yin (2013).

Subsequently, the second cycle of analysis entailed comparisons—both within cases and across cases—among the 12 participants to identify common patterns and themes that directly addressed the research questions. To bolster the credibility and robustness the analysis, a triangulation approach was employed. This involved cross-referencing evidence drawn from the 12 unique cases, reinforcing the support for emerging themes. This comprehensive triangulation process was critical for enhancing the trustworthiness of the data analysis. It enabled us to seamlessly integrate inter-case analysis, synthesize findings across cases, consolidate categories, construct explanations, recognize patterns, and engage in direct interpretation (Yin, 2013).

Results

The data analysis unveiled six distinct and overarching themes that resonated across the 12 individual cases. These themes provide a comprehensive and multi-faceted view of the participants' experiences and perspectives with trauma-informed pedagogies and their implementation within the context of Multilingual Learners. These themes serve as pivotal touchpoints in the exploration of the intersection between trauma-informed pedagogies and the needs of Multilingual Learners, offering valuable insights and considerations for educational practice and policy. Table 3 contains the 6 themes that emerged from the data analysis.

Theme Number	Themes
1	Redefining Trauma and Understanding Children's Perspectives
2	Impact of Trauma on Learning and Relationships
3	Trauma's Impact on Second Language Development
4	Trauma-Informed Practices for ELLs
5	Immediate Implementation of Trauma-Informed Practices
6	Challenging Trauma-Informed Practices Requiring Further Professional Learning

Table 3. Themes in Student Written Reflections.

The alignment between the research questions and the emergent themes is evident, reflecting the depth and relevance of the investigation. This connection ensures that the study comprehensively addresses the central inquiries that guided the research. Table 4 illustrates which themes directly correspond to each research question, providing a clear and structured overview of the intricate relationships between the inquiry and the resulting themes. This alignment serves as the linchpin in the pursuit of a comprehensive understanding of trauma-informed practices and their application within diverse classroom settings.

Research Question	Themes
1	Theme 1: Redefining Trauma and Understanding Children's Perspectives Theme 2: Impact of Trauma on Learning and Relationships Theme 3: Trauma's Impact on Second Language Development Theme 4: Trauma-Informed Practices for ELLs
2	Theme 5: Immediate Implementation of Trauma-Informed Practices
3	Theme 6: Challenging Trauma-Informed Practices Requiring Further Professional Learning

Table 4. Alignment between Research Questions and Themes.

Table 5 offers a reference point for the empirical underpinnings of each theme. Within this table, readers will find direct references to students' written reflections that played an instrumental role in shaping and defining the emergent themes. These exemplar data excerpts provide concrete evidence, drawn from participants' own words, illuminating the nuanced and multifaceted facets of trauma-informed pedagogies within the context of Multilingual Learners. By grounding the themes in the authentic and diverse experiences of the participants, Table 5 reaffirms the robustness and authenticity of the findings, strengthening the credibility and depth of the research outcomes.

Themes	Data Evidence
1	I was naive in my notion of what should/could be considered 'trauma,' [the pd] helped me to redefine and clarify that, 'Trauma is defined by them (children) to us (adults.)' Our job is not to judge their behaviors/reactions, but to help them learn the tools/strategies to enable them to 'regulate' their mental state to maximize learning.
2	A major takeaway that will directly impact my work as a teacher moving forward is understanding that student responses to trauma can be covert or overt—some may fidget, become reclusive, have an outburst, etc." "Students are more than their struggles.
3	It's interesting to have learned that trauma significantly impacts brain development, and carefully thinking about how it connects to language acquisition, I have been able to make some connections.
4	As teachers, many of us have received additional training and 'compensatory services' to provide assistance for Special Education students that missed instructional sessions during the pandemic lockdown. Yet, newly arrived multilingual learners have not received the same amount of support.
5	One of the many, great practices I have already begun to implement in my classroom are the 'Brain Breaks,' (especially the paper/name/bounce knee break), they are a fun and easy way to help students regulate their mood when needed.
6	Creating a student support plan (written document) due to time... threatens to exceed the realities of everyday teaching, wherein I am responsible for 140 students (on average).

Table 5. Exemplar Data Evidence for Each Theme.

Implications and Future Directions

In the findings, one can observe a noteworthy distinction between trauma-informed practices that can be readily integrated into classrooms and those that present more significant

challenges, especially in large class settings. Practices like quick 'brain breaks' and other time-efficient strategies emerged as immediately implementable and well-received by participants. Many educators discussed their swift incorporation following the workshops, signifying their potential to enhance classroom environments. However, more intricate strategies, such as co-writing individualized student support plans, were identified as potentially demanding, particularly within larger classrooms. This revelation underscores the need for clarification in professional development programs, emphasizing that trauma-informed practices should be approached as tiered interventions. Time-efficient practices are suited for whole-class use, offering universal support, while more time-intensive strategies should be reserved for targeted application to a few or individual students, ensuring tailored support where it's most needed. Additionally, this study underscores a prevalent conflation among teachers, perceiving trauma-informed practices as mandatory for all Multilingual Learners, whereas the intention is to offer a means of enhancing differentiation in instruction. Looking forward, the findings have significantly influenced the subsequent Fall 2023 professional learning series, which builds upon the insights gained in the Spring 2023 sessions. This study also serves as a foundation for further research on professional learning on trauma-informed practices, specifically tailored to the unique needs of Multilingual Learners, in an ongoing effort to advance inclusive and supportive educational practices.

Conclusion

In examining the profound intersection of trauma-informed pedagogies and the needs of Multilingual Learners, this study has revealed a rich tapestry of insights that holds significant implications for both the practice and research of education. The findings underscore the significance of tiered approaches in the implementation of trauma-informed practices, distinguishing between those readily integrable for the whole class and those more time-intensive strategies tailored for individuals. This clarification not only enhances differentiation but also empowers educators to better support students who have experienced trauma, particularly in the midst of mass migration. Furthermore, the outcomes of this study have paved the way for the subsequent Fall 2023 workshop series, building upon the insights gained in the Spring 2023 sessions. As we look to the future, the invaluable insights unearthed here beckon for further research, aimed at refining and expanding trauma-informed practices centered on Multilingual Learners. Ultimately, the findings presented here provide a stepping stone toward the creation of more inclusive and supportive educational environments, not only for Multilingual Learners but for all students.

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