

Creating Inclusive EAL Classrooms: How Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada (LINC) Instructors Understand and Mitigate Barriers for Students Who Have Experienced Trauma

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This article draws on my dissertation, "Creating Inclusive EAL Classrooms: How LINC Instructors Understand and Mitigate Barriers for Students Who Have Experienced Trauma." The article explores some assumptions and understandings that English as an Additional Language (EAL) teachers bring to teaching students believed to have experienced trauma, and illustrates the dilemmas they face in supporting such students in a government-funded and -designed EAL program for newcomers. Using the concept of Iris Marion Young's "Five Faces of Oppression" (1990), the data and findings of the research for my dissertation are explored, contributing to the discussion on trauma and learning in EAL programs and specifically in relation to adult immigrants and refugees.

Cet article puise dans ma thèse « Creating Inclusive EAL Classrooms: How LINC Instructors Understand and Mitigate Barriers for Students Who Have Experienced Trauma ». L'article explore quelques hypothèses et interprétations que véhiculent les enseignants d'anglais comme langue additionnelle (ALA) à l'égard d'élèves qui ont subi des traumatismes d'une part, et il illustre les dilemmes auxquels font face les enseignants en appuyant ces élèves dans le cadre d'un programme d'ALA pour nouveaux arrivants et qui est financé et conçu par le gouvernement d'autre part. M'appuyant sur le concept des cinq visages de l'oppression de Iris Marion Young (« Five Faces of Oppression », 1990), je me penche sur les données et les résultats de ma thèse, contribuant ainsi à la discussion sur le traumatisme et l'apprentissage dans les programmes d'ALA, notamment en ce qui concerne les immigrants et les réfugiés adultes.

KEYWORDS: trauma, learning, inclusive classrooms

Trauma has impact on learning (Horsman, 1999; Isserlis, 2000). It is not unusual to teach an EAL class where some of the students have experienced

trauma. How can we as educators support and engage such learners? How can we create inclusive classrooms for our students? What do we need as educators to do this?

My qualitative action research dissertation addressed these questions. The study was rooted in my 20 years of experience in literacy, language instruction, and community development among diverse populations. My work at Vancouver Coastal Health's Access Community Through English program involved piloting a class for people suffering from trauma and/or diagnosed with PTSD. I heard horrendous stories of violence, loss, and isolation. I noticed that certain challenges to learning repeatedly appeared: irregular attendance, what seemed to be flashbacks, cognitive issues, and problems interacting with others. All these made learning difficult. The challenges of responding to and creating an inclusive classroom for students dealing with trauma led me ask how other instructors, outside my place of practice, work with students with histories of trauma and if these instructors perceived that their students possibly feel, and in fact are, excluded from others in EAL classes and experience limitations to learning. I utilized a social justice lens to look at the research findings and employed the methodological approach outlined here.

Research Questions

My research question was: From the perspective of LINC (Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada) instructors working within British Columbia, how can students who have experienced trauma be better supported? I interviewed LINC instructors, and together we explored ideas that could make classrooms more inclusive and help teachers mitigate barriers to language learning for students affected by trauma.

Theoretical Framework

My research, from both the methodological approach and data analysis, was informed by the work of Paulo Freire and Iris Marion Young. Freire's model of praxis and problem-posing education served as a good starting point for me as a research-practitioner. Freire (1995) maintained that problem-posing education, looking at the life experiences and reality of students so as to see them as problem-posing situations, was key to critical consciousness. He stated, "I must not reduce my instructional practice to the sole teaching of technique or content, leaving untouched the exercise of a critical understanding of reality" (1995, p. 44). Freire held that developing critical consciousness is insufficient—that action (making change to society) is also necessary and, following this, serious reflection. He referred to this as *praxis*: the process involving critical consciousness, action, and reflection. Freire urged educators and researchers to instruct with a critical understanding of the wider sociopolitical

and sociocultural contexts. His work thus provided me with a framework for reflecting on existing practices and imagining new practices and forms of activism (such as establishing, with the instructors who participated in my research, alternatives to current LINC instruction, policies, and curriculum).

In respect of my data and findings, the work of Iris Marion Young was key, particularly her theorizations about social injustice. I chose her work (1990) as it helped me to conceptualize the multiplicity of types of oppression experienced by instructors interviewed for this study and by their students. In order to achieve social justice, Young (1990) deemed as necessary “the full participation and inclusion of everyone in a society’s major institutions, and the socially substantive opportunity for all to develop and exercise their capacities and realize their choices” (p. 173). Young, like Freire, argued that oppression can involve denying people language, education, and other opportunities. She wrote:

Oppression consists in systematic institutional processes, which prevent some people from learning and using satisfying and expansive skills in socially recognized settings, and/or in institutionalized social processes which inhibit people’s ability to play and communicate with others or to express their feelings and perspective on social life in contexts where others can listen. (Young, 1990, p. 38)

Young (1990) defined the five faces or types of oppression as exploitation, marginalization, powerlessness, cultural imperialism, and violence. She explained that the five types of oppression can overlap in many ways.

Exploitation, Young argued, uses capitalism to oppress people; the *haves* end up exploiting the *have-nots* for their work. She argued exploitation creates a system that perpetuates class differences.

Young saw marginalization as the act of relegating or restricting a group of people to a lower social position. Through marginalization, a group of people are excluded from useful participation in social life and the labour market. Students with histories of trauma may be pushed out or drop out of language classes and are then further marginalized because they do not have the English language skills needed to have choices and opportunities in society.

Powerlessness, Young (1990) argued, means that people are unable to participate in basic democratic processes because they feel that they cannot or that their participation will not mean anything. In most cases, it results in them not voting or participating in any decision-making processes.

Cultural imperialism, Young explained, involves making the culture of the dominant group the norm. Dominant groups that have power in society direct how people within a given society interact. The dominant group disseminates and expresses values of the society as a whole.

Lastly, Young included violence as the most pronounced and visible form of oppression. As Young says, violence is oppressive not only because of

its direct impact but also because members of various groups live with the knowledge that violence is always a possibility in their lives.

Young's five aspects of oppression can be adapted and extended to EAL education. The schema can be used to analyze how instructors understand oppression and barriers their students face, and the schema can provide a frame for new ways to respond in the classroom.

Methodology

My methodological positioning is qualitative and action oriented. I began my research by exploring Freirian principles and then exploring instructors' realities and experiences and reciprocally sharing knowledge and experience through dialogue and co-learning. The research study then took the form of collective meaning-making, analysis, and exploration of experiences and dialogue to frame actions for change.

Research Design

The research included three phases: (a) individual interviews, (b) a focus group interview, and (c) follow-up individual interviews, each with LINC instructors. I chose interviewing as a method because it looks at the interviewees' lived experience of the subject of research and allowed me to explore from multiple perspectives the complexities LINC instructors face when teaching people with histories of trauma. The focus group for my research allowed me to gather individual and common understandings that LINC instructors have about the experience of teaching individuals with histories of trauma. I used this group interview to more fully explore what collective actions can be taken to make LINC classes inclusive for such students. In the third phase of the research, I used one-to-one interviews and asked the instructors to check, expand, and redefine the language and the codes and themes brought forward in the first interviews and, as well, to expand on their views about what kind of collective action needed to take place.

Criteria for Selecting Participants

The criteria for selecting instructors to participate in the study were three-fold: (a) teachers in any level of the LINC program; (b) individuals with a keen interest in the research topic; (c) representatives of one of five different workplaces: a community college, one or more of three different immigrant services agencies, and a community-based provider. The inclusion of educational institutions, immigrant services agencies, and a community organization provided some varied perspectives on LINC programs.

Instructors' Backgrounds

The instructors I interviewed came from three different organizations. They also came to teaching from various backgrounds including art, special edu-

cation, and community activism. Demographic data such as years of teaching experience, education, workplace setting, prior teaching experience, and work status are found in Table 1. This information and the collection of narratives making up this study give a snapshot of the reality of teaching practice in the LINC program. All five of my instructors were women, and this reflects the predominance of women in the EAL field.

Table 1
Instructor Demographic Data

Inter-viewee	# of years teaching experience	Setting	Education	Prior to teaching	Position
M	Over 20 years	Immigrant service agency	TESL Certificate Bachelor of Arts	Transition house	Part-time
B	5–10 years	Neighbourhood house	TESL Certificate Bachelor of Arts	Community organizing and activism	No longer teaching
D	5–10 years	Immigrant service agency	CELTA Certificate Bachelor of Arts	Special education and artist	Full-time
T	10–20 years	Immigrant service agency	TESL Certificate	Unknown	Full-time
J	0–5 years	Immigrant service agency	TESL Certificate	International schools	Part-time

Trauma Discourse

Immigrants and particularly refugees arrive in Canada from countries where they may have experienced trauma through war, persecution, violence, torture, or other horrendous experiences. The effects of trauma often cause ongoing and even lifelong psychological challenges. Even immigrants and refugees who have not been traumatized in their country of origin may experience trauma through the migration process and/or through trials of living in a new country.

The impact of trauma is wide. Varying interpretations of trauma exist, interpretations being subject to many factors including culture, history, values, and sociopolitical context. Mok Escueta (2010) found:

People do not usually have only one specific way of defining trauma, evidenced by how people draw on various sources of healing for recovery, including medical science, psychotherapy, spirituality, reason, alternative healing arts, the spirits of the natural world, or the divine forces of the universe, just to name a few. (p. 5)

The Western definition of trauma is influenced by a deficit approach through which the individual's trauma is seen as internal with little reference to the structures of oppression that are usually the cause of trauma. At the

time of my dissertation I used the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM-IV-TR; American Psychiatric Association, 2000), which defines trauma as “an incident of grave threat to life or one’s personal integrity, or unexpected, or violent death of others” (p. 463). In the DSM-5 (2013), the definition has been broadened, and more emphasis has been placed on the symptoms of trauma.

In *Too Scared to Learn*, Jenny Horsman (1999) provides a structural analysis of trauma. She considers how trauma and violence are conceptualized in the Western medical model as outside of systemic oppression. Horsman (1999) draws on Judith Herman’s (1992) definition of trauma, which I found very helpful:

Traumatic events overwhelm the ordinary systems of care that give people a sense of control, connection, and meaning. Traumatic events are extraordinary, not because they occur rarely, but because they overwhelm the ordinary human adaptations to life. They confront human beings with the extremities of helplessness and terror and evoke the responses of catastrophe. (Horsman, 1999, p. 33)

In *Writings for a Liberation Psychology*, Ignacio Martín-Baró (1994) examined trauma and how Salvadorian children have experienced trauma. He argued that we cannot overlook the painful experiences of our students. Furthermore, if we do ignore our students’ experiences, then we become collaborators in the social injustices, commonly a source of trauma. I agree with Martín-Baró that we cannot ignore the influence that sociopolitical injustices have on the ability of students to engage and be present physically and mentally in a classroom. If we as instructors do not look at the reality from which our students come as well as their current situations, we perpetuate social injustices.

Findings

From the interviews and focus group I undertook with LINC instructors, I identified themes that relate to trauma including how the instructors understood and identified trauma. Then, I used Young’s (1990) Five Faces of Oppression schema to analyze the responses of the instructors to those students with histories of trauma who suffer the impact of trauma in their present lives, and what changes to the LINC program instructors believe are needed in order to create more inclusive classrooms where conditions are such that these students, despite the impact of trauma, are able to learn.

How Instructors Understand Trauma Through Behaviour

One of the most significant findings of the project is how LINC instructors identified students who had experienced trauma through the students’ behaviour. Research participants frequently spoke of working with students who, they suspected, had experienced trauma and about distinct classroom

behaviour as an indicator of traumatic history. One instructor described a student exhibiting certain behaviours: “Just difficulty engaging, difficulty focusing, and she has very awkward social skills. She will start laughing at really inappropriate moments or she will suddenly burst out with something unexpectedly.” T¹ understands signs of trauma as unusual and inappropriate behaviours. B conversely talks about her surprise at a lack of behaviour that she would expect someone to have if traumatized:

I’ve had students who come as refugees who tell me stories that I think, “Wow, if that happened to me I would be very traumatized,” but who seem able to talk really clearly and are very mature and don’t show any of those signs.

In these quotes we see a focus on trauma as a medical issue and an interpretation of the students as behaving outside the norm. A student thought to have a history of trauma shows what are perceived (and described) as symptoms; another who has experienced horrific oppression but doesn’t show signs interpretable as symptoms is not viewed by the instructor as traumatized.

Instructors said they observed distinct behaviours in students believed or known to have histories of trauma: absences from class, withdrawal from participation, lack of focus, evidence of drug or alcohol abuse, reaction to what might be triggers, and dramatic changes in progress. When I began to analyze the interviews, I found I was hearing repeated examples of how trauma has an impact on the body and the mind. Some instructors told me that they worked with many students who, in class, “space out” or have great difficulty making eye contact. They spoke of learners not having what can be called “presence” (Horsman, 1999), even though they were physically there in the classroom. One of the instructors (T) described a student she worked with in this way: “This is going to sound really weird but she is almost like a ghost. It sounds bizarre, but she is not really physically there.”

Instructors also spoke of students who behave in markedly different ways over the course of a single class. For example, they mentioned the behaviour of students who were sometimes very quiet in a class and sometimes extremely talkative. They spoke of the students switching between extremes in behaviour, which contributed to difficulty engaging with other students. As M said, “So that—that—that alternation between having to talk, talk, talk, talk, talk—and then going almost catatonic.” The language of psychiatry—for example, “catatonic”—was commonly used in describing such behaviour. B echoed what M said:

Yeah, I can relate to what M was saying about the sort of pendulum of being quite shy and reserved and then starting on a story, and then once it starts, sort of snowballing and you can see they’re sort of not paying attention very much to the people around them who

are listening. So whether they're receiving signals of attention or not, they sort of can't stop.

Most instructors in my study tended to focus on the disparity between "abnormal" behaviour noted in certain students and "normal" behaviour of the majority in the class. As Young (1990) explained, "our identities are defined in relation to how others identify us, and they do so in terms of groups that are always already associated with specific attributes, stereotypes, and norms" (p. 46). The instructors spoke about other students' reactions to the different behaviour of certain students and how this might result in these students being marginalized in the classroom.

Instructors also spoke about students' backgrounds as indicators that a particular student had possibly experienced trauma. They talked about students coming from countries where populations had faced persecution, violence, forced migration, and other forms of oppression. B spoke about one of her students: "Just from her life story I can guess there probably was some trauma." Instructors also talked about trauma in individualistic terms, that is, as something negative that happened to an individual or groups of individuals. For example, T explained:

It does not even matter what the incident is; in a sense it is more how the person perceives it. Someone take a horrible example like rape. There are some people for whom an experience of rape may devastate them for the rest of their lives and for others who just deal with go through and get on with their lives.

Demonstrating an understanding of whether someone is traumatized as based in a person's disposition, will, or ability to cope, T further said:

I have a student right now who I guess probably experienced trauma. But she has been in ELSA since literacy and she is now in level 4, so she has managed really well and it is not obvious to me in her behaviour and how she interacts with others.

Instructors also spoke about connecting individual trauma to learning and about difficulties with learning as an indicator of possible trauma. I drew on these understandings of trauma in the focus group to ask, "Where do we get our definitions of trauma from?" There were a number of answers to this question, including answers stating that definitions are garnered from pop psychology, popular culture, and media. As T said, "To a large extent pop psychology and pop culture. I mean these are—the idea of trauma is not new to us." The responses of instructors indicate the role of popular culture and media in defining trauma. The recent and current media focus on PTSD and refugee stories is an example of exposure to traumatic events in people's lives. The instructors defined trauma in both an individual-centred way and a sociopolitical way, giving each a structural understanding and a focus on

the individual experience of trauma. Instructors' understandings of trauma as a dysfunction—or an inability to cope, adapt, and integrate—operated in some tension with their understanding of trauma as a reaction to oppression and harmful sociopolitical realities.

Teachers may rely on a medical definition of trauma to determine what actions to take if a student experiences symptoms of trauma, such as flashbacks in class, or to decide what services to make the student aware of, while at the same time understanding trauma within a sociopolitical context. As a teacher, I too have experienced this dissonance. A medical model can provide an awareness of some of the indicators of trauma and lead to delineation of classroom techniques that can help trauma sufferers in a learning environment. It can also provide a rationale for helping students access psychological services. However, focusing on a medical definition to the exclusion of a structural understanding of oppression can impoverish possible ways of thinking about inclusive classrooms for students who face ongoing oppression or retraumatization as they encounter and try to cope with poverty, racism, homophobia, sexism, violence, or other aspects of oppression in their daily lives.

The Faces of Oppression and Responding to Trauma

I used Young's (1990) Five Faces of Oppression to analyze the oppression students, and also instructors, face and how instructors respond and create more inclusive classrooms.

Violence

Experiencing violence is probably the most obvious form of oppression that EAL students from particular parts of the world may have faced and was the first topic of conversation with instructors during the initial interviews. Instructors described their students as coming from countries where they faced persecution, violence, torture, and war. As J said, "I would assume getting kicked out of your country would count as trauma."

Responding to Trauma/Violence

Most of the instructors also spoke about how their understanding of trauma was at least in part based on their knowledge of trauma as experienced by family members, partners, or friends. B described how her connection to trauma was useful to her in the classroom:

I had some advantages, which was that I was living with people who had experienced trauma so I had personal experience of what that might look like for people.

Instructors' personal experience in relation to trauma is an aspect of second language teaching of students with trauma history that is seldom mentioned in the literature on EAL teaching. A structural understanding of

trauma was also reflected in the comments of those instructors with experience of trauma through its impact on family or friends. As B said, “therefore not having the—not seeing that person as having any power in their situation.” Understanding trauma within the context of one’s own life connects to Young’s strategies to deal with violence. As Young says, “Such reform may require the redistribution of resources or positions, but in large part can come only through a change in cultural images, stereotypes, and mundane reproduction of relations of dominance and aversion in the everyday life” (1990, p. 63). Another way instructors responded to helping learners with a history of trauma was to more fully engage students in creative processes focusing on the body and the mind as a way to lessen stress and strengthen focus. The instructors referred to the importance of using breathing or mindfulness exercises or humour as techniques. Instructors emphasized the importance of providing space for fun and creativity. D provided an example:

Yeah, like, it’s a lot of fun and they all like—where they’re actually up and doing a study—an art study or collages or murals or—like they’re making these dresses out of garbage bags—and they’re—you know, there’s language that’s being learned in that but it’s also just the fact that they’re actually kind of working together, creating those kinds of relationships and trusting each other.

D talked about the importance of humour in learning, as did other instructors. Instructors did not explicitly connect this technique to helping learners with trauma, but D made the connection to making students feel comfortable and building trust in the classroom. Others also mentioned it as a way to respond to conflict or tension. As M said, “Humour is enormously important and I ham it up a lot in the class.”

Powerlessness

Powerlessness came up as a theme for the instructors (although they did not use that term), and they described some fundamental concerns associated with powerlessness. They spoke of what they perceived as barriers for students with histories of trauma, including students not participating in the classroom and experiencing racism, classism, or sexism. Mostly, though, instructors talked about their own powerlessness within the structures in which they taught. They talked about how the restrictions (i.e., funding and policies) impacted their teaching and students’ learning spaces and opportunities. Many changes made or contemplated would directly and negatively affect students. Policies and funding structures could make it less possible for LINC instructors to create inclusive classrooms. As T said of the decrease in instructional time, “So—you know, ultimately it comes down to fewer hours for the students.” D said, “It is a great job but it is really too—it is so precarious. It is just going to get more so.”

The instructors talked about systemic barriers, lack of decision-making power, and lack of recognition of their capabilities and skills, which all speak to powerlessness as a form of oppression suffered by the instructors. They spoke about the barriers around student attendance, assessment, and increased emphasis on measurement. The changes in lesson preparation time for teachers, hiring practices, and job security have had and continue to have an impact on many aspects of the LINC program. As instructors pointed out, they were and are pushed to emphasize productivity and academic competence. When the federal government took over the program in 2015, key areas of change affecting LINC instructors were policies around professional development (PD) and decreasing preparation time. None of the instructors described participating in any of the processes of determining policies for LINC. M spoke about policy related to attendance: “There is a certain amount of time that each student has at the level and he (her student) is having these bits and pieces taken away and he is losing his time.”

Another key concern many of the instructors spoke about was the federal government’s perceived lack of vision around these changes. Instructors discussed their difficulty understanding the federal government’s goals for LINC. D explained the impact of decreased time for preparation: “Where is the vision here? Where is anybody doing anything? Where is the—you are wanting teachers to work 8 minutes to prepare a class and having all this online stuff. What kind of community are we building?”

A subsequent change they spoke of in relation to the federal government taking over was the end of PD for instructors. The federal government does not appear to prioritize PD. All the instructors talked about the need for PD as providing opportunities to better understand issues. T highlighted this perspective when she said, “You know, it’s really interesting—because you do—you know, we talk so much about having an inclusive class and community building in the class, but you need it for your teachers too.” This suggestion from T came after a discussion in the focus group about how to support and value instructors. They discussed the importance of taking care of themselves, understanding their own assumptions, and understanding boundaries around working with people who have experienced trauma. They also spoke about the importance of community among instructors so as to support each other.

Instructors spoke of systemic barriers that existed before the implementation of the changes to LINC. One instructor referred to an “academic thing” a number of times throughout her interviews, talking about teaching becoming more focused on technical aspects, such as grammar, as opposed to a focus on settlement and supporting students in their lives outside the classrooms. The instructors spoke of the shift from a public model to a private model and referred to competition for contracts within the nonprofit sector as more of a business-centred approach. B highlighted this push: “I think if we’re looking big—it would be to make LINC actually public—rather than privatiz-

ing—which is where I think we’re going now.” Instructors referred to a push for accountability and quantifiable measurement now demanded of them as instructors and to lack of government vision and lack of clarity about their roles. B said, “You have to prove that what you’re doing in the classroom is meeting the government’s objectives, which so often has so very little to do with people in your classroom.” The instructors referred to the struggles between pedagogical focus and the financial focus of the program. One of the instructors, D, reflected on this:

So even though the government sometimes pushes that—I have had a girl—she wasn’t that young but she was probably—had the mentality of a 10-year-old. She was probably 35, from Afghanistan—she had fallen and been in a coma for two weeks and nobody had—if you lived, you lived—and she lived and she came out of that coma with a lot of brain damage—I think. But nobody really knew, but she was in my class for a long time—that she was—it was—there was no way she could have a job, right?

The issue of students’ needs and the multiple barriers faced by newcomers to Canada was a theme in many of the concerns expressed by instructors and was set against perceived funders’ expectations for marketability and quantifiable results, illustrating the tension between the push for instructors to meet the government objectives of “economic productivity” and the needs of the students.

The instructors spoke about experiencing a lack of agency, the lack of control over their time due to the increase in administrative tasks, and demands to document attendance more rigorously, increase the number of assessments, and learn new procedures. They told of their experience of powerlessness when excluded from decisions about how they must work and when they were asked to focus on technical tasks that deprofessionalize their instructional skills. They talked about the need to focus resistance on those who make the decisions, not on colleagues charged with implementing them, and the importance of recognizing that some administrative tasks are necessary for their work. The increased focus on technique, measurement, and administration means a decrease in creativity and humanism in teaching and in relating to students. As B said, “If everything has to be measured, you lose the human.”

Instructors spoke about the isolation they feel as teachers and about how they feel distanced from their colleagues. One instructor spoke about how certain policies around professionalism created further isolation and division between herself and the students, saying:

So what does that feel like? Because I actually found teaching really difficult. I found I felt really alienated from people, because I was working alone and I was in a classroom of students but there was this giant space between us, no matter—I felt like I kept trying differ-

ent things and some days would go fine and then other days would just be like, “Oh my God! I’m miles apart! I’m so alone.”

They discussed the importance of having supportive colleagues and managers, and most particularly the value of creating a supportive community for instructors working with vulnerable populations, including students who have experienced trauma. It was acknowledged that teaching EAL can be difficult when working in isolation.

Responding to Powerlessness

Conducting this research brought home to me that the current direction in government-funded EAL education is quite different from the kind of programming the instructors in my study and I propose—that is, EAL programming designed to create inclusive classrooms where people who have experienced trauma and others will thrive. As an educator who has worked with people with histories of trauma, I have found the work is becoming more and more difficult due to mandated changes to programming that render instructors more powerless. Yet, the LINC instructors are often the front line and/or the first contact for students who are newcomers to Canada. D said:

You are probably one of the most significant Canadian people they have met because everyone else is mostly from their own culture. It is also you have a chance to make a significant memory for people, a good one.

Instructors may be the first people to suspect or recognize trauma in students and connect them to resources and supports. Instructors also play a pivotal role as brokers for refugee and immigrant transition to Canada and in helping forge and enhance connection to communities.

Instructors spoke about challenging their own and their students’ sense of isolation and working to generate a sense of capacity or connection. They mentioned good supervision of the teachers and workplace support as resources enabling them to work through issues so as to be able to create inclusion in the classroom. Some of the instructors talked about the importance of responding to their students by not being afraid to listen to and value their stories. Listening was viewed by instructors as an important aspect of an inclusive classroom for those students with histories of trauma. D expressed the importance of listening: “I think that—we all want to tell our stories. It’s like fundamental of being human. So—the ability to—yeah, listen to their stories.” B said, “Having opportunities to share their own thoughts and feelings and values and have that be listened to, respected and valued. I think all of those things can build someone’s sense of self-worth.” The value of being listened to and heard was seen as a way to help interrupt or cut back someone’s sense of marginalization and powerlessness. Instructors talked about the importance of respect, trust, and acknowledgement of

conflict as components of listening. M spoke of the importance of listening and talking about difficult issues and having multiple perspectives in the classroom:

I think if you have a class that is hunky dory, nicey, nicey where there are no problems, there is nothing, it doesn't connect to people's real lives. It is a fine line, it is a difficult balance to walk there, but I think it is important to leave space for that and at the same time to ensure there are guidelines in place to how we talk about it.

Here she was referring to bringing up issues in the classroom that are relevant to students' lives, yet not wanting to make students uncomfortable and not being sure as an instructor how to talk about these issues.

One such issue is listening to people's stories and taking on the role of counsellor in the classroom. Some instructors felt more comfortable with the role of bearing witness to people's stories than others did, but they all acknowledged the tension that exists in listening. As Horsman (1999) says, "When learners trust the classroom is a safe place to take risks they may be tempted to be more open with telling stories of their lives. This creates tension. It demands the instructors be able to hear these stories" (p. 117). As T said, "This isn't a counselling room—it's not necessarily a place for them to come and unload." One of the instructors in the focus group spoke of "a fine line" to describe instructors' roles in bearing witness to people's stories and ensuring that the rest of the students' needs are met. Further, T said, "As much as I'd like to give them all of my attention, it's not going to happen." The instructors said they tried to encourage the students to talk to a settlement worker or a counsellor. B said she sometimes felt cornered, unprepared, or as if she was working outside her job. The instructors recognized that different instructors might look at their roles quite differently. Although their identified role is to teach English language skills, the instructors I interviewed perceived their roles as more than that, while acknowledging that other instructors may see their job as solely that of language instruction. The problem, D said, was

They're not—and they're (other instructors in LINC) not educated in the way that I have been or that other people have been and they bring different experiences to it, and they're really not that interested. They're interested in language—they're interested in—in the academics of teaching. And they want to leave the rest—it's not their job. And they're absolutely right—it isn't. You know, so—but still, you still have people in your classrooms like that. You still have to respond.

Marginalization

The instructors interviewed recognized the intersections of multiple forms of oppression for these students with histories of trauma. They spoke of strati-

fication within the classroom based on social class, race, literacy levels, and technological skills. Some instructors commented on the structural inequalities of their students. In T's first interview she described a classroom situation involving possible racism:

There are class issues, there are language issues and even race issues there and she is obviously a different colour, and for some of them, I would not say there was overt racism but they are more cautious around her. I do notice for example if she tries to be generous, if she goes to the dollar store and buys a bag of chips, for instance, and spreads them out amongst people, often people won't eat them, they won't touch them.

In her final interview she spoke of racism as more of an intrapersonal or individual problem that should be treated as such:

And if there's racism in the classroom, it's not—it's not about, "Oh, here we go again—here's a bunch of rich Chinese people picking on a poor African refugee." We have to just say, "Okay, that's not a place for that kind of analysis. I'd rather, this individual is having some issues—with this individual, how do I deal with that?"

Some instructors looked at racism as an individual issue while others talked about addressing it as a broader issue. Some may include class discussion about social justice issues through language practice while others may not.

Racism, classism, sexism, and how to address these forms of marginalization were important to the instructors, because these forms of oppression are barriers for EAL students. The exclusion of certain students based on economics, race, and access to resources were spoken of by the instructors throughout the research process.

Responding to Marginalization

A number of the instructors used the term "social justice," and others spoke of aspects of social justice without using the term. The instructors talked about their understandings of power in relation to their position as instructors and their own privilege, and the importance of addressing issues of power and privilege.

In the final interview I asked the instructors to define social justice, since it was mentioned repeatedly as an aspect of their approach to classroom practice. M said, "Fairness in, um, access to education, access to healthcare, access to education. Fairness in, of course, access to jobs." B highlighted her perspective on social justice: "So—the three main ones being capitalism, patriarchy and, um, regionalization or national oppression ... So to me social justice is addressing those systems." Not all the instructors had the same perspective on social justice. T was reluctant to explore the concept in the classroom. She was very clear there was a place for talking about social justice but did not

want to talk about it in the classroom, although she approached her classroom practices with certain aspects of a social justice framework. In contrast, M saw the importance of speaking about difficult issues, oppression, and realities as an integral part of her work. Instructors also emphasized the importance of community in their work as a way of countering marginalization. For instance, D spoke about the notion of supporting and encouraging community building in the classroom. “And that’s where I feel my job is mostly — is to help create community with that—even though they might not speak the same language.” B explained the idea of community as an important piece of working with people who have experienced trauma:

I can really see how being in a classroom where there is a really positive environment can help people, and I know that from my own experience being in community. It can make a huge difference in my life too. Those are the sort of things I have tried to create in terms of dealing with trauma.

The notion of classroom community was referred to by all instructors throughout the interviews. In the focus group we discussed the notion of an inclusive classroom community. I began by asking the instructors, “What would a responsive class look like?” They volunteered that they preferred the term “inclusive.” The instructors’ understanding of what constitutes an inclusive classroom community differed one from another, but concepts of listening, social justice, and connection were common to all as aspects of inclusive classroom practices.

Another theme instructors talked about was the importance of creating community in the classroom through openness and relationship building. They gave many examples of how they did this, including providing time for taking a break and having tea/coffee and other opportunities to share thoughts and feelings. For example D stated, “In those moments too. That’s where relationships are built.”

An important relationship besides that of colleagues and supervisors is the connection to settlement workers and other resource people in order to develop links with various services outside the classroom. When talking about community in the classroom, B highlighted the importance of settlement workers:

We try to develop those relationships with students who need a one-on-one person because as teachers we are not available necessarily to do that. So definitely settlement workers have helped in that way and have connected students to other resources.

Cultural Imperialism

According to Young, “Cultural Imperialism involves the universalization of a dominant group’s experience and culture, and its establishment as the norm”

(Young, 1990, p. 59). The English language and its global role in promoting economic and social dominance is a key piece of EAL provision (Pennycook, 1998). The instructors discussed the singling out by fellow students of those students seen to be behaving in a way that might signal histories of trauma. The instructors who worked in Vancouver talked about socioeconomic backgrounds of individual students that were different from that of the majority of students in the class. The identified students often had less formal education, had less access to or knowledge of technology, and were more likely to be excluded. As B said:

The majority of the students in my class have been Chinese, and they [students who had experienced trauma] would be from a different country, so they would be facing different language, different culture, and then on top of that sometimes unusual behaviour or really low literacy skills compared to someone who is university educated. Just because of living through war or displaced or maybe in their family situation dropping out of school really early.

The arrival patterns for refugees and immigrants have changed quite radically over the past several years, and the instructors' comments reflect this. Several of the instructors working in Vancouver mentioned they might have only one student who was a refugee in their classroom, the rest being immigrants. T said when describing one of her students, "She is isolated in every way possible. You know the composition of the class that I have now is fairly and sometimes extremely well off, mostly Mainland Chinese." Changes in immigration policies and housing issues mean LINC classes may have only one refugee student or only a few in the classroom with a group of students who are well-off and more advantaged. The effect of this can be marginalization of students who are already isolated.

The instructors who taught more demographically similar students did not make the same observation. They were more likely to refer to connections between students. D, who taught mostly refugees in classes outside of the city of Vancouver, spoke about friendships between students and a broad sense of inclusion and community. She spoke about these connections as a way to mitigate barriers for students. She described a teaching moment that occurred while she was teaching a unit on family and several students in the class had lost family members.

Responding to Cultural Imperialism

All the instructors spoke at length about how their work and lives were rooted in certain values and how this impacted their understanding of trauma and connection to their students. They used terms like "compassion" and "openness" and talked of how they connected these values to their teaching practice. A long-term instructor (D) spoke about the reasons people might get into

teaching and characteristics they might have: “A deep sense of altruism, and a deep sense of connection to uh—a sense of community.”

All the instructors I interviewed talked about countering assumptions. The instructors stressed that they were against labelling the students based on their backgrounds. As T said:

Looking at a person as a representative of their culture, or as a representative of—she is a representative of someone who has been beaten, she is a representative of someone who comes from a war-torn country, I think that’s a bit of a danger actually and the whole social justice thing springs from that.

Some instructors mentioned paying attention to areas that are often overlooked in the curriculum. M recalls addressing the overlooked issue of women’s health in her class. She said, “Last year in the health section a number of women were coming to me asking me questions about women’s health, so I thought there is a real gap and let’s try and fill that gap.” She also explained: “Well I think about some of the other teachers and things they have talked about. I think it is fair to say lots of people are fearful of conflict, fearful of politics, fearful of religion and fearful of sexuality.” She went on to talk about the importance of bringing up themes and subjects that speak to students’ lives and experience, saying, “Don’t want to retraumatize, which is a thing to think about, to be concerned about, but you know you want to be able for people to talk about their real lives.”

Exploitation

The instructors only briefly discussed exploitation or how to challenge it in relation to their classroom practice. Young’s concept of exploitation states:

The injustice of exploitation consists in social processes that bring about a transfer of energies from one group to another to produce unequal distributions, and in a way in which social institutions enable a few to accumulate while they constrain many more. (Young, 1990, p. 53)

M explored the concept when discussing changes to policy: “They [students] need not to be shoved on to getting some meaningless badly paid job after the first year they’ve been here, when they barely have a handle on the language.” As M said, students are being prepared for menial jobs that only need rudimentary language skills and offer little opportunity for any movement to better pay and more professional jobs.

Conclusion

In this article, I looked at how LINC instructors understood trauma. Then I used Young’s analysis of oppression as a heuristic device to organize and

present the result of my analysis of the data. I focused on violence, marginalization, powerlessness, and to some degree cultural imperialism and exploitation.

Young's schema provided a useful framework to capturing the LINC instructors' pedagogical practices in their effort to counter the oppression experienced by both students and teachers in and outside their classrooms. One of the most significant barriers identified by instructors was teaching in an increasingly neoliberal context where they are pushed toward measuring and asked to do more with less time.

In future publications, I would like to turn my attention to what the participating instructors had to say about taking action, what they actually did after our interviews, and what recommendations they would now make for future change.

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Note

1 My participants were asked to choose pseudonyms, and they chose letters instead of names.

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