

# Welcome, Valued & Heard

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A trauma-informed, humanising pedagogy for adult learners of English as an additional language

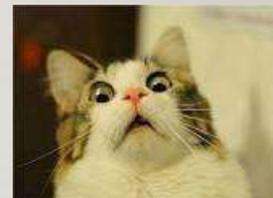
Victoria Wilson – UQ/USQ

QATESOL PD Day Toowoomba, 1<sup>st</sup> June, 2019

## A Bit About Me...

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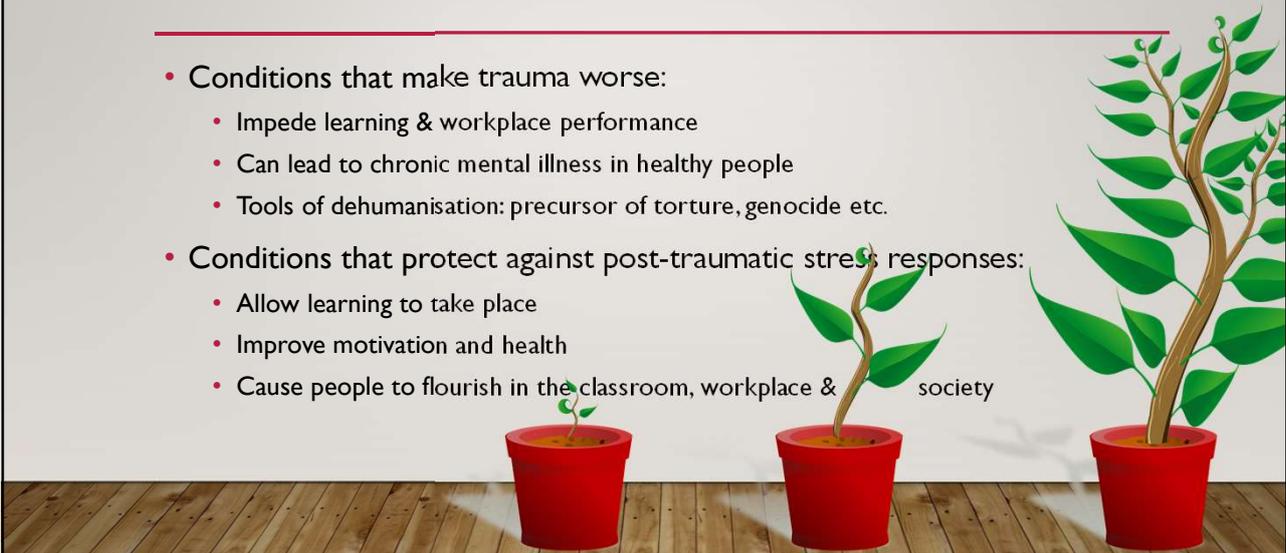
- Thesis: *Nothing about us without us: An investigation into trauma-informed teaching of English as an additional language to adults in SE Qld universities*
- ESL/EFL Teacher since 2004
- Lived overseas for a total of 10 years
- 7 years as a linguistic & ethnic minority + language learner
- Diagnosed with PTSD
- Teach & run ELICOS course at USQ
- PhD at UQ in School of Nursing, Midwifery & Social Work since 2018



## Trauma-informed or Human-informed?

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- Conditions that make trauma worse:
  - Impede learning & workplace performance
  - Can lead to chronic mental illness in healthy people
  - Tools of dehumanisation: precursor of torture, genocide etc.
- Conditions that protect against post-traumatic stress responses:
  - Allow learning to take place
  - Improve motivation and health
  - Cause people to flourish in the classroom, workplace & society



## Why Does This Matter?

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- Higher attrition rates when ss not supported
  - Future productivity lost
  - Higher costs downstream
  - (Supportive) higher ed aids recovery of mental health
- (see Orygen Report 2017)



## Mental Health Of University Students

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- More mental distress than rest of pop'n (Stallman, 2010)
- International & domestic report similar levels (Schofield et al, 2016)
- Int'l students: higher suicide risk than Aus-born ss (SBS)
- Higher mental distress at **regional** unis (Mulder & Cashin, 2015)



## Mental Health of Uni Students (2)

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- H.E. experience causing/exacerbating distress:

Only half pre-existing (Orygen, 2017)

Expense/debt

Multiple commitments

Poor job prospects

Relocation → loss of social supports

Mass education “**depersonalising and isolating**” (Baik et al. 2017)

Poor course design (Field & Kift 2010)

Poor assessment design & feedback (Field & Kift 2010)



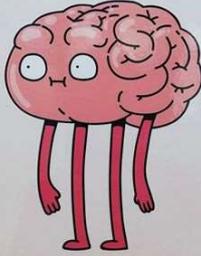


Why can't we just send them to the doctor?

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Brains can have a mind of their own.



Brains are weird. They can keep you up, keep you in, make you feel on edge, or even make it hard to concentrate. If your brain is making life difficult you can find out why at [youthbeyondblue.com](http://youthbeyondblue.com)



- Medicalising ignores role of educational practices
- Leaves student AND teachers unsupported
- Various barriers to mental healthcare (see Orygen, 2017; Baker et al, 2018)
- “multidisciplinary effort “ needed (Silove, 2000)

Can't we just send them to resilience training?

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**NO!**

## Why not?

There's no such thing as society

- Discourse of resilience hijacked by neoliberalism
- Fundamental attribution error: ignores social & environmental context
- Victim-blaming
- ESL students are already resilient!
- Resilience not an individual trait: created by social support & equality (Wilkinson & Pickett, 2018)



## Trauma...in Human Terms

Trauma shatters:

- Trust
- Worldview
- Sense of safety
- Sense of meaning
- Sense of connection

PTSD & similar better understood as

PTSI: an INJURY (external)



## Learning Brain Vs Trauma Brain

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Which would you rather teach? (and you DO have a choice)....

## Silove's Adapt Model (2013) : 5 Pillars

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1. Safety & security
2. Bonds & networks
3. Justice
4. Roles & identities
5. Existential meaning



## Extending the Model: Trauma & Education: common themes

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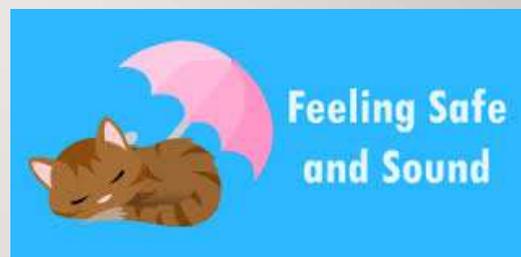
- Safety & trust
- Belonging
- Voice, choice, control
- Recognition of strengths
- Valuing identities
- Meaning



## SAFETY & TRUST

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- Physical & emotional safety
  - Transparency
  - Predictability
  - Don't change the goalposts
  - Don't make arbitrary decisions
- stress impedes learning



## BELONGING & SUPPORT

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- The myth of self-efficacy (Franzblau & Moore, 2001) → Western notion
  - Efficacy provided by various networks
  - Self-regulation a core tenet of SE...but PTSD affects this
- The harms of hierarchy (Wilkinson & Pickett, 2018)
  - Less control → higher cortisol
  - Threat of 'social evaluation' → higher cortisol



## BELONGING & SUPPORT (2)

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- Marginalisation exacerbates PTSD
- Social support protective factor against PTSD, depression, anxiety, et al.
- \*\*\* BUT...beware the (White) Saviour Complex

## BELONGING & SUPPORT (3) THE GUARDIAN, 2018, SURVEY FROM A UK UNI)

What do students want most? To be treated with respect

I was surprised to see students at my university ask for their lecturers to talk to them 'as though I'm a person'

“why don't academics have more **humanity?**”

“treat me and talk to me **as though I'm a person**”

“Some academics act with **contempt and irritation** for the people they should want to inspire, educate, and collaborate with.”

“Students identified **kindness, integrity and understanding** as the most important things that would change **their student experience.**”

## VOICE, CHOICE & CONTROL

- Mentally healthy practices not just about protection and “being nice”
- They are about **POWER**
- Must be “truly heard and seen” (van der Kolk, 2014, p 79)
- Student success predicted by

“sense of ownership bc they feel heard by university leaders” (Schreiner, 2017, p 16)



## VOICE, CHOICE & CONTROL (2)

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- Listen: student voices often silenced or disbelieved of (trauma) victims
- Real autonomy vs fake autonomy
  - (go away and figure it out yourself)
- Real empowerment (Nelson, Lord & Ochocka, 2001)
  - Choice & control
  - Access to valuable resources
  - Community integration



## VOICE, CHOICE & CONTROL

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- Even animals need it!



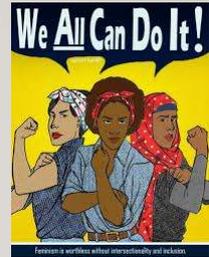
- **“A sense of agency (freedom and control over their choices)**
- To feel safe
- To develop a trusting, caring bond with at least one other creature
- Reintegration into the community at the trauma sufferer’s **own discretion.**”

(Roland, University of Sydney, The Conversation)

## RECOGNITION OF STRENGTHS

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- Trauma-informed DOES NOT mean low expectations
- Have high expectations AND give them the tools to achieve these
- Deficit approach to EAL students often taken
- Focus on strengths they bring & build on these
- Sharing of expert status



## VALUING & RE-MAKING IDENTITIES

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- Trauma & immigration disrupt identity
- Lower self-worth → higher PTSD (te Heide et al, 2017)
- Remove barriers to participation → mastery over life
- Curriculum should foreground student identities (Finn; Smyth; Giroux, Baik et al.)



## MEANING

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- Trauma and migration disrupt meaning
- Existential meaning required for recovery
- Meaningful curriculum essential for learning & engagement



- Picture credit: Charles Schultz

## MY EXPERIENCES OF PTSD & LEARNING

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- What triggers PTS (incl. physical) reactions
  - Behaviour/situations which breach trauma-informed principles
  - Material, environment that recalls the original trauma

### Effects:

- Total shutdown
- Fight or flight
- Nausea, headaches, cold sweats
- NO LEARNING!!



## Trauma & the ESL classroom: observations & student feedback (1)

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### What exacerbates traumatic stress & hinders learning

- Surveillance & lack of trust
- Lack of scaffolding
- Infantilisation
- Deficit approaches to students
- Threats
- Autocratic structures



## Trauma & the ESL classroom: observations & student feedback (2)

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### What minimises traumatic stress & supports learning

- Scaffolding of learning
- Freedom & choices
- Trust: being treated as responsible adults
- Materials that students can relate to in some way: provides entry point for understanding & increases engagement



## Trauma & the ESL classroom: observations & student feedback (3)

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### What minimises traumatic stress & supports learning (cont):

- Social support from peers & teachers
- Flexibility
- Awareness & acknowledgment of struggles & strengths
- Voice: opinions heard & respected
- Welcoming messages/materials in classroom & by teachers





## WHERE TO FROM HERE?

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- Recruiting participants
  - Ethics approval for EAL students 18+ with IELTS 4.5+ or equivalent, at UQ, GU, QUT, Sunshine Coast Uni
  - 1. Trauma-screening questionnaire 20 questions focusing on PTS responses, NOT the trauma itself (ethical reasons)
  - 2. One-on-one interview with students about their EAL learning experiences in Qld. Will interview both ss with low and high PTS scores.
    - Interview focus: framework of trauma-informed principles → how are these enacted (or not) in EAL classroom? How does it affect learning?

## RECOMMENDED READING

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Nelson, C. D., & Appleby, R. (2015). Conflict, militarization, and their after-effects: Key challenges for TESOL. *TESOL Quarterly*, 49(2), 309-332. doi:10.1002/tesq.187

Silove, D. (2013). The ADAPT model: A conceptual framework for mental health and psychosocial programming in post conflict settings. *Intervention*, 11(3), 237-248.

Wilson, V. (2017). Fukushima and beyond: Teaching trauma survivors. In P. Clements, A. Krause, & H. Brown (Eds.), *Transformation in language education*. Tokyo: JALT.

## REFERENCES

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- Email me if you would like a full list!