



Many learners bring invisible trauma with them to the classroom and can be unintentionally triggered by well-meaning educators and practices. Educators are also at risk.

This webinar will examine how retraumatization can present itself, how to recognize it and create a safe and inclusive learning environment.

Retraumatization in the classroom



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ABOUT **POP UP PD** FOR **LITERACY** **EDUCATORS**

- free webinar series developed by Ontario's LBS Regional Networks & the Provincial Support Organizations for Literacy
- supports LBS practitioners with presentations on topics important to them
- English language webinars presented for LBS practitioners annually since 2015-2016
- **all** webinar presentations, recording links & transcripts here: [Pop Up PD Resources for LBS Educators](#)
- webinar topic ideas welcome at: e-channel@contactnorth.ca



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STATEMENT OF **RECOGNITION**

While we meet today on a virtual platform, let's take a moment to recognize, respect and acknowledge the importance of the lands we occupy and from which we benefit.

Today, let's reaffirm our commitment and responsibility to improve relationships between nations -- and our own understanding of local Indigenous peoples and their cultures.

Let's remind ourselves that, wherever we are, we live on the ancestral and unceded territory of Inuit, Métis, and First Nations people.



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YOUR HOST



PRESENTER PATRICK CROSS is in his 25th year as an Academic Upgrading professor and 10th year as program coordinator for the Deaf Empowerment Program at Mohawk College in Hamilton. He also teaches a General Education elective course entitled, "The Holocaust: Perspectives of the Deaf and the Disabled" in ASL with interpreters to an all-hearing audience.

Patrick is a strong advocate for equity, diversity and inclusion, with a passion to ensure all people have an equal playing field to succeed with their goals.

Patrick also moonlights as a tour guide for Deaf groups with a Holocaust-themed tour starting in late October. He has taken part in four faculty and student trips through Mohawk International for service trips to Ecuador and Guatemala.

In his free time, he enjoys crossword puzzles, trivia, taking care of his family + 2 cats and 2 dogs, and dreaming of new adventures.



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RETRAUMATIZATION IN THE CLASSROOM

How does this apply to the adult literacy classroom?

Disclaimer:

This presentation is not intended to open up any wounds or create new traumas but rather to help all of us be more aware of what might be happening in our classrooms or programs.



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WARM-UP ACTIVITY

How much trauma do you think is happening in your classroom/program?

1. A little bit
2. Some
3. A lot
4. Everyone has trauma of some kind

... What about your program staff?

It's worth keeping in mind that there may be some teachers who also grew up in a similar environment or background as their students; this makes the topic of re-traumatization in the classroom all the more relevant.



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SPECIAL ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

A special thank you go to **Christopher Pretchotko**, Academic Upgrading professor at Cambrian College, Manitoulin Campus.



”
**HI,
I'M CHRISTOPHER
PRECHOTKO, THE
ACADEMIC
UPGRADING
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WHY ARE WE DISCUSSING **THIS?**

Simple answer: To make trauma less impactful in the classroom = increase student well-being, inclusion and retention

Long answer: Chris's observations and my observations



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CAVEATS TO **KEEP IN MIND**

1. We're not mental health professionals
2. This is not intended to be prescriptive
3. This is an approach meant for LBS practitioners, not a "one-stop fix"
4. General ideas in this presentation can be used by anyone who wants to get through their daily lives in a **trauma-informed way**; be more understanding of the needs of their learners and of themselves



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THE FOUR **R's**

Framework for a **Trauma-informed** Approach:

1. Realize
2. Recognize
3. Respond
4. Resist Re-Traumatization

(Henshaw, 2022; SAMHSA, 2014; Trauma-Informed Care Implementations Resource Center, n.d.)



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1. REALIZE

What is Trauma?

How common is it?



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TRAUMA IS...

- “Trauma refers to the individual’s **response** to adverse and overwhelming conditions or experiences (e.g., fear, loss of sleep, emotional ability), rather than the experience itself.”

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (2014)

- “Trauma survivors have **symptoms** instead of memories”

Mary Harvey, PhD (psychologist and author)



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FORMS OF **TRAUMA**

Main Categories of Trauma

1. Acute
2. Chronic
3. Complex (“developmental trauma”)

(Early Connections, n.d.; The National Child Traumatic Stress Network, n.d.)



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FORMS OF **TRAUMA**

Specific Types of Trauma

1. Collective
2. Structural (trauma in marginalized groups)
3. Epigenetic (trauma passed down)
4. Secondary

(Early Connections, n.d.; The National Child Traumatic Stress Network, n.d.)



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**ADVERSE
CHILDHOOD
EXPERIENCES,
DEVELOPMENTAL
TRAUMA AND
ADULTHOOD**

1. Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs)
= impacts childhood development
2. Heightened Stress Response:
fight, flight, freeze or fawn
3. Without treatment, trauma carries into adulthood
Stress response is stronger: constant shifting
between hyperarousal (fight or flight) and
hypoarousal (freeze or fawn)
4. Increased risk of developing mental disorders



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HYPERAROUSAL AND HYPOAROUSAL IN THE CLASSROOM

- 1. Fight:** May be labelled as non-cooperative or aggressive
Shown by students who struggle to maintain power or control
- 2. Flight:** May be labelled as disruptive or avoidant
Shown by students who want to escape
- 3. Freeze:** May be labelled as unmotivated or students who "shut-down"
Shown by students who feel powerless, can't or won't speak up
- 4. Fawn:** May be labelled as too compliant or have no boundaries
Shown by students trying to please someone to avoid conflict, ignoring own feelings; nervous system shut-down

(#1 - 3: Downing, 2017; #4: mendable.ca/fawning-trauma-response)



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SOME POTENTIAL **TRIGGERS**

- Unpredictability
- Loss of Control
- Rejection or Disapproval
- Loneliness
- Sudden Changes or Transitions
- Confrontation
- Improper Communication:
 - content, tone and intensity, body language, touch
- Deaf users - facial expressions and intensity of ASL signs



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Great information,
but how common is trauma?

How concerned should we be?

How does this affect education?



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GENERAL STATS

- Stats Can, 2022: 64% of Canadians experienced at least one adverse event, 5% has diagnosed PTSD, 8% more probably have PTSD but undiagnosed
- 50-to-65% of Canadians = at least one adverse childhood experience before age 18 (Public Health Ontario literature, 2020)
- Young adults (18-24) = trauma at disproportionately high rates
- Risk of experiencing traumatic events increases as income, educational achievement and employment status decrease (Fusco, et al., 2021)



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GENERAL STATS

For oft-marginalized groups:

- Racialized groups experience higher rates of trauma and mental health results (Fusco et al., 2021)
- Black Canadians report experiencing discrimination at a rate of 41% while First Nations, Inuit and Metis reported at rates of 44%, 29% and 24% respectively (Cotter, 2022)
- 76% of Deaf, Deafened and Hard-of-hearing college students reported an Adverse Childhood Experience; many bring these traumas with them (Wyatte Hall, 2023)
- Those who experienced childhood sexual trauma are highly likely to be re-victimized as adults



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So... trauma likely affects many individuals in society.

Again, how does this affect education?



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POST- SECONDARY **STATS**

- Many students in postsecondary settings arrive on campus carrying trauma from their past, e.g. first generations students and veterans (Lecy & Osteen, 2022; Ogrodniczuka et al., 2021)
- 14% of Canadian postsecondary students have reported to have been sexually assaulted (Stats Can, 2020). Female students who have a history of sexual trauma are more likely to experience repeated trauma in higher education settings (Davidson, 2017).
- 80% of Indigenous university students in Canada experienced racial discrimination during their lives while 67% were racially victimized on more than three separate occasions (Currie et al., 2012).
- Rates of trauma are likely higher (Maté & Maté, 2022).



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UNADDRESSED
AND/OR
TRIGGERED
TRAUMA IN
LEARNERS
AFFECTS

1. Functions that support learning: sensory processing, attention, memory, problem solving skills, etc.
2. Interaction skills: communication, collaboration, trust, empathy, listening, self-awareness, emotional intelligence, etc.
3. Relationships
4. Educational, employment, and overall life outcomes



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2. RECOGNIZE

How can you recognize or identify a student affected by trauma?



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CASE STUDY

- “K” joined the DEP program in 2019-20, a few years after graduating from E.C. Drury School for the Deaf in Milton
- He struggled to motivate himself in class and his homework was frequently not completed; excuses were plentiful
- He would often talk about his negative experiences in high school
- Left our program after two years with little academic progress
- After I attended Chris’s presentation, I asked “K” if the presence of other students from his high school factored in his lack of motivation. He answered that seeing former teachers from the school now working in our program triggered his trauma.
- “K” is now back in our program this year, making stronger progress



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SYMPTOMS OF TRAUMA

- Low attendance
- Difficulty focusing
- Difficulty with memory
- Difficulty with emotional regulation
- Fear of risk taking
- Fear of social activities
- Unhealthy relationships
- Anxiety - assignments, tests, exams, and deadlines
- Poor stress responses, e.g., anger, helplessness, dissociation
- Withdrawal and isolation
- Difficulties with socialization and relationship development



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SCREENING FOR TRAUMA?

- Monthly Detailed Service Quality Reports (DSQR)
- LBS Participant Registration Form (PRF)
- Suitability & Referral Forms at time of assessment



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A Universal Approach is Recommended



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3. RESPOND

How can you respond to trauma in the classroom?



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VALUES OF A TRAUMA- INFORMED EDUCATIONAL APPROACH

1. **Safety** (Brunzell et al., 2016; Carello & Butler, 2014, 2015; Wartenweiler, 2017)
2. **Trustworthiness and Transparency**
(Anderson et al., 2015; Cramer, 2018; Davidson, 2017; Wartenweiler, 2017)
3. **Peer Support** (Brunzell et al., 2016; Carello & Butler, 2014)
4. **Collaboration and Mutuality** (Cramer, 2018)
5. **Voice, Choice, and Empowerment**
(Brunzell et al., 2016; Cramer, 2018; Davidson, 2017)
6. **Cultural, Historical, and Gender Issues** (Henshaw, 2022)



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4. RESIST RE-TRAUMATIZATION



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RESIST
RETRAUMATIZATION
... AND
SECONDARY
TRAUMATIZATION

Be mindful of how trauma is addressed in the classroom

1. Prioritize the emotional safety of students
2. "Do No Harm"
3. Be cautious but not paralyzed by the fear of getting it wrong
4. Responsive referrals



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So... what about
educational or upgrading
instructors?
(and support staff, etc.)



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CASE STUDY

- “M” is an adult education instructor who teaches English in a program for refugees and adult learners returning to education after years away from school
- Many of her learners share stories of trauma – war, displacement, DV
- Over time, “M” notices that she feels drained after class; hearing stories of trauma leaves her emotionally heavy, and she finds it difficult to “switch off” after work, replaying student stories in her mind late into the night
- Her patience starts to wear thin, becoming irritable with students; she also notices physical symptoms such as headaches and fatigue
- When a student breaks down during a writing exercise about personal loss, “M” feels herself shutting down emotionally, no longer responding with compassion but rather just going through the motions



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RE-TRAUMATIZATION AND SECONDARY TRAUMATIZATION

1. Many of us carry our own traumas
2. We must be mindful of our own re-traumatization
3. We must be mindful of our own secondary traumatization



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SECONDARY TRAUMA: **COMPASSION FATIGUE**

Symptoms:

- Feeling helplessness, powerlessness in reducing the suffering of students
- Reduced empathy and sensitivity
- Feeling overwhelmed and exhausted
- Feeling detached, numb, and emotionally disconnected
- Loss of enjoyment in previously enjoyed activities
- Increased anger, sadness, anxiety, and irritability



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SECONDARY TRAUMA: **COMPASSION FATIGUE**

Symptoms (continued):

- Difficulty concentrating and making decisions
- Physical symptoms such as headaches, nausea, upset stomach, dizziness
- Increased conflict in personal relationships
- Neglect of self-care
- Withdrawal and isolation
- An increase in substance use as a form of self-medication

(Canadian Medical Association, 2020; Compassion Fatigue, 2022; Davidson, 2017; Stephens, 2020)



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SELF-CARE FOR PRACTITIONERS

- Take care of your physical health – eat well, exercise, rest
- Take regular breaks at work
- Practice mindfulness
- Use deep breathing exercises, e.g., flower & candle, 4-7-8
- Acknowledge your feelings / emotions
- Support network with co-workers
- Take time for activities you enjoy
- Take breaks from media and other online content
- Make time for personal relationships
- Reflect through journaling or other forms of self-reflection

(Canadian Medical Association, 2020; Davidson, 2017; Stephens, 2020)



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IN SUMMARY

(HOCH, ET AL., 2015)

- Practice the 4Rs of a trauma-informed approach adapted to your classroom
- Trust is not always instant; be sure you are trustworthy and reliable
- Normalize and validate trauma-related feelings
- Ask learners how you can ensure their comfort
- Understand and accept that some difficult behaviours are ingrained, and they have helped students survive
- Keep appropriate boundaries
- Maintain high expectations



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THANK YOU!

Let's keep the discussion open

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THANK
YOU

Webinar resources: [Pop Up PD Resources for LBS Educators](#)

Webinar evaluation: <https://tinyurl.com/4sd868dn>



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