

## Introduction

**One of the hottest topics** in education today is trauma-informed pedagogy. Much of what has been written in this area comes from counselors, therapists, and other experts in this field. We are in no way claiming to be mental health professionals. However, we do know about English learners, and we have found very little written specifically about the effects of trauma on this specific population. It is our desire to sift through the literature on trauma and social-emotional learning and find the kernels that apply directly to English learners.

We know that not all English learners have experienced trauma, but unfortunately too many have been victims of events that could have produced traumatic memories—some as second language (L2) students who were born in the United States, some as immigrants before their arrival into the U.S., and others as immigrants after their arrival in the U.S. It is our desire to help educators better understand the possible traumatic backgrounds of our students and how it could be affecting their academic, social, and emotional lives now. But most important, we want our focus to be on how we can help to create a safe environment in our schools and in our classrooms that will help each child recognize, nurture, and expand their own internal resilience that has enabled them to weather their past situations and that will allow them to continue the healing process.

This book was written mainly for teachers of students with immigrant backgrounds and also for the building administrators who support them. Our audience will include mainstream teachers, bilingual and ESL/ELD teachers, as well as teachers of special populations. Other school support personnel such as counselors, paraprofessionals, and social workers will also benefit from learning about the impact of traumatic experiences on their L2 students. We certainly do not want to stigmatize or overgeneralize; we are not looking for pity, but for empathy. We want to inform and offer suggestions. We cannot help someone if we do not understand their situation. Our deepest desire is for all students to have their basic academic and emotional needs met in our classrooms. In order for this to happen, teachers must truly know their students and have the skills and tools to best meet those needs.

We begin with a foundational chapter focused on the types of trauma many immigrants and their families have faced and may still be facing. Then we moved to three ways schools and teachers can support these students. First, creating trauma-sensitive schools and classrooms provides the necessary atmosphere of safety and support. Second, we move to specific activities designed to help each learner recognize their own internal strengths and move toward a positive self-identity. Then we explore the critical nature of a team response to resilience. We work in waves from the student needs to the teacher needs, and then out to the broader environment, including school support personnel, the family, and the community. We end with a caution that only when educators practice self-care can they remain in a position to offer the maximum assistance to their students.

Our goal was to help our readers discover resources to move English learners from trauma to resilience within the school environment, focusing on social-emotional learning (SEL) practices in the classroom and beyond. Finally, we are certainly aware of and must warn readers that schools may at times need to seek outside resources and assistance from health care professionals who are trained to address trauma beyond the school setting.

It is our desire that this book will offer educators information on the types of issues many of our L2 learners have faced or may still be facing and to provide specific, practical activities that a teacher and a school can apply to enable students to recognize and build on their individual motivations and strengths that can support their journey from trauma to resilience.

Each chapter contains a section called For Further Study that is designed to provide the educator alone or in teams and/or study groups with the opportunity to go beyond the chapter's contents to explore topics in more depth. Individual teachers, teacher study groups, support staff, and administrators can choose to focus on one topic or on several topics and then share their expanded understandings of how it might be applied in an educational setting.

**A Note on Terminology:** There are several terms that we feel need to be introduced before you read this book. We are combining the complex and sensitive fields of immigration and trauma-informed teaching and both have their own vocabulary and history. We hope that this list of basic terminology will help lay the foundation for your journey by understanding how the terms are used in this book.

We also want to add that education does not exist in a bubble. What happens in the country and the world impacts both the students and their classrooms. Our immigration policy is extremely political and changes constantly. We have tried to focus on the role that immigration has on children, realizing that by the time you read this book, new policies may be in place with different implications for students.

- An **immigrant** is a person who was born outside the United States and who has moved to this country with the intention to live here indefinitely. We use it as an overarching term. Immigrants can include people who enter the United States through various legal channels such as family reunification or through the visa lottery program, as well as individuals (children and adults) who enter the United States without the proper documentation or who overstay their temporary visas.
- A **refugee** is a person with legal immigrant status granted outside the U.S. based on having experienced persecution. Refugees are permitted to apply for citizenship after a certain amount of time determined by the government. A refugee is one sub-category of an immigrant.
- An **asylee**, or **asylum-seeker**, is another category of immigrant. They are individuals who enter the United States and then ask for official permission to stay. They must prove a well-founded fear of persecution the same as a refugee, but the difference is that they ask after they enter the U.S., not before. The U.S. government does not consider asylees as refugees until and unless their case is approved. How this is handled and who is permitted to stay varies depending on the national political situation. The individuals and families who are arriving at the southern border and are asking for political asylum fall into this latter category. When we use the term *immigrant*, we are most often referring to all categories.
- A **newcomer** is a student who has been in the United States less than two years and who has developing English skills. Some of the activities listed in Chapter 3 will be specifically appropriate for these new arrivals. The term does not refer to the immigration status of the student but to the length of time in the country.

- **SIFE/SLIFE** both refer to students who have experienced an interruption in their education. **SIFE** is the older of the two acronyms and stands for Students with Interrupted Formal Education. The newer term growing in popularity is **SLIFE** (Students with Limited or Interrupted Formal Education), with the *L* added to refer to the fact that some of these students have more than just interrupted schooling—it may be limited or, in some cases, non-existent. Students with interrupted educations face a number of challenges in U.S. schools. While not all SLIFE have experienced situations that may have resulted in trauma, many come from areas of the world where violence is common and may be the impetus for their relocation. Also, for many of these students, the stress of trying to make up for their lost years of education can create its own type of trauma.
- **Resilience** is defined in this book as the ability to adapt in the face of adversity and trauma to those stressors that may have impacted the learner’s ability to survive and thrive. We do not look at it as “bouncing back” from a difficult or a perceived challenging experience. For the learners described in this book, becoming resilient is empowering and allows the individual to grow and significantly improve his/her life. We understand that the term *resilience* has received some negative reaction because in certain situations it has been used to place the blame on the victim, arguing that if the person with the challenge had just been stronger, if they had more resilient, then the situation would have been easily resolved. This is absolutely not how we are using this term. We recognize that the situations our students have faced were out of their control, and we are offering support to help them channel their own inner strengths to rebuild their lives and move beyond their earlier circumstances. We are trying to provide a helping hand within an atmosphere of safety and empathy.

Terms that are defined in the Glossary appear in boldface on first mention in this book.