

Trauma and Teaching the Multilingual Refugee Learner: A Teacher Development Model

Jan Stewart

University of Manitoba, Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada

Abstract:

Background: For the first time in the history of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the number of refugees and displaced people worldwide have surpassed 117 million (UNHCR, 2024). The unprecedented refugee crisis has dramatically changed the demographics of today's classrooms and this has left many teachers feeling ill-prepared to adequately meet the diverse needs of their students. Many multilingual learners have experienced forced migration as a result of war, conflict, human rights atrocities, and environmental disasters—situations that are often associated with trauma and mental health challenges both in the short and long term. Moreover, forced relocation and the process of adjusting to a new country can also be extremely stressful or traumatic. As multilingual students enter into classrooms in a host country, educators need to be aware of the potential for trauma within this demographic and be trained in trauma-informed practices and culturally-responsive teaching in order to provide the most appropriate support.

Objectives: This presentation will provide an overview of a teacher training model to support the multilingual learner who has been affected by trauma. Using the three stages, each of the 15 steps will be introduced along with a discussion about how administrators and teachers can use the 15 steps (three stage model) to focus on healing and care. The **Trauma Informed Schools and Healing Centred Engagement Model (TISHCE)** was adapted from the *HPRT model* in the *Primary Care Provider Toolkit*, *Trauma Story Assessment and Therapy* and, *Healing Invisible Wounds* developed by Richard Mollica founder of the *Harvard Program in Refugee Trauma*. Originally developed as a tool for primary care providers and psychologists, Mollica's toolkit was adapted and revised to appeal to a school practitioner audience (teachers, settlement workers, school counsellors, school administration) who are the front-line workers who work directly with refugee children and youth. The need for basic level knowledge on trauma is needed and providing professionals with some guiding principles and tips for supporting traumatized youth is essential. The Trauma Informed Schools and Healing Centred Engagement Model is a model to help teachers support and respond to children and youth who are healing from the effects of traumatic experiences.

Overview of the Trauma-Informed Healing Centred Engagement Model: This is a model for school practitioners (teachers, counsellors, administrators, settlement workers) who would have minimal or no training in psychological assessment and therapy. The intended use is to help these professionals provide basic mental health support to students who have experienced mass violence, torture or trauma. It is also not intended to be a replacement for providing therapeutic help, nor a replacement for medical attention.

The TISHCE model can be used as a guide for assisting children and youth who have experienced trauma. It is designed to provide general principles for caring and healing within a school or community environment. Stage 1: Creating a climate of Care is designed to help develop the kind of atmosphere and environment that is essential for establishing any classroom or school environment. These universal elements should form the foundation for all other work with students. Stage 2: Gathering Facts provides some suggestions for approaching and talking with students who might need additional support. Stage 3: Healing and Support provides strategies for teaching and learning