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## 2 | **Feel free to:**

- ask questions and make comments as we go along
- use the chat
- leave, stretch, turn cameras on and off
- get a cup of tea (etc)



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### 3 | Outline

- My background & why I started researching this
- What is trauma?
- PTSD & its effects
- Effects of PTSD on learning
- Trauma-informed learning principles



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### 4 | My background

- EFL & ESL teacher since 2004
- CELTA, MA in Applied Linguistics
- Developed PTSD from 2011 Fukushima disasters
- 2014 began teaching ss from Iraq, Afghanistan, DR Congo, Sudan...
- PhD in trauma-informed English language teaching to adults. 2016-2022
- Recent cancer survivor → more trauma to draw on!

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## What is trauma?

- Clinical def'n changed from "outside the range of usual human experience"  
"Only the fortunate find trauma unusual"  
- Judith Herman
- Narrow definition in DSM-5 (American Psychiatric Association): traumatic event must be exposure to "death, threatened death, actual or threatened serious injury, or actual or threatened sexual violence"
- BUT trauma elsewhere accepted to include chronic poverty, racism, etc
- def'n broader cross-culturally →

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## Trauma & Culture



- What is considered traumatic may vary cross-culturally (e.g. burial rites, family status)
- Post traumatic stress (PTS) can manifest differently cross-culturally (e.g. somatic pain, seizures)
- But overall, PTSD valid concept cross-culturally and historically

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## 7 | PTSD...more than 'mental' illness

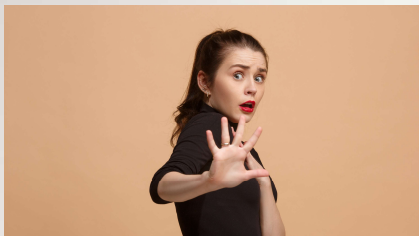
- Injury/condition of the nervous system that affects whole body and mind
- PTSD & similar better understood as PTSI: an INJURY (external)
- Body in state of high tension & alert →
- Chronic physical pain & high sensitivity to stress



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## 8 | Common post-traumatic stress responses



- Re-experiencing the trauma (flashbacks, nightmares)
- Avoidance
- Negative cognitions and mood (isolation, blame, shame, lack of interest)
- Arousal: irritability, risky behaviour, hypervigilance, heightened startle response, trouble sleeping and concentrating

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## Trauma...in Human Terms



### Trauma shatters:

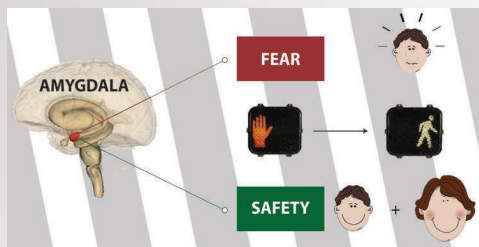
- Trust
- Worldview
- Sense of safety
- Sense of meaning
- Sense of connection

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## How does PTSD affect (language) learning?



### Cognitive effects:

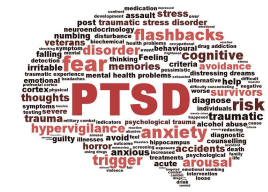
- speed of language acquisition & long-term symptom load of PTSD inversely related
- Deficit in verbal learning
- Concentration & memory problems

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# Trauma & English Language Students

- Both international & domestic students could be suffering from PTS.
- Ss often wrongly assumed to be not interested (eg zoning out, sleeping, leaving classroom, distracting or distracted, arrogant)
- Often hidden/masked →
  - ❖ Assume trauma exists
  - ❖ Don't assume who is traumatised



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

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



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## 13 | Extending the Model: Trauma & Education: common themes (Wilson)

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



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## 14 | Safety

- Emotional and physical

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## How ESL students conceptualise this

### Emotional:

- Supportive, caring teachers & peers
- Learning support & advisors
- Not being shamed or humiliated

### Physical:

- Safe campus (night buses, security staff)

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## Belonging & connection

- Connectedness a key human need
- Marginalisation exacerbates PTSD
- Social support protective factor against PTSD, depression, anxiety, et al.

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## Belonging & connection (2) 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."

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## How ESL students conceptualise this

- Teacher attention, presence, listening, patience
- T care for ss' lives outside the classroom
- T understanding of/respect for students' cultures
- Not just transactional r'ship & mechanical teaching
- Build community in classroom: treat equally; collaborative activities between ss, especially sharing cultures!
- Extra-curricular activities

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## 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)



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## Voice, choice & control (2)

- Listen! Student voices, trauma survivors, refugees often silenced or disbelieved
- 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



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## Voice, choice & control (2)

REAL AUTONOMY	FAKE AUTONOMY
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Ask questions; do not assume preferences, triggers, and "what's best"</li> <li>- Give choices in learning</li> <li>- Provide scaffolding to assist <i>future</i> self-sufficiency</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- "Figure it out yourself"</li> <li>- "Google it"</li> <li>- "The best teacher I ever had sat in the corner and did nothing. I learned that students only learn when they are forced to teach themselves" (A REAL QUOTE from a teacher!!)</li> </ul>

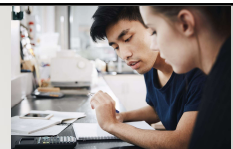
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## How ESL students conceptualise this: (1)

- Don't treat like children
- Be fair and equitable
- Give them a say in big matters (e.g. changing class or level; future career!)
- Do not overwhelm with choices re small matters (seating, etc)
- Give choices in assessment questions (e.g. essay question or presentation topic)



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## How ESL students conceptualise this: (2)

- Teachers can build ss' English language autonomy through:
  - Low teacher talk time! High student talk time!
  - Teach English through content familiar to ss
  - Give encouraging & constructive feedback



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## Recognition of strengths: Trauma-informed DOES NOT mean low expectations

- Have high expectations AND give them the tools to achieve these
- Focus on strengths they bring, e.g.
  - Language learning competence
  - Strength in adversity
  - Intercultural knowledge
- Share expert status: what do ss already know?  
(this also reduces TTT)



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## How ESL students conceptualise this

- Treat all students equally
- Recognise as adults
- Encourage, encourage, encourage!



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## Valuing & remaking identities

- Trauma & immigration disrupt identity
- Lower self-worth → higher PTSD
- For some ss, ethnic/religious identity has been life or death  
→ acceptance is therefore paramount



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## How ESL students conceptualise this

- 1. Value & respect cultural/religious/ethnic identities
- 2. English language learner as identity:
  - Scaffold language
  - Be patient
  - Don't expect native speaker standards
  - Treat mistakes with solutions, not impatience



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## Meaning

- Trauma and migration disrupt meaning
- Existential meaning required for recovery



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## How ESL students conceptualise this

- Meaningful curriculum essential for learning & engagement
  - Can they relate to it?
  - Is it interesting?
  - Does it go beyond just learning the language?
  - Cultural exchange, environment, health



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## One more thing...

- Look familiar???
- Trauma-informed = human informed



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## All this adds up to

Transformative English language teaching!

### Major takeaways:

- Culture in the syllabus. Cultural pride + curiosity about others → motivation to communicate → enhanced learning of English + broadening of mind
- Interactive, collaborative learning → synergistic knowledge & social support + more opportunities to use English
- Egalitarianism: hierarchical, authoritarian teaching has no place.

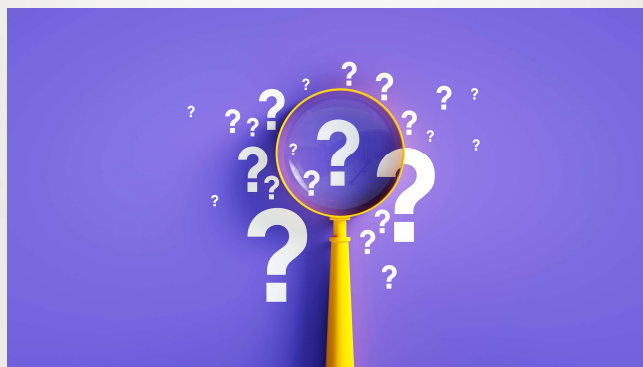


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## Questions?



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## Thank you!

- Linked In Special Interest Group: Trauma Informed Adult TESOL International

<https://www.linkedin.com/groups/13942368/>

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**Trauma-informed  
TESOL = Human-  
informed TESOL**

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