

Trauma and Adverse Childhood Experiences (TrACE)-informed training for English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) practitioners in Wales:

Understanding current provision and gaps

Natasha Judd, Kat Ford, Katie Cresswell,
Rebecca Fellows, Karen Hughes



Background

- ESOL promotes learner independence and integration.
- ESOL learners come from diverse backgrounds, including those with forced migration experience.
- Learners may have experienced complex trauma.
- Providers need to understand the challenges learners face.
- The ACE Hub Wales has developed a trauma-informed approach to further education, but this has yet to be extended to ESOL.
- Welsh Government review recommends embedding ESOL-specific trauma-informed practice and using TrACE¹ training resources.
- This study examines trauma-informed training availability and practitioners' training needs.



¹Trauma and Adverse Childhood Experiences

Methods

1. Scoping work: Understanding current training availability in Wales

- Individuals working in ESOL delivery contacted by email and telephone
- Online search



2. Semi-structured interviews: Identifying impacts of learner trauma and practitioner training needs

- Participants: ESOL practitioners working in Wales
- Recruitment: Convenience sampling, providers invited to participate via email and telephone
- Data collection: Interviews conducted via Microsoft Teams and guided by an interview topic guide
- Analysis: Thematic analysis (NVivo) to identify themes



Participants



- 12 participants
- Worked across a range of providers
- Most taught ESOL across multiple grades
- Participants had been teaching ESOL for between 2 and 41 years
- 11 participants based in South Wales, 1 in mid Wales

Results:

Current provision of trauma-informed training in Wales for ESOL practitioners

- Little trauma-informed training available
- Some examples of trauma-informed training specific to ESOL were identified
- Some participants had completed trauma-informed training provided by their employer, but this was not ESOL-specific

Examples of ESOL-specific trauma-informed training identified

- Trauma-informed ESOL for refugees training, *The University of Leicester*
- Trauma training workshops, *NATECLA¹ Cymru*
- Postgraduate Certificate in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL specialism), *The University of South Wales*

¹National Association for Teaching English and other Community Languages to Adults

Results:

Practitioners' trauma awareness

- Participants were not directly asked about their understanding of trauma, but it was evident that their understanding was predominantly from
 - Their own experience of working with ESOL students
 - Their own research
 - Awareness gained from outside their ESOL role
- Few participants were aware of the Trauma-Informed Wales Framework and the TrACE¹ toolkit

¹Trauma and Adverse Childhood Experiences

Results:

Practitioners' perceptions of the impact of trauma on learners in the classroom

All participants felt their learners had experienced trauma and were affected by it

Some participants felt it was part of their role to talk to learners about trauma, while others did not

"I kind of feel like it is part of my job to make a space to listen to it"

Participants felt an emotional demand of teaching ESOL

"Sometimes it can be quite stressful, emotionally"

Participants felt that trauma impacted learner cognition, emotion and behaviour

"I didn't realise how much it would impact their learning and it does in terms of like them retaining information, even their attendance sometimes, due to them struggling with mental health or personal struggles"

Participants acknowledged difficulty in communicating with learners about trauma

"This person has been going through quite a lot, but because sometimes of the language barrier, we find that they're not always able to convey the type of trauma that they might be feeling"

Results:

The impact of trauma on teaching practices in the classroom

Learner trauma influences teaching practices. Participants expressed difficulty anticipating topics that might be triggering to students and the need to be flexible

"I had to readjust everything in terms of a two-week program to just try and make sure that what I was covering was gonna give them the language they needed, but without hitting that exact topic over and over"

Some participants expressed difficulty managing the classroom if an issue arises

"I don't know what's going to happen if this guy starts chucking chairs around or that kind of thing. I don't know how I will manage that and keep the other students safe"

Some participants felt an exam-focused curriculum is not beneficial for students. Others were able to adopt a more flexible teaching approach

"You may be trying to do some kind of unit of accreditation, and actually that particular day it's not relevant and it isn't what they need"

Results:

The importance of experience and shared learning for current trauma-informed practice

Most participants felt their knowledge of trauma and response approaches were developed from their own teaching experiences

"It's basically just teaching experience that's given us as a team these strategies"

Informal learning from peers and colleagues was an important part of understanding how to respond to trauma in the classroom

"I feel like that is probably the most useful support I have is just having that conversation with my colleagues and seeing things from a different perspective"



Results:

The need for trauma-informed training specific to the ESOL setting

Around half of participants reported that their training had not equipped them to work with ESOL students who had experienced trauma

Those who had undertaken trauma-informed training said it didn't consider the needs of ESOL students

"it didn't feel directly related to my students, it didn't feel directly related to my experience"

Those who had attended trauma-informed training had actively sought it themselves

Participants noted that training should include:

- Learning about trauma that refugee and asylum-seeking populations may have experienced, e.g. war trauma, post-traumatic stress disorder, trafficking and displacement
- Awareness of global conflicts and disasters
- Recognising symptoms of trauma
- Practical strategies for responding to situations e.g. trauma disclosures, student anger

Results:

The importance of creating safe spaces and safeguarding students



Participants wanted to understand how to create safer and more supportive environments for learners

"I would say when it comes to maybe dealing with learners from different cultural backgrounds, what tools to use to maybe like not offend learners or to be more empathetic towards learners"

Participants felt better knowledge of support services would be useful to enable referral to appropriate and effective support for learners

"I don't know where to signpost you. I think maybe, maybe being aware of where to signpost people. What other support's available? We can't answer all the questions"

Results:

The requirement for additional support for ESOL practitioners

Participants said they were more likely to access informal support than formal support for any wellbeing or safety concerns

"It's not quite a subject area a lot of people understand, so talking about it to other people, they can't relate as well as my colleagues do"

Participants thought formal wellbeing support would be more useful if it were more specific to their ESOL roles

Two participants thought receiving high-quality, external training would be more beneficial than self-led training

"We would benefit from having external providers offering training within our ESOL department at a high level rather than being asked to deliver training to each other where we might be still learning ourselves"

Discussion

- Practitioners perceive that learners' trauma impacts learners and practitioners
- Current training for ESOL practitioners does not include how to deliver ESOL in a trauma-informed way
- There are some promising examples of workshops on trauma (e.g. delivered through NATECLA Cymru), but such training is yet to be formalised in Wales
- All participants indicated a need and desire for more ESOL-specific trauma-informed training
- Findings informed recommendations for ESOL trauma-informed training delivery in Wales...

Limitations

- No participants from North Wales
- Interviews did not enquire about lived experience
- Restricted participation due to summer holidays
- Discussions based on participants' own understanding of trauma
- Researcher positionality and bias
- Analysis focused on broad themes

Recommendations

- (1) Trauma-informed training for ESOL practitioners should be developed
- (2) Such training should include:
 - a. complexities around presentation of trauma in the ESOL classroom
 - b. practical guidance on how to support learners e.g. responding to disclosures, safeguarding
 - c. wellbeing for practitioners
 - d. best practice for how organisations can take a trauma-informed approach
- (3) New and existing training should be evaluated to understand its suitability
- (4) Future research should seek to understand learners' perspectives

Acknowledgements

A big thank you to:

- All interview participants
- Anne Hubbard, Erica Williams, Dr Catryn Wyn Edwards for providing peer review
- Nayana Varadaraj and Carys Dale for support with report production
- Colleagues from Adult Learning Wales, the Learning and Work Institute, NATECLA Cymru, University of South Wales, Mental Health Foundation, Welsh Local Government Association, Oasis, Powys Education, Coleg Cambria, Coleg Meirion-Dwyfor, Coleg Menai, Bridgend College, Coleg y Cymoedd, Coleg Merthyr Tydfil, Vale Learning Centre, Agored Cymru, NPTC Group of Colleges, Vale of Glamorgan Council, Cardiff Council, Gwynedd Council and Flintshire County Council for contributing to study development, participant recruitment and/or sharing of knowledge and information