As a graduate student in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages, I had been looking forward to increasing my understanding of the knowledge and scope of the field at the virtual TESOL 2021 International Convention and English Language Expo held March 24th to 27th. The live workshop by Louise El Yaafouri (2021b) of Diversified Consulting, called Mitigating Trauma in Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Settings, gave me a lot to think about. In it, she described both culturally-responsive approaches to trauma and some of the tools we could use to apply these approaches in our teaching.

The terminology she used framed the concepts presented in a positive, life-affirming perspective. An occurrence of trauma is a power interruption. The term transition shock covers many facets of trauma that can occur in the lives of people and, more specifically, ELs. Power restoration refers to the process of an individual rebuilding their life from a traumatic event. By focusing on power restoration, an individual is looking forward and moving/growing out of a power interruption, instead of being held back by it (El Yaafouri, 2021a).

Power restoration is achieved through culturally responsive teaching in collaboration with the four essential pillars used in addressing transition shock (El Yaafouri, 2021a). The pillars are

- connect (creating and sustaining relationship with students),
- protect (generating trust and security where students learn),
- respect (encouraging and allowing students to speak, make choices, and collaborate with others), and
- redirect (supporting students as they transition to wholeness by helping them: 1) to cease engaging in unprofitable behaviors, and 2) to develop a healthy outlook leading to healthy behaviors).

El Yaafouri demonstrated many specific activities that teachers can implement in the classroom to support students in progressing towards power restoration, including the use of transition cards. While the instructor has a schedule which she communicates in advance to her class, she can use transition cards, at periodic intervals, to notify her students of an upcoming activity prior to its starting time. This may take the form of placing an announcement on her communication board a few hours prior to an event as a follow-up to having told her students about it when they first arrived. This allows students time to prepare themselves for the event. The speaker explained that a trauma-impacted brain finds ambiguity and abrupt changes more difficult to handle, and that students’ stress is reduced by knowing what is going to happen next. El Yaafouri also suggests giving transition cards to students at the start of a school break: She wants her learners to be secure that their connection with her and the school will continue despite the short hiatus.

El Yaafouri emphasized the importance of coordinating with other professionals when educating students who are working through trauma. If it is evident that a student’s need is beyond our scope as a teacher, we can call upon those who are skilled in the relevant area of expertise, such as a school counselor.

For me, the workshop highlighted how important it is for teachers to be aware of this topic so they can provide a firm basis for their students’ learning. Healing is a process. By championing our students’ strengths, and treating them as the valuable individuals that they are—thus building towards their power restoration—we support them in their journey to illuminate the world (El Yaafouri, 2021a; Zacarian et al., 2017).
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References


Mark your Calendar

June 21-23, 2021  2021 Virtual TESOL Advocacy & Policy Summit


July 13, 2021  WAESOL Online Training: Narrative Writing: The Remix

September 12, 2021  WAESOL Annual Conference Proposals due

October 22, 2021  WAESOL Pre-Conference Workshops

October 23, 2021  WAESOL Annual Conference (Virtual with Networking Hubs)

October 22-23, 2021  WAESOL Annual Conference

November 15, 2021  WAESOL Educator Winter 2022—Articles due for submission to the editor

April 15, 2022  WAESOL Educator Summer 2022—Articles due for submission to the editor