

**CREATING INCLUSIVE EAL CLASSROOMS: HOW LINC INSTRUCTORS  
UNDERSTAND AND MITIGATE BARRIERS, FOR STUDENTS WHO HAVE  
EXPERIENCED TRAUMA.**

by

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A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT  
OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

in

THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE AND POSTDOCTORAL STUDIES  
(Educational Studies)

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

(Vancouver)

August, 2015

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## **Abstract**

This study explores the assumptions and understandings that English as an Additional Language (EAL) teachers bring to teaching students who they believe have experienced trauma. The instructors in this study teach in a Canadian federally funded program called Language Instruction Program for Newcomers (LINC). The research is informed by the critical literacy work of Paulo Freire, particularly his critique of the banking model of education and his work on dialogue and praxis. The work of Freire is considered in relation to larger conversations about social justice. The research draws on participatory action research. The study illustrates the complex and contradictory understanding that instructors have about trauma and the dilemmas they face in supporting students affected by trauma in a government-funded EAL program for newcomers. First, this project describes the multiple barriers students and instructors face in trying to create inclusive classrooms. Second, it demonstrates that instructors bring a variety of experiences, techniques and processes to support students who have experienced trauma. Third, it shows that for EAL programs to be responsive to the whole student requires a shift away from neo-liberal policy and practice. What is needed is a rethinking of current Professional Development (PD) practices, and active engagement through communities of practice are needed to enable EAL instructors to create more inclusive EAL education, particularly for students who have experienced trauma. This research contributes to the discussion on trauma and learning within government-funded EAL programs, specifically in relation to adult immigrants.

## **Preface**

This dissertation is an original intellectual product of the author, Amea Wilbur, and was undertaken under the supervision of principal investigator Dr. Michelle Stack of the University of British Columbia (Faculty of Educational Studies). The fieldwork reported in Chapters 5-6 was covered by the University of British Columbia Behavioural Research Ethics Board number H14-02410.

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## List of Abbreviations

ESL	English as a Second Language
EAL	English as an Additional Language
LINC	Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada
ELSA	English Language Services for Adults
CIC	Citizenship and Immigration
BC TEAL	British Columbia Teachers of English as an Additional Language
ACE	Access Community through English

## **Acknowledgements**

I would like to express my deepest appreciation to my supervisor, Dr. Michelle Stack. I feel incredibly fortunate to have worked with her. Her guidance was so very important in my educational journey. I would also like to thank the other members of my research committee – Dr. Shauna Butterwick and Dr. Maureen Kendrick for their thoughtful and useful feedback throughout my writing process.

I would like to thank my research participants. They provided me with so much meaningful and important information and were a pleasure to work with.

I'd also like to thank my friends, and family who helped edit, review and talk through all my worries and concerns. I would particularly like to thank Sandra Slind, my colleague and friend, who read and reread many version of this document. Your help was so vital in the process of writing this dissertation.

I would also like to thank my father. I am very grateful for your love and unconditional support over the years.

Finally, thanks to my husband, Eric for supporting me and pushing me to complete my studies even when I really felt like I could not complete them. I love you.

## **Dedication**

This dissertation is dedicated to my mother Margaret Wilbur, who I miss dearly, for encouraging me to think about social justice and teaching me to be a compassionate and caring person. I would also like to dedicate this to my son Oscar, who was one year old when I started my EdD and my son Ari who was born in the middle of it. I love you both. Lastly I would like to dedicate this to the students I have worked with over the years who have shown me the meaning of resiliency and hope.

## Chapter 1: Introduction

This chapter provides an overview of the research questions, scope of the project, and its significance. First, I discuss the purpose, scope and significance and then explore the research context and my research questions. The final section briefly introduces my conceptual framework and the terms I use throughout my dissertation, including the term *trauma* and the acronym *EAL*.

### Scope of the Project

The Canadian government-funded English as Additional Language (EAL) program is predicated on the view that students should become “productive” members of society. Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC) states that “the ultimate goal of this process [settlement, adaptation and integration of newcomers to Canada], whereby immigrants become fully functioning members of Canadian society” (Government of Canada, 2004). The program is set up with the assumption that “productive” means paid employment. For students struggling with the effects of trauma this perceived pressure can be yet another burden and stress is compounded for those very students who may have difficulty learning due to trauma. The timelines for demonstrating language competence in government programs are short, which increases stress on both students and instructors. I argue that the current model of LINC takes a deficit approach to students who do not go through stages that are deemed “normal”. In other words, students that require more time are seen as being a burden and less productive. Factors such as trauma are not taken into account. I am hopeful that if policymakers and teachers had a

better understanding of trauma, one that did not pathologize students through viewing them as below “normal” or lacking motivation, programs could be more flexible and holistic and could better meet the needs of all students. It is not surprising that students struggling with trauma and little or no support to heal find developing language competence difficult if not impossible.

This research is grounded in an understanding of the socio-political context of language policy for new immigrants and refugees in Canada. I examine the policy context, particularly the reversal from a provincially-managed program, English Language Services for Adults (ELSA), to the federally-managed program, called LINC. This shift happened during the course of my study and instructors were still struggling to understand the impact of the change on their daily practice, as will become apparent in the following chapters.

In my experience, immigrant and refugee students are often further marginalized because mental health services are mostly in English and settlement programs do not have the capacity to deal with mental health issues. My research interest is rooted in 15 years of experience in literacy, language instruction, and community development among diverse populations. Through working in both international and local contexts, I have developed a deep interest in social justice, inclusion, and education. The need for research and resources on this topic is urgent. For example, in 2009, a colleague and I were asked to give a presentation at a conference focused on mental health and English language acquisition. During the question and answer period we were inundated with questions about the availability of resources for LINC instructors tasked with teaching English to students known or believed to have suffered from or be

suffering from trauma. Also, Literacy British Columbia (now called Decoda) had asked me to join an advisory committee to investigate EAL, trauma, and teacher support. In addition, my discussions and joint presentations with other English language instructors prompted me to begin this research. I started this work with Jenny Horsman's groundbreaking book, *Too Scared to Learn*. However, I realized Horsman's book is among a handful of sources on this topic. There is a dearth of literature that examines the role of trauma in language learning and that could inform language learning policies.

Through my work with Vancouver Coastal Health Mental Health Services, I piloted an EAL class in 2008 for people experiencing trauma or Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). The students in this program were women who were suffering or had suffered from domestic and/or political violence and who had attended English Language Services for Adults (ELSA) classes in the past.

Students were often referred to this project from educational institutions or non-profit societies where they were *pushed out*; the rules regarding participation and progress did not take into account their lived experience, specifically how trauma impacted their capacity to learn. For example, attendance rules can lead to a student with mental health issues that result in he or she being unable to regularly attend classes being pushed out of a program. Some students drop out for financial reasons and heavy work schedules. For example, one policy that existed under ELSA was,<sup>1</sup> "ELSA students are expected to attend all or almost all of their classes and to attend on time" (ELSANet, 2008, n.p.). As an example, I worked closely with a woman who could

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1 Deirdre Kelly uses the term push out in her book *Last Chance High* to show how students often do not want to leave school (dropout) but are pushed out by rule, regulations and expectations that deny their lived experience.

not attend ELSA classes due to the severity of her PTSD symptoms so we had to support and teach her individually.

As my work in this class and my work as an instructor within Vancouver Coastal Health Mental Health Services' Access Community through English (ACE) program progressed, I heard horrendous stories of violence, loss, and isolation. I also noticed that certain challenges to learning arose repeatedly. These challenges included irregular attendance of classes, what appeared to be flashbacks, fear, cognitive issues (including challenges with memory and focus), and problems interacting with others. The challenges of creating an inclusive classroom for students dealing with trauma led me to ask how other teachers outside of ACE worked with EAL students suffering from trauma and if these students might be excluded inadvertently from participating in ELSA classes.

Over the years that I worked with the women in the class I piloted, my role as instructor changed significantly. I believe this change was a result of the trust and flexibility that was eventually established. I began the practice of speaking with the students and encouraging them to attend. I also shaped the curriculum to be more flexible and informed by what the students requested (and felt they needed to understand). Given the challenges these students had with attendance, I shifted my attendance expectations and allowed them to arrive at any time during our hour-and-a-half session. Additionally, the class focus was not solely on English language acquisition but was also about connecting with students' communities and building support systems. I had also begun to realize through a conversation with one of my committee members (Shauna Butterwick) that the term "post" (as in Post Traumatic Stress

Disorder) is somewhat inaccurate as these women presently face systemic barriers and poverty that continue to create trauma. In the fall of 2010, I piloted a new class with the Vancouver Association for Survivors of Torture (VAST) to continue exploring how to bring language learning opportunities to those who, due to restrictive program policies, might be unable to access such conventional learning opportunities.

### **Researcher's Social Location**

I was born in 1970 in a small town in eastern Ontario into a white middle class family that was, particularly on my mother's side, heavily involved in politics and social justice issues in Canada. Both of my grandparents worked for peace, fairness, and equal opportunity. There is a housing co-op named after them in Toronto. My grandfather was a lifelong active Anglican, a lawyer, and founding member of the New Democratic Party and he was a Member of Parliament (MP) for 17 years. As an MP my grandfather was involved in obtaining reparation for Japanese Canadians after their internment during the Second World War. My mother was also politically active, running for office federally, provincially and locally. She was involved in the anti-nuclear movement and other social justice issues. Throughout my childhood I was taught that critical reflection was vitally important and that one must question dominant values. I remember having discussions around the dinner table about abortion, nuclear disarmament and racism. I remember my opinion being valued on these issues. My family, principally my mother, taught me that it is essential to use one's position of privilege for positive social change. She taught me that it is important to act and also to reflect.

I started working in literacy over 15 years ago, specifically in EAL. I have worked “in the field” both in Canada and abroad in varying capacities. For example, with Frontier College (a national literacy organization), I taught English and life skills to farm workers and live-in caregivers. Prior to this, I taught English as a Second Language in Korea and was involved in a number of community development programs in the Solomon Islands and Brazil. In addition, I worked for a number of years with newly arrived Afghan families in a family literacy program in South Burnaby. My work in the EAL field has largely focused on marginalized people who are excluded from conventional EAL programs.

### **Academic Influences**

As a graduate student, I was introduced to Paulo Freire and his ideas. Freirian principles are evidenced in my daily life and in my work, including my interest in critical educational practices. The reason I became involved in literacy, EAL, and transformative educational practices revolves around my beliefs that education must perform a role in the fight for social justice. My family, my academic experience, my work and most importantly students with whom I work demonstrate to me that *liberatory* (Freire, 1995) education and critical thinking can be part of a practice for social justice.

I was also introduced to the notion of “equitable educational practice,” education that adheres to the principles of social justice (Young 1995). Young’s (1995) notion of justice “refers not only to distribution, but also to the institutional conditions necessary for the development and exercise of individual capacities and collective communication and cooperation” (p. 3). Her work also connected to my feminist sensibilities. Young’s

theory and principles provide a framework to better understand the role of education and the impact of education. She also helped me understand the intersections between different forms of oppression. The individual, as a whole person in his/her own learning, is pivotal. Learners are not objects in the learning process (Freire, 1995). Instead, they are subjects and bring a myriad of experiences, thoughts, and ideas to their learning. The experience of the students cannot be looked at separate from all other oppression they may face in their lives including poverty, racism, sexism, and classism. Young provides a nuanced way of examining multiple oppressions and ways of thinking about alternative society. Later in the dissertation, I will explore these theories further.

### **Conceptual Framework and Key Concepts**

I use a framework based on Paulo Freire's work on critical literacy. In discussing critical literacy, Freire (1995) put forth many ideas, but for the purpose of my research I have explored three key concepts that relate to my research focus. First, a critique of the banking model of education; second, a discussion of a more dialogical approach; and lastly, the concept of praxis. Iris Marion Young's "Five Faces of Oppression" became another key contribution to my framework. Young's work suggests a way to look at oppression, which involves considering five types of oppression. These five types are used to discriminate and assert dominance, and will be discussed in Chapter 2. Her work is extremely useful in understanding how students who have experienced trauma may be marginalized within mainstream Canadian society. This work was also extremely helpful in my data analysis around oppression.

## **Trauma**

My use of the term “trauma” throughout this paper, is heavily influenced by the work of Horsman (1999) and Martin-Baro (1994). They both argue against a medicalized and individualized definition of trauma. They look at an alternative view of trauma that addresses socio-political factors and the context of people’s experience. Similar to these theorists, I see trauma as a loss of connection, power and meaning. I would also say trauma should not be confined to an individualized definition or viewed as an uncommon experience within our global context. More details about the discourse around trauma are provided in Chapter 2. I concur with conceptualizing trauma not only as an individual problem but as part of structural violence that is social and political.

## **ESL to EAL**

I have chosen use of the term English as an Additional Language (EAL) instead of English as a Second Language (ESL) because it reflects the reality as many EAL students speak a number of languages prior to coming to studying English.

## **Research Questions**

My underlying research question is as follows: From the perspective of Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada (LINC) instructors working within BC, how can students who have experienced trauma be better supported? Given this overall question, through my research I sought to answer the following sub-questions:

1. What understandings are held by LINC instructors about trauma and its effect on learning?
  - a. What barriers do LINC instructors face when trying to support students who have experienced trauma?
  - b. In what ways do LINC instructors attempt to mitigate barriers to learning for and with students who have experienced trauma?
2. How can this action oriented research support LINC instructors working with people who have experienced trauma? What collective actions at the level of policy can be taken to create inclusive LINC classes for students who have experienced trauma?

### **Dissertation Structure**

This chapter has outlined why I decided to conduct research on LINC instructors working with students who have experienced trauma. I have discussed in the chapter the scope and significance of my research, and how my own position connects to my research interest. I have also included a brief discussion on my conceptual framework and some important terms I will be using throughout the dissertation, including “trauma” and “EAL”.

Chapter 2 further explores my conceptual framework through a literature review on literacy. Beginning with exploring Paulo Freire’s work in critical literacy, the chapter pays close attention to his critique of the banking model, his dialogic approach and his notion of praxis. In looking at Freire I explore some of the critiques of his work from feminist and post-colonialist writers. Chapter 2 also outlines specific aspects of Iris

Marion Young's work and how these can frame a discussion on marginalization of students who have experienced trauma.

Chapter 3 looks at the literature around language policy in Canada. I look at related discourses of citizenship, the economy and the LINC program. The chapter then explores different conceptualizations of trauma. Finally, it includes a brief overview of the small body of literature on trauma and learning with particular attention paid to the work of Jenny Horsman.

Chapter 4 describes the action research methodology utilized in this study and the three-stage approach taken. This chapter provides a discussion on why a combination of interviews and a focus group was chosen as the means of gathering data. Finally, this chapter also looks at the issue of the validity of this research.

Chapter 5 presents the data from the interviews and focus groups. The chapter also explores the themes that emerged from this study as they connect to the research questions.

Chapter 6 presents the data and makes recommendations for places of change to the LINC program.

Finally, Chapter 7 presents the conclusions to this study. This chapter also outlines the limitations to this research and offers potential areas for further study and research.

The last section of this study lists the references used for the research and the appendices which include (Appendix A) the first interview questions, (Appendix B) the focus group questions, (Appendix C) final interview questions, (Appendix D) coding sheet which include the preliminary themes from the focus group, (Appendix E) the

consent form, (Appendix F) initial letter to participate in the interviews, and (Appendix G) a list of the research instructors and their pseudonyms.

## Chapter 2: Theoretical Framework

### Introduction

This chapter explores the definitions, influences, principles, and approaches of critical literacy, which served as the theoretical basis for my study. It starts with an overview of the work of Paulo Freire, the work that informed the methodological approach for this research and my conceptualization of EAL and critical literacy. I will then move to some of the critiques of his particular approach to critical pedagogy including feminist and post-colonialist critiques of his work. This chapter also explores Iris Marion Young's theoretical framework of social justice that informed the framing of my findings Chapters.

### Critical Literacy

Critical approaches are nothing new in EAL and literacy. As many writers have indicated, there is an immense body of literature that discusses the value of critical pedagogy as an alternative approach to conventional methods and approaches to EAL instruction. (Auerbach & Burgess, 1985; and Lin, 2006; Norton & Toohey, 2004; Pennycook, 1998; Ricento, 2000).

In the field of education, the terms “critical pedagogy” and “critical literacy” are often associated with the work of scholars such as Freire (1995), Luke (2004), and McLaren (1989) in the field of education. Freire is most noted for two key books: *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1995) and *Literacy: Reading the Word and the World* (1987), texts regarded as foundational to critical pedagogy and the critical literacy

movement. Darder, Baltodanot and Torres (2009) have argued that, “Paulo Freire is considered by many to be the most influential educational philosopher in the development of critical pedagogical thought and practice” (p. 5). Many scholars working in the fields of adult and literacy education use and have been influenced by Freire’s concepts surrounding critical pedagogy. hooks (1994) maintains, “I had learned so much from [Freire’s] work, learned new ways of thinking about social reality that were liberatory” (p. 45).

In *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Paulo Freire (1995) offers an example of how critical literacy is developed within a specific educational context. Freire’s critical literary framework is grounded in his critique of certain models of education (i.e. the banking model) that positioned learners as empty vessels to be filled with others’ knowledge and ignored the wider context of learning; he also questioned the myth of neutrality in education. His proposal was for an alternative approach to literacy education, one that addresses people’s realities and promotes equality for all. The final element he addresses is the importance of praxis to transform people’s realities. As Giroux (1987) says in his introduction to *Literacy: Reading the Word and the World*, “...central to Freire’s approach to literacy is a dialectical relationship between human beings and the world, on the one hand, and language and transformative agency, on the other” (p. 7).

Paulo Freire's work emphasized the impact of power relationships and demanded an analysis of inequality and the importance of active participation in the promotion of social justice. Freire promoted adult literacy techniques that involved consciousness raising and encouraging people to see themselves as active agents in their own lives. Freire’s work informed literacy programs and policies in Chile, Brazil,

Nicaragua, and post-independence African countries. Freire was heavily influenced by Marxist theory and thinking in his work. He uses class analysis to show that only a small group of people profit from the status quo. His influence and methods were far reaching and had an impact on literacy programs globally, including in Latin America, Africa, Europe and North America.

### **Banking Model**

As mentioned earlier, a key contribution of Freire's approach is his critique of the banking model and the utilitarian approaches to literacy. Freire problematized this model and the objectification of the students and teachers. Freire (1995) argued that the banking concept imposes a split between a person or persons (teacher and/or student) and the “real world”. Freire contended that by accepting the roles of teachers as depositors and students as receptors, the banking concept thereby changes humans into objects. Humans (as objects) have no independence and therefore no capacity to rationalize and conceptualize knowledge at a personal level. As a result of this objectification, the method itself is a system of oppression and control. Freire (1995) argued, “In the banking concept of education, knowledge is a gift bestowed by those who consider themselves knowledgeable upon those whom they consider to know nothing” (p.58). In the banking model of education Freire states that people are being taught how to be oppressed and to fear freedom. The banking model of education insists that the world is fixed and forces the students to adapt to it.

McLaren (2009) contended that “the dominant curriculum separates knowledge from the issue of power and treats it in an unabashedly technical manner: knowledge is

seen in overwhelmingly instrumental terms as something to be mastered” (p.72). This relates quite easily to the discourse around what is called “survival English” and the mastery of language skills. Survival English refers to the acquisition of basic language in order to function in a community. This could mean how to read a bus schedule, make a doctor’s appointment or even fill out a basic job application.

Another aspect of Freire’s (1987) critique of the conventional “teacher role” includes advising teachers to avoid perceiving themselves as specialists. The dominant model sees teachers as the epistemological authority in the EAL classroom and students’ pre-existing knowledge is ignored or devalued aside from, according to the banking model, what was deposited into them through their earlier education. Again this will be discussed further in the literature review section on language policy in Canada. The role of the educator, Macedo and Freire (1987) argued, is to work with students to move towards critical consciousness through dialogue that is non-hierarchical and is driven by acts of love and hope. Greene (2009) further mentions, “To engage students as persons is to affirm our own incompleteness, our conscious of spaces still to be explored, desires still to be tapped, possibilities still to be opened and pursued” (p. 95).

Building on a critical paradigm that recognizes the relative nature of learning and education, Paulo Freire (1995) critiqued traditional educational practices and specifically examined and challenged the teacher’s role in the education process using the banking model as an example (in reference to traditional or conventional teacher-as-expert pedagogy). Freire (1995) argued that this teaching method adheres to principles of false charity. False charity, he argued, perpetuates oppression and maintains the subject/object dichotomy within the student /teacher relationship. Freire (1995) argued for

solidarity between "the oppressor and the oppressed" and claimed that true liberation will only take place when both groups work together for emancipation.

### **Dialogic Approach**

Freire (1987) argued that in contrast to the banking model, critical literacy is premised on true dialogue. Freire (1995) contended critical literacy encourages learners to confront and transform the world, not simply to adapt to the dominant hegemony. According to Allman's (2009) assessment of Freire, "Dialogue, therefore, is a collaborative form of education and learning which, even though it involves challenge, creates trust rather than animosity" (p. 427). Allman (2009) also argued that dialogue is "most fundamentally ...a form of communication, which enables people to grasp the dialectical movements of their reality" (p. 427). Westerman (2009) observed that:

. . . what sets Freire's method apart is that the student becomes an active instructor in the educational process, through questions, dialogue, and the introduction of life experience; the teacher does not have all the answers, and the contents of the reading primers are no longer irrelevant phonetic phrases, but sentences that reflect on the everyday life reality of the student. (p. 548)

To Freire, literacy, as in all things educational, is a political process and one that requires the teacher and the student to respect each other's position; and to ensure that there is cultural relevance in the delivery of the program or the process will not be

liberating. Freire's (1995) educational strategies are informed by a problem-posing approach to education in which both students and teachers are subjects in the learning process. Freire (1995) maintained that problem posing education was key to critical consciousness. This method begins with looking at the life experiences and reality of people. These experiences are turned into problem posing situations. He (1995) stated, "I must not reduce my instructional practice to the sole teaching of technique or content, leaving untouched the exercise of a critical understanding of reality" (p.44). His work focused on demonstrating to people that they have a right to ask questions about their own lives and histories. Critical literacy, Freire (1987) argued, creates a new space for emancipatory education. Liberatory education, he contends, encourages learners to confront and transform the world, not simply adapt to the hegemony. The curriculum and function of liberatory education is to create a dialogical process that promotes political and economic change. Liberatory education works with and supports other social justice movements. Freire (1995) stated, "Liberating education consists in acts of cognition, not transferrals of information" (p.67).

Freire (1995) argued for a critical analysis of the world around us. His framework speaks to the importance of understanding the socio-political and psycho-emotional context within which students are expected to learn English. For example, in *Literacy: Reading the Word and the World* (1987), a book he co-authored with Donaldo Macedo, Freire insisted upon an understanding of the connections between the individual and social practices (literacy education in particular). Critical engagement is key to Freirian principles and aims to meet each student at their own unique starting point. In *The Critical Pedagogy Reader* (2009) Ira Shor stated the following:

This educational work means, finally, inventing what Richard Ohman (1987) referred to as a “literacy from below” that questions the way things are and imagines alternatives, so that the word and the world may meet in history for a dream of social justice. (p. 301)

Freire (1995) espoused an acknowledgement and a clear understanding of the power differentiations in society. He argued that we must examine who holds the power in our society and the inequitable systems that create oppression. He used the examples of traditional schooling and dominating bureaucracy. He also argued that we must look at our own role within these systems of oppression. According to Freire (1987) we have to consider the friction that exists between individuals and societal practices. This means understanding the barriers and dominant ideological construction that exist in society in order to change one’s situation and comprehension of the world. Freire referred to the importance of understanding the interconnections of those who hold the power in defining and shaping the world (the subjects) and those who do not (the objects). As McLaren (2009) states, “critical pedagogy asks how our everyday common sense understanding—our social constructions or ‘subjectivities’—get produced and lived out” (p. 72).

## **Praxis**

Freire’s model of praxis serves as a good starting point for me in my work as an educator. Freire (1995) asserted that developing critical consciousness is insufficient and that action (making change to society) is also necessary and, following this, serious

reflection must occur. He referred to this as *praxis*: the process involving critical consciousness, action, and reflection. He maintained that it is not enough for people to come together in dialogue in order to gain knowledge of their social reality. They must act together to reflect on it and transform it.

Freire urged educators and researchers to instruct with a critical understanding of the wider socio-political and socio-cultural contexts. This advice provided me with a framework for reflecting on existing practices and imagining new practices and forms of activism (such as establishing with the instructors who participated in my research an alternative to current LINC instruction, policies, and curriculum).

### **Critiques of Freire**

Many theorists and practitioners of critical theory, including feminist, post colonist, and anti-racist theorists (Escueta, 2010; Taylor, 1993; Schugurensky, 1998; Siddhartha, 2005) have highlighted some of the challenges inherent in Freire's work, most particularly in, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. Mok Escueta's dissertation (2010), *Popular Education in Collective Recovery and Reconstruction from Continuing Complex Traumatic Stress: A Collaborative Psycho Education Approach*, offered an extensive account of the criticisms aimed at Freire's framework of emancipatory education. I have utilized these positions to inform my critique of Freire.

Esteva, Stuchul, and Prakash (2005) have argued that Freire's model of power does not acknowledge different world-views, beliefs, and complex social systems. They note specifically his assumptions about class, values and knowledge and argue that in fact *conscientization* is another form of oppression. They argued that his approach

presumed that one can be liberated and can in fact reach a sophisticated level of awareness. “Conscientization is, in fact, new wine for old bottles-the bottles of colonization” (p.16). These authors also noted how Freire never questioned the supposition that education is a good thing. In Esteva, Stuchul and Prakash’s estimation “Education is promoted in the name of equality and justice. Education is presented as the best remedy for the oppressive inequalities of modern society. It produces, however exactly the opposite” (p.21). Further to this Ellsworth (1989) maintains, “Strategies such as student empowerment and dialogue give the illusion of equality while in fact leaving the authoritarian nature of the teacher/student relationship intact” (p.306).

These theorists (Esteva, Stuchul, & Prakash, 2005; Siddhartha, 2005) considered Freire’s pedagogy prescriptive and inaccessible. Paul Taylor (1993) argued that Freire’s pedagogy represents the banking model:

The rhetoric which announced the importance of dialogue, engagement, and equality, and denounced silence, massification and oppression, did not match in practice the subliminal messages and modes of a Banking System of education. Albeit benign, Freire's approach differs only in degree, but not in kind, from the system which he so eloquently criticizes. (p.148)

Others noted how Freire failed to look at the intersections between class, race, and gender. This lack of due consideration can reinforce systems of oppression and serve as a colonizing force. For Siddhartha (2005), “Freire divided social reality after the Marxist manner into ‘oppressed’ and ‘oppressor’. Today the two-class theory has lost its

lustre” (p.84-85). This dichotomy between oppressor and oppressed, while contextually understandable, does not take into account all of the complexities of the world in which we live. As Schugurensky (1998) pointed out, human beings can simultaneously be oppressed and act as oppressors according to their different identities (class, gender, race, age, ability, religion, etc).

Schugurensky (1998) also maintained that Freire’s focus on class struggle, does not allow for the actuality of oppression within social groups. Siddharta (2005) goes further and states that Freire’s class analysis, “Although a conceptually useful tool for mobilising people it is nevertheless inadequate to understand complex social systems” (p.85).

Escueta (2010) also called attention to Freire’s use of inaccessible language, particularly in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1995) and referred to others’ critiques of Freire’s use of sexist language in his work. Similarly Martin (1998) confers that Paulo Freire failed to address gender in his initial discussions and analysis of oppression: “When he fails to integrate specific elements into the relational framework (as so often happens with gender), or when he truncates or distorts a particular relation (as also happens with gender), he should be taken to task” (p.121). bell hooks (1994) also speaks at length about Freire’s use of exclusive language and sexism in his work. She also refers to his “blind spots” and the historical context of his work.

*In Pedagogy of Hope*, (2004) Freire reflected on the specific criticism around his lack of discussion on gender and took responsibility for it, trying thereafter to use more inclusive language. He speaks of his lack of discussion on gender in a dialogue with Donaldo Macedo (1995): “Given the seriousness and the complexity of the gender

issue, it merits reflection in conjunction with a rigorous analysis regarding the phenomenon of oppression" (p.170).

Ellsworth's (1989) critique explored the difference between the aim of critical pedagogy and the actual practice within a classroom, arguing that key critical pedagogy using Freirean terms such as "empowerment, dialogue, student voice and even critical are repressive myths that sustain relations of domination and exacerbated 'banking education'" (p.298). She further noted that the theories and practices around critical pedagogy actually serve to perpetuate the very things Freire was critiquing.

Freire addressed some of these criticisms further in his later writing, including *Pedagogy of Hope* (2004). He looked back upon his work, particularly *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, and the critiques surrounding it and acknowledged his use of sexist and colonialist language and continued to call for critical dialogue.

Regardless of the criticisms levelled at Freire's works, Freire's ideas had a profound effect on bell hooks' thinking, specifically regarding literacy and consciousness-raising. hooks referred to Freire's notions of reflection and action in *Teaching to Transgress* (1994). I am struck by what bell hooks said about Freire and the importance of his work in critical educational practices: "To have work that promotes one's liberation is such a powerful gift that it does not matter so much if the gift is flawed. Think of the work as water that contains some dirt. Because you are thirsty you are not too proud to extract the dirt and be nourished by the water" (hooks, 1994, p.50). Escueta (2010) spoke to this as well by saying, "paradigm shifts need to be made where they are needed and this is abundantly allowed for and encouraged in Freire's work" (p. 59).

Like hooks and Escueta, I see substantial value in Freire's contributions and his alternate way of looking at education and the role of the instructor in this process. His view provides a stark contrast to traditional approaches to literacy and language education. There is much documented about how critical pedagogy is used in EAL classrooms and the problems around its use in classrooms. (Auerbach & Burgess, 1985; Lin, 2006; Norton & Toohey, 2004; Pennycook, 1998; Ricento, 2000;). Lin (2004) looked at the challenge, complexities and resistance around introducing critical pedagogy to teacher training. Pennycook (2004) looked at the critical moments where instructors can address power and critically reflect on their practice. There have been further problems bringing a Freirian approach as policy makers and instructors generally work within a certain capitalist ideological framework. The ideological approach is evident in government-funded EAL for newcomers in Canada where predetermined learning outcomes (Canadian Language Benchmarks) greatly limit the pedagogical approach EAL teachers are able to bring to their classrooms. I will look at these challenges further in Chapters 5 and 6. I now turn my attention to Young's theorizations about social injustice, which provided a crucial lens through which to extend Freire's conceptualization of oppression.

## **Social Justice**

There are various frameworks for understanding social justice. I chose the work (1990) of Iris Marion Young as it helped me to conceptualize the multiplicity of experiences of oppression that both the instructors interviewed for this project and their students may have experienced. As stated in my introduction, Young's work was useful in

conceptualizing more equitable education practices. Her framework also helped me understand the possible intersections and locations to respond to these forms of oppression. In order to achieve social justice, Young (1990) deemed as necessary “the full participation and inclusion of everyone in a society’s major institutions, and the socially substantive opportunity for all to develop and exercise their capacities and realize their choices” (p. 173). Her principles of social justice built and reinforced for me the notion and possibilities of equitable education and aided the framing of my ideas of social justice and broadening Freire's framework. Young, like Freire, argued that oppression is enacted when people reduce the potential for other people to be fully human by dehumanizing them. Oppression can involve denying people language, education, and other opportunities.

Oppression consists in systematic institutional processes, which prevent some people from learning and using satisfying and expansive skills in socially recognized settings, and/or in institutionalized social processes which inhibit people’s ability to play and communicate with others or to express their feelings and perspective on social life in contexts where others can listen. (Young, 1990, p. 38)

Young (1990) developed five faces or types of oppression: exploitation, marginalization, powerlessness, cultural imperialism and violence. These are outlined below. Young explained that the five faces of oppression can overlap with each other in many ways.

Exploitation, Young argued, uses capitalism to oppress people; the *haves* end up exploiting the *have-nots* for their work. Exploitation creates a system that perpetuates

class differences. She saw marginalization as the act of relegating or restricting a group of people to a lower social position. Through marginalization a group of people are excluded from useful participation in social life and the labour market. As a result, these groups are subjected to severe material impoverishment. Students who have experienced trauma may be pushed out or drop out of language classes and are then further marginalized because they don't gain the language needed to have choices and opportunities in society.

Powerlessness, Young (1990) argued, means people are unable to participate in basic democratic processes because they feel that they cannot or that their participation will not mean anything. In most cases, it means not voting or participating in any decision-making process. However, the deeper forms of powerlessness are more insidious. Paulo Freire believed that powerlessness is the strongest form of oppression because it allows people to oppress themselves and others.

Cultural imperialism, Young explained, involves making the culture of the dominant groups the norm. Dominant groups that have power in society to direct how people within a given society interact. The dominant group disseminates and expresses values of the society as a whole. As Pennycook (1989) demonstrated, there are connections between cultural imperialism and the dominance of the English language. Pennycook links between colonialism to the dominance of English throughout the world.

Lastly, violence is probably the most pronounced and visible form of oppression. As Young says, violence is oppressive not only because of its direct impact but also because members of various groups live with the knowledge that violence is always a possibility in their lives.

Young's five aspects of oppression can be adapted and extended to EAL education. The five faces can help demonstrate how instructors understand oppression and barriers for their students and provides new ways to think about what social justice means in their classroom. I think it is particularly helpful for recognizing the intersections between different types of oppression for students. It also helps to frame and understand responses as instructors to each face of oppression.

### **Chapter Summary**

This chapter explored the theoretical framework utilized in this study and began by focusing on critical literacy, paying particular reference to the work of Paulo Freire. I then explored the work of Iris Marion Young and her definition of social justice and analysis of oppression. I looked specifically at her Five Faces of Oppression, which include: oppression: exploitation, marginalization, powerlessness, cultural imperialism and violence. In the next chapter, the larger policy context of LINC is examined, specifically Canada's immigration and English language policy.

## Chapter 3: Immigration and Language Policy in Canada

### Chapter Introduction

This chapter examines the larger context of language education policy in Canada, both from an historical and a current perspective, as a means to understanding the discourse within the LINC program. The medical and sociopolitical understanding of the term trauma is then discussed. Lastly, I explore a small body of literature that addresses trauma and learning.

### Connecting Multiculturalism and Language Policies in Canada

The foundation and continuation of Canada's two official languages and the positioning of minority languages have long been key matters in Canadian nation building and in supporting Canada's economic growth. Canada's linguistic state must be understood through policies such as the *Official Languages Act* (OLA) and the *Multicultural Act* (MA). As Cray and Hague (2006) state:

Language policies such as the OLA and the MA have had an essential place in the construction and maintenance of the image of Canada as a diverse but unified settler nation and have, as well, ensured the marginalization of languages other than French and English. (p.73)

In Canada when Europeans arrived and made contact with Aboriginal peoples, Aboriginal languages were "quickly dismissed" (Cray and Hague, 2006, p.73). In 1867, the year of Confederation, English and French became the languages of the Parliament

of Canada and became the national founding languages. While English and French were deemed the official languages of Canada, Aboriginal languages, were seen as unimportant, as merely “dialects”. In 1969 the Parliament of Canada enacted the first *Official Language Act*. which recognized the equal status of English and French: “Its primary goal was to ensure that Canadian citizens had access to federal services in the official language of their choice” (Government of Canada, 2014). Bannerji, (2000); Kubota, (2004); Adam-Moodley, (1999) have argued that these acts and the subsequent policies around multiculturalism, of which language policy has been a key component, have been a way to construct a very clear national identity and maintain otherness. Bannerji (2000) critiqued the concept of multiculturalism, contending that it “is an essentialized version of a colonial European turned into Canadian and the subject or the agent of Canadian nationalism” (p. 42). Cray and Hague (2006) asserted that:

The wording of these official announcements (the new Multiculturalism Policy in the House of Commons) reflects the government’s unwillingness to acknowledge the relationship between language and culture for so-called cultural groups and its insistence on establishing and maintaining boundaries between those who speak an official language and those who are speakers of non-official languages. (p. 75)

### **Connecting Immigration and Language Policies**

Official bilingualism within a multicultural state has had significant influence on the provision of language education and employment training policy within Canada. Nation building and economic policy have intersected over time with immigration policy and in

turn with language policies. Although some Canadian immigration policies have focused on migration for humanitarian purposes, this has become increasingly less of a priority, as evidenced in the Balanced Refugee Reform Act in June 2010 and the Protecting Canada's Immigration System Act of June 2012. Lawyers, mental health professionals, and Amnesty International (CCR, 2012) have expressed serious concerns that through these acts refugee experience further injustices and trauma. The new laws and policies mean refugee's claimants face discrimination in a number of ways including the denial of access to health care (Globe and Mail, 2014). In 2014, under Bill C-31, the federal government designated refugees as "irregular arrivals". These claimants face mandatory detention, fewer rights in the refugee determination system and a long-term ban on permanent status because of their designation as "irregular arrivals". As well, some claimants will have fewer rights because they come from a "designated country of origin (DOC)". These countries are mostly European countries including the Czech Republic, Slovak Republic and Hungary where Roma people are claiming discrimination and persecution. Mexico is another country classified as a DOC.

Historically, Canada's immigration policies have been developed to ensure Canada's economic growth and to increase the Canadian workforce. EAL historically had labour- related objectives and was administered by the employment side of Employment and Immigration Canada. Burnaby (1998) argues, "the purpose of the program was explicitly to 'unlock' their [immigrants'] occupational skills" (p. 249). As Gibb (2012) states:

If building a knowledge economy requires a labour force capable of sophisticated manipulation of symbols and codified knowledge, it is

perhaps not surprising that the English language capability of new immigrants has become a key concern of the Canadian government. (p.2)

The following recent quote from Chris Alexander, Canada's Citizenship and Immigration Minister, highlights the current government's policy around immigration:

Our government is focused on attracting experienced business people and raising investment capital that will contribute to our economic success over the long term. Our government will continue to focus on economic immigration programs that make sense for Canada by ensuring our economic and labour market needs are being met now and into the future. (Government of Canada, 2014)

Here we see that immigrants are seen as a source of economic capital. Immigrants and refugees not identified as "business people", and therefore without the ability to increase investment capital are seen as liabilities in a global marketplace. Since 2006 the federal government has shifted Canada's immigration system toward a two-tiered process. Immigrants are first encouraged to come to Canada as temporary residents through studies or employment and then apply for permanent status. As Amin Yazdani said in the Toronto Star, "The government is making it harder for people to come, contribute and have a say in Canada" (Toronto Star, 2015).

## **Connecting Discourses of Citizenship, the Economy and LINC**

Prior to 1992, EAL instruction emphasized employment issues and there was very little content addressing the Canadian social context. Since the inception of LINC in 1992, however, the federal government has directed that introductory EAL classes focus on language for both integration and employment. Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC) states that the purpose of LINC is to contribute to the key strategic objective of CIC's settlement program, that is, "to support the settlement and integration of newcomers to Canada" (CIC, 2004).

LINC has always been seen as part of settlement services and has offered EAL with a focus on Survival English (Auerbach & Burgess, 1985). Survival English is a term utilized to explain the basic English skills a person needs to learn to live or work in low skilled jobs in an English speaking environment. Only newly arrived immigrants and refugees who have been approved for permanent residence can access LINC classes. The LINC program has increased LINC Levels to include LINC 5-10, which means a slight shift in the focus to job preparation and economic productivity.<sup>2</sup> Hajer, Kaskens & Stasiak (2014) argue that the LINC 5-7 Curriculum Guidelines are based on the theory of communicative competence, a theory of second language acquisition, which assumes that five areas of communication must be achieved in order for a learner to be proficient in a language. These areas include linguistic, discourse, functional, socio-cultural and strategic competency. The trend and changes in immigration have impacted the shift to increasing the levels of English provided by LINC.

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2 LINC was designed to provide basic language training and knowledge about Canada. When it was started in 1992 it offered three levels of LINC training. Currently BC offers LINC up to Level 8.

The Canadian Language Benchmarks (CLB) is the national standard used in Canada for describing, measuring and recognizing the English language proficiency of current and prospective adult immigrants. The LINC curriculum is influenced by the CLB. Developed by the Government of Canada, the CLB sets the design and development of language proficiency standards in Canada. The following is a description of the CLB:

The Canadian Language Benchmarks is based on a functional view of language, language use and language proficiency. Such a view relates language to the contexts in which it is used and the communicative functions it performs. The focus of the Canadian Language Benchmarks is thus on communication and communicative proficiency in English as a second language. (Pawlikowska–Smith, 2002, p. 5)

The ELSA program was a federally funded program but administered provincially, but as of April 1, 2014 the federal government of Canada, through CIC, resumed responsibility for the direct delivery of the settlement program in British Columbia and the LINC Program was reintroduced. This change occurred alongside other efforts by the Federal government to streamline and further standardize language classes it funds. The LINC program now gets all of its funding from the federal government. The program continues to use the Canadian Language Benchmarks and the Niveaux de Compétence Linguistique as the standards for measuring language levels. Shifting the responsibility of newcomer language instruction back to the federal government has meant many changes to language delivery in the province of BC, including the process of the call for

proposals and how and with which service providers the contracts are negotiated and delivered. One of the results is there is now less teacher preparation time, and another result is a decrease in service for lower LINC level students.

As well, over the past several years, there have been other significant changes that have taken place in language requirements across Canada. Higher levels of English proficiency are now required in the four following areas: speaking, reading, listening, and writing. The government states:

As of July 1, 2012, most applicants for semi- and low-skilled occupations under the Provincial Nominee Program will be required to first take a language proficiency test and obtain a minimum standard of CLB 4 across all four categories: listening, speaking, reading and writing. (Government of Canada, 2012)

There has also been a change in the assessment frameworks utilized under the LINC program and other EAL programs. CLB, for example, in partnership with LINC is setting up a project intended to introduce Portfolio-Based Language Assessment (PBLA) as a standard feature of LINC. PBLA is described as the following:

PBLA is embedded in curriculum and is an integral part of the teaching and learning cycle. Teachers and students collaborate to set language learning goals, compile numerous examples of language proficiency and learning in a variety of contexts over time, analyze the data, and reflect on progress. (Pettis, 2011)

While a PBLA approach appears to customize LINC classes for diverse learners, the assumptions around what language must be learned and the timing expected for this learning is actually a barrier to teachers and students in developing individualized goals and time-limes for language learning.

The Canadian Language Benchmarks 2000 (CLB, 2000) was developed to mediate the assessment of immigrants' English language abilities under the auspices of establishing a standardized and unified approach to language assessment that will assist with immigrants' civic and labour market integration. (p.19)

The CLB systematizes English language assessments and, as Gibb (2012) argued, "The CLB 2000 articulates a perspective of language as a fixed system bounded within the borders of the nation-state" (p.46). The topics are deemed relevant to many students' lives and address the skills that are deemed necessary for daily life in Canada. Language Instruction Support and Training Network (LISTN), formerly ELSANet is a professional organization, which promotes professional development, communication and networking for LINC (previously ELSA) instructors. LISTN, gave the following information about ELSA:

You will learn English to help you with all your communication needs. You will learn about Canadian laws, health care, society, job market, and many things that are important for life in Canada. At the highest ELSA levels you can prepare for further studies in English or raise your English level to

qualify for training for employment. To work in Canada in your field or occupation, you may need to learn more English after ELSA class ends. (ELSA Net, 2008, n.p.)

This view I would argue sees society as stagnant and learners as blank slates that are taught how to live in a pre-existing determined context. The current LINC curriculum continues to cover a number of topics including employment, health, family, and shopping, which fit into the traditional notions of language instruction and Survival English. It is characterized by (and perhaps utilized to promote) the existing ideas of citizenship, economic productivity, and social integration. As Luke (2004) states “teaching remains about, within, and for the nation, tacitly about the protection and production of its Culture (and, by implication, its preferred ethnicities and races, languages, and codes) committed to the production of its sovereign subjects” (p. 24).

The curriculum focuses on adaptation to the Canadian culture and its norms with the teachers acting as the translators of these themes. However, although the topics of the LINC curriculum are relevant or even crucial for day-to-day living in Canada, the assumptions about language learners and immigrants can create barriers for those students who do not fit into the picture of the *ideal immigrant*, in particular individuals coping with structural oppression including poverty, racism, sexism and the stigma of mental illness. Based on the literature identified in this study, I saw little evidence of any discussion about the root causes of the flaws in current LINC programming, most particularly the disproportionate emphasis placed on productivity and functionality over the exploration of the socio-political situations and the related barriers that many students face and how they may impact learning. As Young (1990) argues, “while

marginalization definitely entails serious issues of distributive justice, it also involves the deprivation of cultural, practical, and institutionalized conditions for exercising capacities in a context of recognition and interaction” (p. 51). Auerbach and Burgess (1985) explored the socio-political implications of survival language training, arguing that, in its inception and implementation, this approach highlights white middle-class values.

These authors, similar to Freire, brought forward the notion that no curriculum is neutral and that each curriculum represents a particular view of social order. They further argued that “survival text views cultural adaptation as a one-way process” (p. 487). Cray and Hague (2006) went further and argued that LINC policies further marginalize and racialize newcomers through “presenting learners with both idealized and sanitized visions of Canadian society, and a reinscription of submissive and passive roles of racialized learners both in class and ultimately in larger Canadian society” (p. 81). The following excerpt from the theoretical framework for LINC (2014) provides evidence for this critique: “Socio-cultural competence requires an understanding of the social conventions around language use. These conventions include rules of politeness in discourse, the use of appropriate register and other socio-cultural norms of language use” (p.5). Here it is clear that the writers of LINC’s framework assume there is one register that is common to and appropriate for all Canadians and that this register must be acquired so newcomers follow the rules of politeness.

Most of these changes that shifted EAL in BC to a federal LINC program took place within a two-year period, and had a substantial impact on my research instructors. As a language instructor, I too have been impacted. Furthermore, there have also been significant cuts to health care and trauma services in BC for immigrants, refugees and

refugee claimants. The Teaching English of Other Languages (TESOL) one of the largest and longest standing public programs at Vancouver Community College (VCC) was closed. The impact of these changes will be further explored in subsequent chapters including Chapter 5 and 6.

## **Trauma Discourse**

Immigrants and particularly refugees arrive in Canada from countries where they may have experienced trauma through war, persecution, violence, torture, or other horrendous experiences. The effects of trauma often cause ongoing and even life long-psychological challenges. Even immigrants and refugees who have not been traumatized in their country of origin may experience trauma through the process of upheaval in their lives that is migration and/or through trials of living in a new country.

The impact of trauma is wide. In Canada, as newcomers strive to learn English or French they may likely be placed in situations where they are affected by how government policies structure language learning to create “productive” citizens. The recent changes to immigration and language policy under Canada’s Bill-43 can mean students who have experienced trauma may feel greater pressures than they are able to tolerate and face oppressive learning conditions. An example, of this would be the fact that language proficiency requirements for citizenship are becoming stricter and students with lower levels of English (often refugees from particular populations) may be marginalized. As well, the funding cuts to services for immigrants and refugees means less support for students with trauma, including help in overcoming trauma. In the

following section I look at the discourse around trauma to understand how the experience of many refugees and immigrants may be viewed.

Varying interpretations of trauma exist, interpretations being subject to many factors including culture, history, values, and socio-political context. Mock Escueta (2010) found:

People do not usually have only one specific way of defining trauma, evidenced by how people draw on various sources of healing for recovery, including medical science, psychotherapy, spirituality, reason, alternative healing arts, the spirits of the natural world, or the divine forces of the universe, just to name a few. (p. 5)

The conventional (or Western) definition of trauma is influenced by a deficit approach: the individual's trauma is seen as internal with little reference to the structures of oppression that are often the cause of trauma. The American Psychological Association (2000) defines trauma as "an incident of grave threat to life or one's personal integrity, or unexpected, or violent death of others" (p. 463).

In *Too Scared to Learn*, Jenny Horsman (1999) provides a structural analysis of trauma. She considers how trauma and violence are conceptualized in the Western medical model as outside of systemic oppression. By drawing on the medical model of trauma, instructors might be able to get support for their students and changes in policies that marginalize learners, but they are also drawing on models of trauma that "obscure an issue which must be addressed by social change" (Horsman, 1999, p. 42). In her discussion, Horsman focused specifically on the impact of violence on the

learning processes of women. She highlighted some of the challenges associated with the medical definition of trauma, but also how an awareness of it can “help workers and other learners realize that loud and aggressive talk in the classroom might evoke extreme terror in some learners” (p. 43). Horsman (2005) draws on Judith Herman’s (1992) definition of trauma, which I found very helpful:

Traumatic events overwhelm the ordinary systems of care that give people a sense of control, connection and meaning. Traumatic events are extraordinary, not because they occur rarely, but because they overwhelm the ordinary human adaptations to life. They confront human beings with the extremities of helplessness and terror and evoke the responses of catastrophe. (Herman, 1992, p.33)

In *Writings for a Liberation Psychology*, Ignacio Martín-Baró (1994) examined trauma and how Salvadorian children have experienced trauma. His critique of how trauma has been conceptualized through a Western medical model is useful in understanding the experience of some students within the LINC classroom. He proposed the concept of “psychosocial trauma” to replace the usual term “psychic trauma” (p.122). His analysis focused on problems of “identity development within a system of social relations that are aberrant, alienating and dehumanizing” (p. x). He further argued that we cannot overlook the painful experiences of our students. Furthermore, if we do, then we become collaborators in the social injustices.

I would argue, as does Martín-Baró, that we cannot ignore the influence that socio-political injustices have on the ability of students to engage and be present

physically and mentally in a classroom, and I agree with his challenge to the concept of an historicism which believes “there are no fundamental differences between people’s experiences” (p. 23). Moreover, if we as instructors, do not look at the context from which our students come as well as their current situations, we perpetuate the social injustices that may have caused the trauma in the first place.

This dissertation does not look specifically at refugees and their experiences of trauma but most of the literature addressing trauma and learning in EAL focuses on the refugee experience (Adkins, Birman and Sample, 1999; Canadian Centre for Victims of Torture, 2000; Isserlis, 2000). Refugees often experience forced migration and they have likely experienced significant personal losses, often including the violent deaths of family and friends. They frequently bear the scars of traumatic experiences; many are survivors of torture. Refugees are also more likely than other immigrants to arrive without their immediate families, having been forced to separate in flight from persecution. Because of these situations, refugees often suffer depression, sleep disorders, nightmares, fatigue, and an inability to concentrate, etc. (Canadian Council for Refugees, 1998). There has also been an increase in the number of refugees coming from countries where they have had little or no formal schooling, which further impacts language learning. En route and in Canada EAL students may experience trauma as a result of the punitive process involved in becoming a refugee in Canada as well as economic hardship and racism (CCR, 1998).

## Trauma and Learning

There is a dearth of studies on language learning and trauma. A small body of writing concentrating on the connection between trauma and learning includes Janet Isserlis' (2000) article, *Trauma and the Adult English Learner* and the Canadian Centre for Survivors of Torture (CCVT) publication (2000), *Torture and English Language Acquisition*. These publications highlighted the effects of trauma on learning, ways in which teachers can work effectively with people who have experienced torture, and offered practical suggestions for the classroom. The CCVT article specifically explored torture and its impact on students in the classroom. It discussed attendance, room set-up, learner participation, self-esteem, units of study, and gave ideas such as keeping the classroom door open when possible and inviting learners to participate in organizing the classroom space (CCVT, 2002). Isserlis' article looked briefly at the effects of trauma on learning. Her article focused on the implications for the practice of instructors who are working with students who have experienced and are experiencing trauma. She offered some concrete examples including a responsive curriculum, linking to community resources and using a learner-centred approach.

Horsman's *Too Scared to Learn* (1999) is the most comprehensive work relating to trauma and learning thus far. Horsman used the terms "violence" and "learning" as she explored the impact of trauma on learning and the systems that allow the violence to take place. She also spoke about students' behaviour that lies outside the range of the so-called *normal*, pointing out the danger of other students and instructors identifying them as *other*. She highlighted how these conceptualizations of abnormal can "minimize and individualize violence and blame survivors for failing to cope with

normal life” (p. 55). She challenged the therapeutic model in the classroom and offered an alternative to looking beyond the individual student’s response to trauma. Horsman offers the following: “Within literacy learning, there is potential to move away from the ‘diagnostic model’ and to support literacy learners in learning and claiming their power, while questioning the narrow concept of ‘normal life’” (p. 83). Horsman (1999) also spoke about the impact that “bearing witness” to trauma has on instructors. She spoke of literacy workers taking on the role of counsellors and having students disclose experiences of violence. She discussed how taking on the role of counsellor could create tensions, and contradiction for literacy workers as they try to create a space for learning and a space to support individual students who have experienced violence.

## **Chapter Conclusion**

In this chapter, I analyzed language policy in Canada historically and presently. I examined the role of nation building and economic policy and their connection with immigration policy and the LINC program. I also examined how the CLB and LINC curriculum articulates the idea of language learning as a fixed process and supports the government agenda. I then looked at the literature about trauma paying particular attention to the work of Jenny Horsman and Martin-Baro and how they conceptualized trauma. Finally I briefly explored the minimal body of literature on learning and trauma.

## **Chapter 4: Methodology**

In this chapter, I describe the methodological territory within which I framed my study and research process. Initially starting with a discussion of action research and moving more specifically to feminist approaches to action research. I provide details of the three-stages of the research design process I undertook. The chapter also details the parameters of this study and assumptions and biases. The later part of the chapter discusses research validity as it pertains to my study.

### **Methodological Territory**

My methodological positioning is qualitative and action oriented. As Rubin and Rubin (2012) said, “Many qualitative researchers follow a naturalistic approach often guided by a social construction approach that focus on how people perceive their worlds and how they interpret their experiences” (p.3). Similarly, according to McNiff, Lomax and Whitehead (2003), “People do action research when they want to investigate what is happening in their particular practice and try to change it” (p.14). Therefore, an action-oriented approach that is influenced by a qualitative focus seemed like a good fit for my study. This was also an appropriate approach as it fit with the larger philosophy of the EdD program in which I am enrolled. The EdD program is designed to enable educational leaders and practitioners to critically examine an issue in their respective arenas of practice.

I draw on the work of Anderson and Herr (2005) who stated that action research “...is oriented to some action or cycle of actions that organizational or community members have taken, or wish to take to address a particular problematic situation” (p.

3). They further note that action research is often characterized by circular motion and how collaboration and reflection are often key components of the research process. Action research can also involve collective change or action as a result of the research findings. Participatory action research has a more "...emancipatory emphasis [and] tends to focus on a broader societal analysis" (Herr & Anderson, 2005, p.16). As a research practitioner, I wanted to ensure that action-oriented participatory research is applied through this process. Cahill, Sultana, and Pain (2007) referred to Freire's acknowledgements surrounding the importance of participatory action research as means of inclusion. Freire maintained:

The silenced are not just incidental to the curiosity of the researcher but are the masters of inquiry into the underlying causes of the events in their world. In this context, research becomes a means of moving them beyond silence into a quest to proclaim the world. (Cahill et al., 2007, p. 308)

I would further argue that often people who are oppressed speak but are not heard or listened to by decision-makers and policy makers. Herr and Anderson (2005) also outlined some of the areas where concerns and dilemmas could exist because of employing action research methods. They wrote about the importance of negotiating entry into the research process so the data is authentic, they pointed to the importance of understanding the complex issues of boundary crossing and trust and addressing biases in the research as well as the importance of reflexivity in the process (Herr & Anderson, 2005). Brydon-Miller (2008), Reid and Frisby (2008), and Kemmis (2008) also spoke to the importance of reflexivity and transparency in action research.

## **Freire**

Initially, I began my search by exploring Freirian principles, including problem posing, exploring instructors' realities and experiences, and a reciprocal sharing of knowledge through dialogue and co-learning. These principles, as I stated earlier, informed my teaching and they also inform this research. This project attempted to be a form of collective meaning-making and analysis that facilitated the engagement and collective action of instructors.

## **Feminist Action and Community Research**

Feminist Action Research (FAR), Participatory Action Research (PAR), and Feminist Community Research (FCR) have also informed my methodological approach for this study (e.g. Fine, 1992; Brydon-Miller, 2008; Reid, 2004; Frisby & Creese, 2011). For Reid (2004), FAR is “ a conceptual and methodological research framework that is fundamentally about exploring and pursuing opportunities for social justice” (p. 2). She highlights the following components as part of feminist action research: inclusion, participation, action, social change, and researcher reflexivity. “ FCR is built on the assumptions that important knowledge can be found in the daily lives of people in their communities and knowledge is always partial and context-specific” (Reid, p. 189). Creese & Frisby (2011) went further to say there are a number of methodological themes running through FCR including “deconstructing concepts and categories,

reflexivity, voice and representation, the importance of time and place, the political economy of FCR, ethics, emotions and efforts of fostering social change” (p. 5).

My study is informed by these feminist methodological approaches in a number of ways, and particularly in emphasizing the need for exploring the voices of those who are traditionally marginalized and the importance of bringing in an activist component to the research. In choosing my research topic I built on my understanding that there had been little research done on the issue of working in language instruction with people who had experienced trauma and that there was a need to create understanding and to inform more inclusive social justice practices. The first key component of my research was to bring into view the issue of trauma in a highly marginalized group of language students under-represented in the academic literature and theories and practice of language delivery. Secondly, I utilized the concepts of inclusion, participation, action, social change, and researcher reflexivity, as described by Reid (2004), when I undertook to engage LINC instructors in exploring how they understand barriers, how they mitigate those barriers and their understanding of where and how social action could take place. I did this through in-depth interviews, a focus group, and a participatory approach. This will be further discussed in the next section of my dissertation. I found Iris Marion Young’s work most useful for conceptualizing my research in ways that would engage my participants. Young’s feminist work provides a framework for examining intersection of oppression including gender oppression that instructors and students face.

## **Research Questions**

As stated in Chapter 1, my research question is as follows: From the perspective of LINC instructors working within BC, how can students who have experienced trauma be better supported? Again given this overall question, through my research I answer the following questions:

1. What understandings are held by Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada (LINC) instructors about trauma and its effect on learning?
  - a. What barriers do LINC instructors face when trying to support students who have experienced trauma?
  - b. In what ways do LINC instructors attempt to mitigate barriers to learning for and with students who have experienced trauma?
2. How can this action oriented research support LINC instructors working with people who have experienced trauma? What collective actions at the level of policy can be taken to create inclusive LINC classes for students who have experienced trauma?

## **Research Design**

The research design included three phases: 1) individual interviews, 2) a group interview, and 3) a follow-up individual interview. First, I chose interviewing as a method because as Kvale and Brinkman (2009) point out “interview knowledge is produced in a conversational relation; it is contextual, linguistic, narrative, and pragmatic” (p.18). It also looks at the interviewee’s lived experiences of the subject matter. Hesse-Biber (2007) describe in-depth interviews as a way of getting at the “subjective” and a way of

understanding what people bring to given locations or events. The interview method allowed me to explore from multiple perspectives the complexities and contradictions of LINC instructors who have been working with people who have experienced trauma. As Rubin and Rubin (2012) explain, “Through such interviews [in-depth qualitative interviewing], researchers explore in detail the experiences, motives and opinions of other than their own” (p. 3).

I also held a focus group interview. Kvale (2009) suggests that focus groups are useful because “the lively collective interaction may bring forth more spontaneous expressive and emotional views than in individual, often more cognitive interviews” (p. 150). Kamberelis and Dimitriadis (2005) show focus group interviews can have several functions including, “inquiry, pedagogy and political effectivity” (p. 36). Kamberelis and Dimitriadis (2005) see focus groups as a way to gain collective engagement to promote discussion around values and understandings and transform conditions. A focus group was also helpful in my research to gather individual and common understanding that LINC instructors have about the experience of teaching those who have suffered trauma. I used a focus group to more fully explore the second question of this project: what collective actions at the level of policy can be taken to make LINC classes more responsive and inclusive for students dealing with trauma.

Kvale and Brinkman (2009) state that in qualitative research there are different types of analysis: those focusing on already developed codes and those developed through the examination of the material. My approach to analysis involved both; codes based on the small body of literature around trauma and learning including Jenny Horsman's work. For example, I started with concepts such as trauma, barriers and

mitigating barriers. These concepts informed my coding. However, many of my emergent codes, such as Professional Development (PD) and communities of practice, came from my analysis of the focus group and interview data. In addition, I used the framework of Five Faces of Oppression (Young, 1990) to analyze my data.

I also drew on the work of Linda Finlay's (2002) exploration of reflexivity as part of research practice to better understand how to be reflexive in my own research. She wrote about different routes to "reflexivity" and I was particularly drawn to the notion of mutual collaboration in my research process. Findlay explains, "collaborative reflexivity offers the opportunity to hear, and take into account, multiple voices and conflicting positions" (p. 220). To integrate this approach in my work, I relied upon a number of important mechanisms. First, I examined my own extensive experience as an EAL teacher in diverse settings. Additionally, I looked to others (critical friends) to raise questions I had not thought of, or to challenge assumptions I held about my findings. One such "critical friend" was a former colleague at the Access Community through English (ACE) Program who offered support and guidance. She helped me recognize which ways my understandings of trauma were perhaps biased by my personal teaching experience. In particular, I have worked with students diagnosed with mental health issues whereas my participants had not worked in such a setting and had different experiences of trying to develop inclusive practices. Through this process of reflexivity I unearthed some unexpected findings—including the importance of personal connection in understanding trauma. For example, as I spoke with the instructors, I came to realize that their ability to bring their personal experiences to the classroom helped them better relate to—and support—their students. This subsequently lead me

to more closely examine my own experiences of trauma and loss, and how these events impacted my teaching. Additionally, I started this process with certain assumptions about common language used by EAL instructors. I quickly learned that not all of these terms were seen as appropriate, or constructive. For example, they preferred the phrase “inclusive classrooms” to “responsive classrooms”—believing the former better spoke to all classroom participants.

### **Selection Criteria and Recruitment Procedures**

The criteria for selecting instructors to participate in the study was threefold:

- Working in any level of the LINC program
- Represent one of five different workplaces: a community college, one or more of three different immigrant services agencies and a community-based provider. The inclusion of educational institution, immigrant services agencies and a community organization provided some varied perspectives on ELSA and LINC programs.
- A keen interest in the research topic.

To recruit instructors, I initially contacted immigrant services agencies, a community college and a neighbourhood house via email. These organizations then sent out an email to all their instructors informing them of my study. I was also asked to attend a few staff meetings to talk to LINC instructors about my research. At these meetings I provided an overview of the study, and explained the informed consent letter and confidentiality agreement. I invited interested instructors to contact me via email. When

contacted by instructors who wanted to participate in the study, I then agreed with them on a mutually acceptable date and time and the interview took place on that date.

### **Instructors' Backgrounds**

The instructors I interviewed came from three different organizations. They also came to teaching from various backgrounds including art, special education and community activism. Demographic data such as years of teaching experience, education, workplace setting, prior teaching experience and work status are found in Table 1. This information and the collection of narratives making up this study give a snap shot of the reality of teaching practice in the LINC program. All of my instructors were women and this reflects the predominance of women in the EAL field.

**Table 1: Instructor Demographic Data**

<b>Interview</b>	<b># of years teaching experience</b>	<b>Setting</b>	<b>Education</b>	<b>Prior to teaching</b>	<b>Full time</b>
M	Over 20 years	Immigrant Service Agency	TESL Certificate Bachelor Degree	Transition House work	Part time
B	5-10 years	Neighbourhood House	TESL Certificate Bachelor Degree	Community Organizing/ Activism	No longer teaching

Interview	# of years teaching experience	Setting	Education	Prior to teaching	Full time
D	5-10 years	Immigrant Service Agency	CELTA Certificate Bachelor Degree	Special Education/Artist	Full time
T	10-20years	Immigrant Service Agency	TESL Certificate	Unknown	Full time
J	0-5years	Immigrant Service Agency	TESL Certificate	International schools	Part time

In the beginning of my study English Language Services for Adults (ELSANet, 2008) classes happened in more than thirty different locations in the Lower Mainland including: Greater Vancouver, and the Fraser Valley. These classes were provided through continuing education centres, immigrant services agencies, neighbourhood houses, and community colleges). Classes were also taught throughout the province from Vancouver to Prince Rupert (ELSANet, 2008).

Currently some of these classes have closed or different agencies have now taken on the role of providing LINC classes. Based on my reading of multiple job postings, LINC instructors are generally required to hold a Bachelor degree as well as Teaching English as a Second Language Training (TESL) certification. The certification can vary quite substantially from one month intensive training, such as the Certificate in

Teaching English to Adults (CELTA), to one or two years of TESL training through an institution such as Vancouver Community College.

Last year, the Association of British Columbia Teachers of English as an Additional Language (BC TEAL), the largest professional organization for educators of English language in the province of BC, conducted a membership survey that included instructors' background and experience. This survey did not specifically address instructors working within LINC. It did, however, identify some statistics that were interesting about BCTEAL instructors. First, 53% of the respondents were on limited contracts and 45% of respondents held a Master degree in a related field. Lastly, although I was unable to locate information with specific numbers, anecdotally I have found most EAL instructors are women although I was unable to confirm this data as BCTEAL did not ask gender in their most recent membership survey in January 2014.

### **Stage One: First Interview**

During the individual interviews, I asked the instructors a number of open-ended questions about their experience working with students who had histories of trauma. These questions allowed for flexibility and a more in-depth discussion of the themes including understanding of trauma, barriers, and mitigating factors. I was also able to collect demographic data about the interviewees' teaching experience at the beginning of the interview.

In all cases I met with the instructors for a face-to-face interview. I conducted the interviews over 9 months (between February and November 2013). I began looking for

research participants at the time of massive changes and cutbacks in EAL programs including LINC in BC. For this reason I went to a number of sites to find research participants. I completed transcribing the interviews and sent the transcripts to the instructors within a month of conducting the interviews in 2013. The instructors came from a variety of backgrounds and experience. There were five instructors in the beginning with one who dropped out after the first interview. Two instructors were newer to the field and three instructors had been in the field for fifteen to twenty years. After receiving information about the study, the instructors self-selected and contacted me to set up the first meeting. I met instructors in locations of their choice. I asked if they would be comfortable with my tape recording the interview. In all interviews, instructors allowed me to record their interview session. Each interview took from 45 minutes to 1 hour. See Appendix A for a list of my interview questions.

Once the interview was completed, I completed extensive field notes. My field notes included comments on the location of the interviews, how the interviews unfolded, any initial thoughts of concerns I had about the process and any key concepts or themes that particularly struck me. After I had recorded the interviews, they were transcribed by me verbatim. I sent the transcripts to each instructor and asked if they had any concerns or if they thought any changes needed to be made. Three of the instructors did suggest minor changes and I made those to the final transcripts. At this point one instructor withdrew from the study because of the time commitment. I used the findings from the individual interviews to investigate how instructors understand the effects of trauma within their learning and teaching context.

## Stage 2: Focus Group

During the second phase instructors met as a group. The focus group occurred in December 2013 after the initial interviews. The focus group was done at a community centre and was held mid-afternoon on a weekend so all the instructors could attend. I structured the tasks and conversations for the group-based analysis on my preliminary analysis of the one-on-one interviews and invited their participation in expanding my analysis. After reviewing and expanding my analysis of the interviews we explored potential changes to LINC practices and policies. See Appendix B for my focus group questions.

The focus group process was comprised of the following steps:

- themes, commonalities, and differences garnered from analysis of the one-to-one interviews at the beginning of the focus group.
- processes and areas for action-oriented changes were determined through collaborative discussion. These changes included; these changes to teacher-training and PD.

I began the focus group by further exploring my first research question, “What understandings are held by ELSA instructors about trauma and its effect on learning?”

Instructors were asked to work in pairs or individually to create a picture or structure using images, Lego, play-dough, and/or ‘found’ materials. The constructed object was to respond to the question: “What would a responsive ELSA class that acknowledges people who have experienced trauma look like?” I reminded instructors of some of the themes they identified in the individual interviews, including sense of community, responsive curriculum, peer support, and agency. Although I encouraged

this approach the instructors said they would rather not use the materials I had brought. They preferred to continue to talk to each other. The conversation did not lag. I changed my approach in order to be responsive to the instructors' thoughts and desires around the process and we continued our conversation.

As with the first interviews I took extensive field notes. Here are some examples of my field notes from the focus group:

- *Hard to navigate the role as researcher and practitioner and active participant*
- *Time constraints noted and the focus group could have gone on much longer*
- *People seemed quite comfortable with each other and jumped into a topic quite quickly*
- *One instructor said she was not surprised to see the people who were there*

I then analyzed the focus group conversation and generated further key themes that informed my final set of interviews.

### **Stage 3: Final Interview**

In the third phase of the research, I used one to one interviews to provide instructors a further opportunity to reflect on their understandings. I asked the instructors to check, expand and redefine the language and codes and themes brought forward in the first interviews. As with the focus group process, I did this by orally summarizing my codes in the beginning of the interview. I asked for clarification on certain terms they had used including pity, social justice and PD. Another component of this stage of the research involved asking the instructors to expand on their thoughts about what kind of collective

action needed to take place. A copy of my interview questions is attached in Appendix C. The changes instructors suggested related to policy recommendations and classroom practices; they also identified communities of practice and other forms of support for working with other instructors. These will be discussed in the next two chapters.

As in the first set of interviews, I took extensive field notes and again the notes reflected my observations and feelings about the interview process. Here are some examples from my field notes of different interviews with two separate instructors.

Notes from final interview with M:

- *She is someone I have known for many years and have worked with in different capacities.*
- *I was aware she was an ELSA instructor and had a firm commitment to social justice issues so she would be a good person to speak with*
- *Interview was right after work for me and I had had a stressful day*
- *She had prepared and made some notes prior to my arrival*
- *I spent some time fooling around with the computer to tape the interview (more prepared next time with this part of the interview)*
- *She was very forthcoming with her answers and provided lots of information*
- *It was interesting to see that her answers were directed more at the manager/ supervisor than at policies and curriculum*
- *I was very conscious of the tape recorder and the fact I was asking interview questions; it was, however, relatively relaxed and I was able to ask the questions*

- *She seemed to be a little worried about the fact her responses were not concrete enough, but I assured her that the information she had provided me with was very useful*
- *I was very interested in what she had to say because she has taught for a long time and is very aware of social justice issues*
- *She stated she would like some information on the findings of the interview*
- *In terms of what worked well she had lots of information and had really thought about her responses. We also have a prior relationship so we were able to delve right into the questions*
- *Conducting the interview at her house seemed to be a good idea in allowing for the interview to be more natural and relaxed*

Notes from final interview with T

- *One interesting area was her response to ideas of social justice*
- *I gather from her she did not want to bring social justice issues into the classroom. It had a place in her personal life--i.e around coffee purchases (fair trade)—but not in the classroom. I wish I had asked her more about that but I got the impression she did not want to talk any further about these issues.*

After I had recorded the interviews, they were transcribed by me verbatim. I sent the transcripts to each instructor and asked if they had any concerns or if they thought any changes needed to be made.

## Steps for Data Analysis

To protect the anonymity of all the instructors in this research, I asked each instructor to choose a one-name pseudonym or one letter, which I used throughout the document.

The first step of my data analysis involved a close reading of each interview. I then marked the transcripts with key words or phrases associated with each excerpt connecting them back to my research questions, the literature and the codes I had initially identified including trauma, barriers, and mitigating barriers. This process helped me understand some of the assumptions I had about my research project.

After the initial reading, I went through the interviews a second time, noting where an instructor addressed my research questions. I also noted anything I found surprising or interesting. I also identified new themes that seemed related to my broad research questions. Through this process I determined there were themes that captured the relationships amongst these various codes: understandings, barriers, ways to mitigate barriers and action that could be taken. I created tables for coding data organized into sub-categories around my overarching themes. The table contained the code, a definition and an example of each code. See Appendix D for an example of my coding table from the focus group.

Next, I looked at all of the initial interviews together. This allowed me to see how all the instructors addressed my questions as well as any common concepts. As Sapsford and Jupp (2006) have explained, “The researcher is on the lookout for recurrences that may indicate patterns, whether these are typical sequences of events in a setting, or preoccupations around which a particular group’s or individual’s view of the world revolves” (p.251). Coding in this manner afforded me an opportunity to

explore the instructors' experiences and thoughts on working with people who had experienced trauma. It also allowed me to clarify concepts and recode them accordingly. I was also able to compare the excerpts between different coding sub-groups and then summarize and define the results of each sorting. I brought these codes to the focus group for further clarification and understanding.

In the second stage of my research I followed a similar pattern to the first stage. I used the same technique of identifying concepts brought forth by the instructors, defining them and finding an example. Some of the concepts that came directly from my interviews are outlined in Appendix A. The next step was to compare and contrast all the items that were assigned to the same theme. This allowed me to better understand and clarify what codes emerged and their interrelationships with each other.

In the third stage I followed the same four-stage process: reading the transcripts individually and making notes, looking at my research questions, creating codes, and looking for definitions. I would then look at the transcripts as a whole and went back to my coding tables, looking for commonalities and differences around themes. Finally, I looked at all the data and the coding as a whole. This allowed me to identify relationships between themes, redefine and rename them, re-code previously coded data and align it with the research goals. As well I used Young's Five Faces of Oppression as a framework to further interpret and understand my data. I also spent a good deal of time reflecting on my own feelings and behaviours in the research setting. I kept notes on my data analysis process in order to be aware of my own biases and assumptions. An example of this is reflected in the following excerpt from my field notes from my interview with D.

*When I met D for the interview we had many points of connection and I was quite drawn to her approaches. I had heard she was quite a responsive instructor and was aware of this before I met her. I needed to keep this in check and ensure my questions were not too leading.*

*I knew M prior to meeting with her and I had worked with her in different contexts. I believe having a relationship with her meant I had certain assumptions about the way she would answer my questions. I was very mindful of not guiding her too much and allowing time for reflection. I also needed to make sure that because of my relationship with her I was not spending too much time talking about my own experiences but was listening to her thoughts.*

### **Biases and Assumptions**

In terms of my own biases and assumptions as a researcher, I had assumed that the instructors I interviewed would have similar world views to my own. I had to be quite conscious of assumptions towards the instructors because I am also an EAL instructor. I connected with my research participants and respected the work they did as EAL teachers, which is often devalued. I wanted to be sure my work was respectful but also critical.

As well, I have had a lot of experience working with people with histories of trauma and I wanted to share my experience but ensure that the instructors' experience was prioritized and that I was not taking over. I demonstrated my background knowledge by asking meaningful questions and reporting back their answers after

reflection. Lastly, my three-stage approach meant I was able to bring my assumptions and biases about themes back to the group for clarification.

I also had to be mindful of my dual role as a researcher and as an EAL instructor. Although my main role was being a researcher and I want to not ignore my own teaching experiences. I felt, however that I needed to ensure that I was focused on listening to the experiences of the instructors within their teaching context in order to maintain my integrity as a researcher. As Escueta (2010) says “It was vital that I continuously assessed the appropriate level of my involvement with the participants in order to ensure that none of my roles were compromised” (p. 214)

### **Considering Validity in Qualitative Research**

The issue of evaluating qualitative research has been widely examined, using concepts of validity, transferability, trustworthiness, and authenticity. Lincoln and Guba (1985, 1986, 1989) proposed the concepts of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (cited in Schwandt, 2007). I chose to utilize the types of validity proposed by Herr and Anderson (2005): outcome, dialogic, process, catalytic, and democratic because it best connects with the action-oriented intent of my work.

### **Outcome Validity**

Herr and Anderson (2005) list the goal of “outcome validity” as “the achievement of action-oriented goals” (p. 55). My own research brought new insights into working with people who have experienced trauma and identified locations for action. Some of the

outcomes recommended by the instructors were changes to training and PD and larger systemic changes. These will be discussed further in Chapter 5 and 6 of this dissertation. As well, the research procedure I followed led me to, as Herr and Anderson (2005) suggest, “reframe the problem in a more complex way” (p.55). This was necessary, particularly given the political changes that happened within LINC over the course of my study. Herr and Anderson see outcome validity as the achievement of an action-oriented outcome.

### **Dialogic Validity**

As part of an action-oriented outcome, I wanted my research to explore the experiences of instructors, to encourage more complex dialogue about how to support students and instructors, and to enable more inclusive classrooms practices that address the diversity of newcomers' experience. This research involved generating new knowledge on how to better support students who have experienced trauma. This project has involved a dialogic process with instructors that resulted in ongoing discussions and plans for PD. I hope to present my findings to LINC instructors and government EAL policy makers.

### **Process Validity**

Process validity means there is a well-constructed and appropriate methodology. In order to follow process validity, I utilized an action research approach that was heavily influenced by Feminist Action Research (Reid, 2004) principles including participation, action, social change, and researcher reflexivity. Using two sets of individual interviews and a focus group, I was able to understand four instructors' experience with people

with histories of trauma. To address my interviewees' reflections on their experiences, I took my interpretation of the themes to individuals in the interviews and to the focus group. Both of these opportunities allowed for instructors' reflections to be heard and feedback received.

### **Democratic Validity**

Democratic validity indicates the degree to which the findings of the research are pertinent to the participating group and the participants are involved in the process of determining what is relevant and important. The purpose of this study was to explore how instructors make meaning of their experiences working with people who have experienced trauma. Their participation was voluntary and they all had a keen interest in the project. As well, I spoke about my own experiences as an instructor. Part of ensuring the democratic validity of my findings involved sending the transcripts back to participants for accuracy, sharing preliminary findings with them during the focus group and final interviews. It also involved restructuring my questions and coding based on their feedback. For example, I changed one of my preliminary questions for the focus group after feedback from the instructors. The question was "How can we make LINC classrooms more responsive to students who have experienced trauma?" They felt the question did not reflect the reality of their experiences teaching in the LINC program.

## **Catalytic Validity**

Catalytic describes the process of transforming, deepening understanding and creating change. This research has a personal meaning for me, as I have worked with many students who have experienced trauma. I have never worked in the LINC program. Through conducting the interviews and focus groups I learned a great deal about the challenges and locations for change within this particular context. I also kept a research journal to monitor the changes that I experienced as a result of the process. The instructors as well discussed their interest in the project and how they learned new ways of working and supporting students who had experienced trauma including better understanding of the services available to them. In addition, two of the instructors have shown a keen interest in working together to share the findings of the study and further discuss supporting students who have experienced trauma.

## **Challenges in the Research Process**

I have been working as a teacher in the field of EAL for many years but as I said I have never taught in the LINC program. I have been fortunate to speak with and present to a number of LINC instructors. Thus one of the challenges with my research is that I occupy an insider-outsider. This could be construed as a potential obstacle since LINC instructors might believe that I do not understand the complexities of teaching in the LINC program. Nevertheless, I felt that, as a result of my experience and professional involvement in EAL, I have sufficient access to, and rapport with, LINC instructors to counter any such obstacles. In order to mitigate my role as an outsider I was very clear

from the offset that I had never taught in LINC. I tried to address this issue through transparency and (Grant, Nelson and Mitchell, 2008) “clarity about one’s position and about the expectations one has of the community” (p.591). I shared my findings as well as my own experience as an EAL instructor with the participating instructors.

Another challenge to my research was that I only interviewed five instructors. It was a real struggle finding even these five instructors to participate. I even had one instructor (J) drop out after the initial interview because of time constraints. There are several reasons I would put forward for a low level of interest in participation. It was a time of great change within the LINC program and people were worried about their employment situations. As well, the research project required a substantive time commitment and people may have had other time pressures. However, I felt that depth rather than breadth was key to my research. As Rubin and Rubin (2012) say, “[qualitative researchers] care less about finding averages and more about understanding specific situations, individuals, groups, or moments in time that are important or revealing” (p.2).

## **Chapter Summary**

In this chapter, I review and describe my research design and other issues brought forth from the interviews and focus group I undertook with LINC instructors. Through analyzing and coding the data from my interviews and focus group response, I identified themes related to trauma including how LINC instructors understood and identified trauma and its effect on learning. Subsequently I identified themes that related to supporting students who have experienced trauma. I then identified a number of themes

that initially related to possible actions to be taken to make LINC classes more inclusive for people who have experienced trauma.

## Chapter 5: Findings

### Chapter Introduction

In this chapter, I review and summarize the data from the interviews and focus group I undertook with LINC instructors. I identified themes that relate to trauma including how LINC instructors understood and identified trauma. Subsequently, I used the Five Faces of Oppression explained in Chapter 2 of my dissertation to analyze the oppression students and instructors face and how they respond to this oppression and create more inclusive classrooms.

### Understanding Trauma through Behaviour

One of the most significant findings is how LINC instructors conceptualized students who had experienced trauma through the students' behaviour. Instructors frequently spoke of working with students who, they suspected, had experienced trauma. Young (1990) makes the following assertion about groups: "A person's group identities may be for the most part only a background or horizon to his or her life, becoming salient only in specific interactive contexts" (p.46). Further to Young's point about context, the stories instructors told revolved around distinct classroom behaviour as an identifier for students who probably have experienced trauma. T described one student in her classroom exhibiting certain behaviours: "*Just difficulty engaging, difficulty focusing and she has very awkward social skills. She will start laughing at really inappropriate moments or she will suddenly burst out with something unexpectedly.*" T understands

signs of trauma as unusual and inappropriate behaviours. B conversely talks about her surprise at a lack of behaviour that she would expect someone to have if traumatized.

*I've had students who come as refugees who tell me stories that I think, "Wow, if that happened to me I would be very traumatized but who seem able to talk really clearly and are very mature and don't show any of those signs. And so I would—I don't know if they are traumatized—it's hard to say. They've been able to process things as they're happening and not have as many of those symptoms of trauma.*

In these quotes we see a focus on trauma as a medical issue and interpretation of the students as outside the norm. Students with trauma show what are perceived as symptoms and those who have experienced horrific oppression but don't show signs are not seen as traumatized.

Most of the instructors said they observed the following distinct behaviours in students believed or known to have histories of trauma: absences from class, withdrawal from participation, lack of focus, evidence of drug or alcohol abuse, reaction to what might be triggers, and dramatic changes in progress. When I began to analyze my interviews, I found I was listening to repeated examples of how trauma has an impact on the body, the mind, and feelings. Several instructors told me that they worked with many students who, in class, "space out" or had great difficulty making eye contact. As I discussed in the literature review, Horsman (1999) speaks of these behaviours as quite common responses to trauma. Several of the instructors spoke of learners not having what can be called "presence" (Horsman, 1999) even though they were

physically there. One of the instructors (T) described a student she worked with in this way, *“This is going to sound really weird but she is almost like a ghost, it sounds bizarre but she is not really physically there if you know what I mean.”*

Many of the instructors also spoke of students who behave in different ways during a class. For example, they mentioned the behaviour of students who were sometimes very quiet in a class and sometimes extremely talkative. They spoke of the students switching between extremes in behaviour and this contributing to difficulty engaging with other students. As M said: *“So that—~~that~~—that alternation between having to talk, talk, talk, talk, talk—and then going almost catatonic.”* The language of psychiatry, catatonic, is common in describing such behaviour. B echoed what M said:

*Yeah I can relate to what M was saying about the sort of pendulum of being quite shy and reserved and then starting on a story and then once it starts, sort of snowballing and you can see they’re sort of not paying attention very much to the people around them who are listening. (Laughs)  
So whether they’re receiving signals of attention or not, they sort of can’t stop.*

Most instructors in this study, as they spoke about students in their classes, tended to focus on the disparity between abnormal behaviour noted in certain students and “normal” behaviour of the majority in the class. As Young (1990) explained, “our identities are defined in relation to how others identify us, and they do so in terms of groups that are always already associated with specific attributes, stereotypes, and

norms” (p.46). The instructors spoke about other students' reactions to the different or abnormal behaviour of the students. Several of the instructors commented on students who have possibly experienced trauma not following typical classroom norms and how this might mean they are marginalized by other students.

Instructors also spoke about students' backgrounds as indicators that a particular student had probably experienced trauma. They talked about students coming from countries where populations had faced persecution, violence, forced migration and other forms of oppression. B spoke about one of her students:

*I have a student right now who I guess probably experienced trauma but she has been in ELSA since literacy and she is now in level 4 so she has managed really well and it is not obvious to me in her behaviour and how she interacts with others. Just from her life story I can guess there probably was some trauma.*

The instructors spoke about trauma and how trauma manifests in a variety of ways dependent on the individual.

### **From the 'Gut' to 'Pop Psychology'**

Instructors also talked about trauma in individualistic terms, that is, as something bad that happened to an individual or groups of individuals. For example, T explained:

*I have even had groups of students that have had a group trauma type thing happening. So to define I would just say something really shitty that*

*happened to you, something really bad or that you perceive that way. ....It does not even matter what the incident is in a sense it is more how the person perceives it. Someone take a horrible example like rape there are some people for whom an experience of rape may devastate with them for the rest of their lives and for others who just deal with go through and get on with their lives.*

While T started by focusing on groups, she moved to trauma as an individual event and individuals' reactions to "shitty things". That some people can get over and others do not. Similar to B's notion of trauma, "*I have a student right now who I guess probably experienced trauma but she has been in ELSA since literacy and she is now in level 4 so she has managed really well and it is not obvious to me in her behaviour and how she interacts with others*", T understands whether someone is traumatized as based in a person's disposition, will or ability to cope. Instructors also spoke about connecting individual trauma to learning. As T said "*I just kind of—while I think—I—you know—it's very hard to pinpoint exactly what it is—it's somehow kind of an effect on people—there's some—that makes learning incredibly difficult.*"

I drew on these understandings of trauma in the focus group to ask, "Where do we get our definitions of trauma from?" There were a number of answers to this question, including answers stating definitions are garnered from pop-psychology, popular culture and media. As T said, "*To a large extent pop-psychology and pop culture. I mean these are—the idea of trauma is not new to us.*" The responses of instructors indicate the role of popular culture in defining trauma. Perhaps, given the

recent media focus on Canadian war veterans and PTSD, the role of the media in relation to instructors' exposure to definitions of trauma has increased. One of the instructors, M, had an interesting response when I asked her where her definition of trauma came from: "*I get it from my gut.*" Just as people with trauma can experience symptoms in their bodies as well as in their minds, this instructor recognized trauma in others based on the feelings in her own body.

### **Definitions or Complex Contexts**

The instructors defined trauma in both an individual-centred way and socio-political way, giving both a structural understanding and a focus on the individual experience of trauma. Instructors' understandings of trauma as a dysfunction, or an inability to cope, adapt and integrate operated in some tension with their understanding of trauma as a reaction to oppression and harmful socio-political realities. Examining what we educators learn from popular culture about trauma is important as it informs EAL instructors' views and so has an impact on EAL education in BC.

Teachers may rely on a medical definition of trauma to determine what actions to take if a student experiences symptoms of trauma, such as flashbacks in class, or to decide what services to make the student aware of, while at the same time understanding trauma within a socio-political context.

As a teacher myself I too have experienced this dissonance. A medical model can provide an awareness of some of the symptoms of trauma and lead to delineation of classroom techniques that can help trauma sufferers in a learning environment. It can

also help provide a rationale to help students access services. However, focusing on a medical definition to the exclusion of a structural understanding of oppression can impoverish possible ways of thinking about inclusive classrooms for students who face ongoing oppression or re-traumatization as students face poverty, racism, homophobia, sexism or other aspects of oppression in their daily lives.

There is minimal discussion in the literature around trauma and learning. In this limited body of literature however the focus is on classroom behaviours and working with people who have experienced trauma (Adkins & Birman, 1999). This discussion is helpful to EAL teachers in the area of recognizing and responding to the complexities of trauma and learning.

## **The Faces of Oppression**

### **1) Violence**

Experiencing violence is probably the most obvious form of oppression that EAL students from particular parts of the world might have faced and was the first topic of conversation with instructors during the initial interviews. Such experiences identified the students as a distinct. As instructors spoke about their students, many talked about the previous socio-political situations of these students. They described their students as coming from countries where they faced persecution, violence, torture and war. A number of the instructors offered a definition of trauma similar to that of Martin-Baro (1994). His analysis (1994) “focuses on problems of identity development within systems of social relations that are aberrant, alienating and dehumanizing” (p.x). As J

said, “*I would assume getting kicked out of your country would count as trauma.*” This statement speaks to Young’s assertion about violence. As she says, “What makes violence a phenomenon of social injustice, and not merely an individual moral wrong, is its systemic character, its existence as a social practice” (p.62). As B says:

*When I was thinking about it I thought I could kind of see two groups, one group that experience trauma through war or displacement and another group that would have been more in terms of a batter, like more a husband with a lot violence both physical and emotional violence at home.*

Here B pointed out a common thread in that when the instructors talked about trauma they tended to see that there were two groups of students who had experienced trauma. There seemed to be a general consensus as to which groups of students were most likely to have experienced trauma: refugees and women as a whole and particularly those who had experienced domestic violence. Thus the experiences of violence, displacement and war were seen as a form of trauma and oppression by these instructors. M echoed this:

*So for example a woman who was been abused at home was my student and she told me about it. And more recently I have had students from Iraq, Afghanistan and from Eritrea, from a lot of war zones basically. In some those cases they have told me about their experiences and in others I have just kind of guessed that might be part of what’s going on.*

## Responding to Trauma/Violence

Most of the instructors also spoke about how their understanding of trauma was at least in part based on their knowledge of trauma as experienced by people in their personal circles such as family members, partners or friends. Their understanding of their own experience with trauma challenged the idea that they could not understand their students. B described how her connection to trauma was useful to her in the classroom.

*I had some advantages which was that I was living with people who had experienced trauma so I had personal experience of what that might look like for people not in terms of what I would do as a teacher in that situation.*

Similarly, D explained how her individual experiences aided her understanding of refugees' struggles:

*Probably that more than anything—but I was also once married to a guy who was also a political refugee and he came here. And so I'd also had the very personal experience of being with someone from another culture, another religion and a totally—totally different life experience than me.*

Instructors' personal experience in relation to trauma is an aspect of second language teaching of students with trauma history not commonly mentioned in the literature on EAL teaching.

A structural understanding of trauma was also reflected in the comments of those instructors with personal experience of trauma themselves or through that of friends or family members who had suffered from trauma. As B said, “*therefore not having the— not seeing that person as having any power in their situation*”. Knowledge of trauma derived from a personal connection helps to reframe the relationship between the students and instructors, drawing on a commonality between the knowledge of trauma of the instructors and the experience of their students. One of the instructors who spoke of having a family experience with trauma showed discomfort talking about this experience as it was very personal.

Young’s approach to addressing violence was consistent with some of the instructors’ personal understandings gained through their own connection to trauma. Understanding trauma within the context of their own lives connected to Young’s strategies to deal with violence. As she says “Such reform may require the redistribution of resources or positions, but in large part can come only through a change in cultural images, stereotypes, and mundane reproduction of relations of dominance and aversion in the everyday life (p.63).

Another way instructors responded to trauma was to look at ways to more fully engage students in creative processes focusing on the body and the mind as a way to lessen stress and increase focus, particularly for learners with a history of trauma. The instructors referred to the importance of using breathing or mindfulness exercises or humour as techniques. Several of the instructors emphasized the importance of providing space for fun and creativity. D provided an example of this:

*Yeah, like, it's a lot of fun and they all like—where they're actually up and doing a project—an art project or collages or murals or—like they're making these dresses out of garbage bags—and they're—you know, there's language that's being learned in that but it's also just the fact that they're actually kind of working together, creating those kinds of relationships and trusting each other.*

She talked about the importance of humour in learning. Several of the other instructors mentioned humour as well. They did not connect it to trauma explicitly, but D made the connection to making students feel comfortable and building trust in the classroom. They also mentioned it as a way to respond to conflict or tension. As M said:

*I try to when I see people are starting to get frustrated or tense or something I will do some kind of physical thing or funny thing. I have been told by some of the students that one of them told me I was strict and I was very puzzled about it but I think what she meant was I want them to work on a certain thing and I will push them on it and I will keep them on it. The potential is for people to get stressed out and frustrated. I think it is really, really important not to get to that point but to break and we will come back to this. We are going to stay on this, we are going to get this but we need a break for now and come back to it. Humour is enormously important and I ham it up a lot in the class.*

As seen from the experiences of the instructors interviewed for this study, in their practices they saw connecting to the whole person in learning as important. Several spoke passionately about building community to support all students. D talked about the importance of building community as a way to break isolation for students:

*And that's where I feel my job is mostly—is to help create community with that—even though they might not speak the same language. And when they do—they make great friendships—which they do often—they take them to another class.”*

This sense of the importance of community related to not only their students but also to LINC instructors. Much of the literature in EAL and trauma does address the importance of community as a way to mitigate barriers. I will be further discussing the theme of community building in looking at how instructors respond to marginalization.

## **2) Powerlessness**

Powerlessness came up as a theme for the instructors although they did not use the term specifically. The instructors did, however, describe some fundamental feelings and concerns associated with powerlessness. They spoke of these feelings mostly in relation to their own experience as instructors. They made connection with their teaching practices and what they perceived as barriers for students who had experienced trauma, recognizing the powerlessness of students in the face of multiple barriers. Mostly instructors talked about their powerlessness within the structures in which they taught. As they tied the restrictions on their way of working, both current and

anticipated restrictions, to the effect on their teaching, it is obvious that students are/ would be powerless in that they must accept the restrictions on instructors' teaching capacities. Also, as noted below, many changes made or contemplated would directly and negatively affect students and so instill a feeling of powerlessness. Policies and funding structures can make it less possible for LINC instructors to create inclusive classrooms. As T said of the decrease in instructional time, *“So—you know, ultimately it comes down to fewer hours for the students.”* As D said, *“It is a great job but it is really too - it is so precarious. It is just going to get more so.”* T makes an analogy to parenting to describe the impact of the connection between how teachers are treated to how they can respond to their students and refers to the importance of instructors having support.

*I guess it's one of those things where you know, again thinking about being a parent, is like—you can't be a good parent—sorry that sounds so—it's easy to be a better parent if you're kind of able to deal with your own shit—and I think it's true as a teachers too right? You might be a better teacher.[ she was referring to looking to a discuss we had in the focus group about looking at our own fears and assumptions]*

The instructors I spoke to talked about systemic barriers, a lack of decision making power, lack of recognition of their capabilities and skills which all speak to powerlessness as a form of oppression for the instructors.

All the instructors spoke at great length about the change from ELSA to LINC and the effect this might have on their teaching practices and classrooms. They spoke about the barriers around attendance, assessment and increased emphasis on measurement

that may come to the forefront as a result of the changes to LINC. These changes in lesson preparation time for teachers, hiring practices and job security, have had and continue to have an impact on many aspects of the program. As several of the instructors pointed out, they were further pushed to emphasize productivity and academic competence. When the federal government took over the program, key areas of change affecting LINC instructors were policies cancelling PD and decreasing preparation time.

### ***Policy Pressure***

According to Young: "most people in these societies (advanced capitalist countries) do not regularly participate in making decisions that affect the conditions of their lives and actions, in this sense most people lack significant power." (Young, 1990, p.56)

There was much conjecture but not much clarity provided to these instructors about new policies around attendance, PD, and assessment. None of the instructors described participating in any of the processes of determining policies for LINC. M spoke about policy related to attendance. As she said, *"there is a certain amount of time that each student has at the level and he ( her student) is having these bits and pieces away and he is losing his time."*

The group did explore different understandings of current policy problems but were hesitant to make recommendations until they had more information. M said about policy changes she felt needed to take place: *"A) those people need more time in the*

*program, B) they need not to be shoved on to getting some meaningless badly paid job after the first year they've been here, when they barely have a handle on the language.”*

The second point about policy changes she made is quite relevant and reinforces the assertion that certain immigrants and refugees can be socially and economically disadvantaged in the labour market because of lower English skills (Hague & Cray, 2006). There is a connection between feelings of powerlessness of students and instructors sense of powerlessness within current policies.

Another key concern many of the instructors spoke about was the federal government's perceived lack of vision around these changes. Instructors discussed their difficulty understanding the federal government's goals for LINC. They talked at length about all the changes that were taking place. D explained the impact of decreased time for preparation:

*Anyways that is - anyway what I find is hard is this lack of vision and I think this is kind of coming out of these cuts. Where is the vision here? Where is anybody doing anything? Where is the - you are wanting teachers to work 8 minutes to prepare a class and having all this online stuff. What kind of community are we building?*

A subsequent change they spoke of in relation to the federal government taking over was the end of PD for instructors. Instructors were paid for PD under ELSA, but instructors thought it unlikely they would be paid under CIC or the money allotted would be severely reduced. The federal government does not appear to prioritize PD. All the instructors talked about the need for PD as providing opportunities for open dialogue so

as to better understand issues and as a way to promote self care. T highlighted this perspective when she said, *You know, it's really interesting—because you do—you know, we talk so much about having an inclusive class and community building in the class, but you need it for your teachers too. It would be great to have paid retreats.*” This suggestion from T came after a discussion in the focus group around how to support and value instructors. There was a discussion on the importance of taking care of themselves, understanding their own assumptions, and understanding boundaries around working with people who have experienced trauma. They also spoke about the importance of community among instructors so as to support each other. The paid retreat was an example of building connections and finding ways to support students.

Many of the instructors spoke of systemic barriers that existed before the implementation of the changes to LINC. In the focus group they talked about the direction that ELSA (at that time) was going. As T said, *“I mean I totally agree with you—I mean—that's been for me personally—the whole ELSA thing—you know, I see it moving towards almost a more academic thing—.”* She referred to an “academic thing” a number of times throughout her interviews in talking about teaching becoming more focused on the technical aspects such as grammar as opposed to a focus on settlement and supporting students in their lives outside the classroom.

They spoke of a push towards a business model. They also spoke about the shift from a public to private model, referring to the competing for contracts within the non-profit sector as more of a business-centred approach. B highlights this push, *“I think if we're looking big—it would be to make ELSA actually public—rather than privatizing—which is where I think we're going now”.* Instructors referred to a push for accountability

and quantifiable measurement now demanded of them as instructors and to lack of government vision and lack of clarity about their roles. B said, *“You have to prove that what you’re doing in the classroom is meeting the government’s objectives, which so often has so very little to do with people in your classroom.”* The instructors referred to the struggles between pedagogical focus and the financial focus of the program. One of the instructors, D, reflected on this:

*So even though the government sometimes pushes that—I have had a girl—she wasn’t that young but she was probably—had the mentality of a ten year-old. She was probably thirty five from Afghanistan—she had fallen and been in a coma for two weeks and nobody had—if you lived, you lived—and she lived and she came out of that coma with a lot of brain damage—I think. But nobody really knew but she was in my class for a long time—that she was—it was—there was no way she could have a job, right?*

The issue of multiple barriers was a theme in many of the concerns expressed by instructors. Students were not just dealing with trauma but in some cases disabilities. The points brought up by instructors reflect the current federal policy environment, particularly changes to immigration policies. EAL is facing demands to be accountable and to implement a further push towards employment for all students. Roxanna Ng's book, *The Politics of Community Services: Immigrant Women, Class and the State* (1996) discusses this shift to a high emphasis on employability and the control of funding sources on program operations. She discusses how immigrant women have become “commodities” with this shift in emphasis. Her analysis speaks to my findings

around the shift in current government policies and the conflict between services and funders expectations, marketability and quantifiable results. The shifts that the instructors spoke about illustrate the tension between the push for instructors to meet the goals and objectives of the federal government policies of “economic productivity” and the needs of the students.

### ***Institutional Pressure***

Another key theme was the increase in instructors' administrative duties and about how this did not keep the needs of students nor of instructors in the forefront. The instructors spoke about a lack of agency and lack of control over their time with an increase in administrative tasks. For example, B said when discussing the need for instructors to look at their own assumptions and judgements as opposed to solely focusing on administrative tasks and specific methodological approaches:

*I think some of those things need to be done on a regular basis, like even if I know those things, it's still useful to be in a group talking about them because of the pressure from the administration. So they're constantly—your interaction with methodology, just how are you administering your class, and you don't get a break to think about the other stuff, it's easy to get into that trap. Well like, that's what's important—that's what's on my mind, most of the time. And I think like we can say, well the other administrative training is good, but the more time that I spend doing administration, the less space I have to be thinking about the people.*

That the focus on administration takes time from building trusting relationships with students was also a common theme throughout the interviews and focus groups. Instructors spoke about increasing demands to take attendance, to increase assessments, and to learn new procedures. Instructors emphasized the importance of the fact that decisions were made on a business model approach and were more and more focused on the need for measurement and administrative duties. The instructors experience powerlessness when they are excluded from the decisions or asked to focus on tasks that de-professionalize their skills with this focus on technical skills. The following exchange highlights this:

*B: And so I actually think they shouldn't be pounding on the administrative tasks—because it's destructive.*

*D: That's always the way.*

*B: And I think the academic track is a lot about funding and about measuring.*

*T: Everything has to be measured.*

*B: And if everything has to be measured, you lose the human. And I think they are not totally compatible.*

*D: Well I think it's culturally biased as well—like you know, the whole ideas of having—you know, your goal setting and—it's like, “Ask me—I don't know!”*

*T: I agree with you*

Here, the instructors are talking about the need to focus resistance on those who make the decisions not colleagues charged with implementing them. They spoke about the importance of recognizing that some administrative tasks were necessary for their work. They did, however, say as increased time is spent on administration they have much less time with the students or to think about the major issues and tasks of EAL. The increased focus on technique, measurement, and administration means a decrease in creativity and humanism in teaching and relating to students. As B said above, *“And if everything has to be measured, you lose the human. And I think they are not totally compatible”*.

Rather than programming that creates inclusiveness and honours the realities of both students and instructors, the LINC programs are being cut back and instructors are pressured to focus primarily on measuring progress and on administrative tasks. As B said, *“And I think like we can say, well the other administrative training is good, but the more time that I spend doing administration, the less space I have to be thinking about the people.”* This makes it more difficult for instructors to respond to the challenges of working with people who have experienced trauma.

Through my research I gained knowledge about strategies other EAL instructors use to create inclusive classroom communities even within these many systemic

barriers. Neo-liberal policies and funding structures which focus on the productive citizen as the person that does not need a social safety net do make it less possible for LINC instructors to create inclusive classrooms. As T said of the decrease in instructional time, “So—you know, ultimately it comes down to fewer hours for the students.” As D said, “It is a great job but it is really too - it is so precarious. It is just going to get more so.” Instructors did briefly talk about not being part of the decision-making process in LINC and they talked extensively about the direction in which the federal government is/was taking LINC. The government and LINC policy makers are shaping LINC into a program to promote the government’s economic imperative and have taken away opportunities for students and instructors to feel supported and capable. Many of the instructors saw this happening through moves to a business model approach and also through the cuts to PD and the cuts to preparation time for instructors. Where EAL education moves further towards a business-model approach and a focus on economic productivity it is likely that students who are already marginalized will become more marginalized. I will address marginalization later in this chapter.

### ***Professional Development***

The importance of good PD and training, as a way to learn about methods to mitigate barriers, was a recurring issue expressed by all participants throughout the research. Most instructors in this study, as they spoke about PD in their practices, tended to focus on some of the problems around it. A change to PD practices was perceived as critical for supporting students and instructors. Criticism of some of the

current PD practices was that they focused entirely on administrative tasks or technical competencies. Several of the instructors commented that some PD did not recognize instructors' current experience and knowledge. I asked M the following question, "When you think of professional development, what are—like a bad experience or something that you feel that it's not maybe within the ESL framework?" M's answer echoed Freire's (2009) critique that functional or technical approaches ignore the intellect and creativity of teachers. She said, *"...are ones where the—the workshop facilitator sees themselves as the expert. I've felt quite insulted at some of the workshops! (Laughs.) Because I felt talked down to."*

In many of their stories, instructors spoke of the focus on PD that is for development of skills related to the administrative aspects of teaching. As D said, *"So what I think—I mean from my point of view—there's—we—we get a lot of professional development on all the things that we're supposed to do for the—for administration of our programs (group laughs.) and it's sort of endless, right?"* Further to this, in the focus group the instructors spoke about their frustration with current PD opportunities reflecting certain aspects of teaching that focus on the technical or on promoting efficiency. M said when I asked her about the current focus of PD:

*I'm afraid it's because the decisions are generally made by people in an administrative positions—and that it's for those people, and I'm not knocking it—it's a very important piece of what we do. But for those people the priority is efficiency in a certain way.*

Several of the instructors talked about learning the technical aspects of teaching being useful, particularly for newer instructors to the field. However, as T said, *“Seriously, I think, you know, after going to PD events for twenty years, if I had to do one more fucking pronunciation workshop—I’ll shoot myself.”* As well, D said:

*Oh well there is lots of that. I mean it is the same old, same old. A lot of people trying to figure out new ways of teaching practical stuff. There is nothing new, it just revamped in another wrapping. I think feeling like there is a sense of purpose to what teachers feel like they are doing. And maybe that is another component to the social justice issue. You have a real opportunity to make changes in those people’s lives. I know I have.*

In general instructors' were consistent in their criticisms of current PD practices. They unanimously felt they wanted more from their PD in particular, they want to have opportunities to address the broader socio-political questions that reflect the realities of their classrooms. They viewed the role of PD as outside of just the technical aspect of teaching and wanted what can be termed critical pedagogical practices.

### ***Isolation***

Some of the instructors spoke about the isolation they feel as teachers and several spoke about how they feel distanced from their colleagues. M spoke of this when she said, *“I mean that is an issue for a lot of teachers—many teachers are very isolated, and*

uh—yeah.” One of the instructors spoke about certain policies around professionalism creating further isolation and division between herself and the students. B said:

*So what does that feel like? Because I actually found teaching really difficult. I found I felt really alienated from people, because I was working alone and I was in a classroom of students but there was this giant space between us, no matter—I felt like I kept trying different things and some days would go fine and then other days would just be like, “Oh my God! I’m miles apart! I’m so alone.”*

Instructors’ responses highlighted the complexities of teaching. As illustrated by many of the remarks, instructors spoke about the importance of having supportive colleagues and managers and most particularly of the value of creating a supportive community for instructors working with vulnerable populations including students who have experienced trauma. This area of work can be quite difficult when working in isolation. These ideas raise questions about power, power inequality, and conflicting perspectives on education.

### **Responding to Powerlessness**

Conducting this research reminded me that the current direction in government-funded EAL education is quite different than the kind of programming the instructors and I propose—that is, EAL programming designed to better serve people who have experienced trauma. As an educator who has worked with people who have experienced trauma, I have found the work is becoming more and more difficult due to

mandated changes to programming that render instructors more powerless . Yet, the LINC instructors are often the front line or/and the first contact that students (newcomers to Canada) have with Canadians. D said:

*You are probably one of the most significant Canadian people they have met because everyone else is mostly from their own culture. They are curious and your giving your love for them is given back a million times. It is also you have a chance to make a significant memory for people, a good one.*

This was an interesting point on a number of levels and raises some significant issues about the roles instructors play for newcomers. Instructors may be the first people to recognize their experience with trauma and to connect them with resources and support. Instructors also play a pivotal role as brokers for their transition to Canada and in enhancing connection to communities.

A number of the instructors spoke about challenging their own and their students' sense of isolation and generating a sense of capacity or connection. Many instructors mentioned good supervision of the teachers and support at their place of work as resources enabling them to talk through issues. They talked about a wide variety of places in which to find support. D said,

*But it's—yeah—always having a chance to uh—just bounce ideas off of—I have a great mentor and a great manager and a great IC (Instructional*

*Coordinator), so I think that door is always open for teachers—that's really important..*

T further highlighted the opportunities she has to be supported by her colleagues: *“Um—I would say, yes I do have a community practice within my own workplace. The—the I am lucky to have wonderful colleagues who have all kinds of different experience and you know, and are willing to share it and I really appreciate that.”*

### **Listening**

Some of the instructors talked about the importance of supporting their students by not being afraid to listen and value students' stories. This idea of listening was viewed by instructors as an important aspect of an inclusive classroom for the students who had experienced trauma. T talked about how she was a good listener. She gave the example of a student she had who disclosed to her about his experiences as a refugee. She said, *“You know I think for me I am not afraid to hear things and I think for those guys the guy [she was referring to one of her students] try to tell his jail story tell me I want to know and I think when he saw I could talk to her [referring to herself here] about this it was okay....”* D was also quite conscious of the importance of listening. As she said, *“I think that—we all want to tell our stories. It's like fundamental of being human. So—the ability to—yeah, listen to their stories.”* Further to this B said, *“Having opportunities to share their own thoughts and feelings and values and have that be listened to, respected and valued. I think all of those things can build someone sense of self worth.”* Within my interviews and focus group the instructors spoke about the

importance of listening to students' stories. It was thus apparent to me that listening to people's stories was a very important aspect of supporting students who have experienced trauma. The participants words point to the value of being listened to and heard to help interrupt a sense of marginalization and powerlessness. Some instructors also talked about the importance of respect, trust and dealing with conflict as a component of listening. She particularly spoke of the importance of listening and talking about difficult issues and multiple perspectives in the classroom. M spoke about her previous experiences using conflict resolution techniques to promote an open dialogue.

*I think if you have a class that is hunky dory, nicey, nicey where there are no problems, there is no nothing, it doesn't connect to people's real lives. It is a fine line, it is a difficult balance to walk there but I think it is important to leave space for that and at the same time to ensure there are guidelines in place to how we talk about it.*

In this quote she was referring to the struggle between bringing issues that are relevant to students lives and not wanting to make them uncomfortable or not knowing as an instructor how to talk about issues. She used the example of addressing sexual health in the classroom. She spoke about her experiences having students ask her questions privately about sexual health and women's reproductive health and wanting to address these questions in the context of the classroom.

The subject of listening highlights the tension between listening to people's stories and taking on the role of counsellor in the classroom. Several of the instructors

felt more comfortable with the role of bearing witness to people's stories than others did, but they all acknowledged the tension that existed in listening to people's stories. As Horsman (1999) says, "When learners trust the classroom is a safe place to take risks they may be tempted to be more open with telling stories of their lives. This creates tension. It demands the instructors be able to hear these stories" (p.117). D reflected on this tension:

*They are hard to hear, right? And it's—it is—um—nothing makes me really sad—sometimes—I don't get a lot of chances—you know, you go back into the world to your life and it's all very, very easy compared to that. So it's kind of that complicated relationship you're having with the world because of there are these parallel universes—you are living in.*

As T said, *"This isn't a counselling room-it's not necessarily a place for them to come and unload."* One of the instructors in the focus group spoke of *"a fine line"* to describe instructors' roles in bearing witness to people's stories and ensuring that the rest of the students' needs are met. Further, T said, *"As much as I'd like to give them all of my attention, it's not going to happen."*

The instructors talked about how they tried to encourage the students to talk to a settlement worker or a counsellor. Enabling such a conversation could be challenging at times because of the referral process or because of the student's immediate need to talk. As B said, she sometimes felt cornered, unprepared or as if she was working outside her job. She said:

*It is extra time, extra unpaid time so if there is someone who has a lot of need that can start to feel like a train or I think a struggle is when it feels like that person is taking up a lot of space and not wanting to shut them down but not wanting to create this dynamic where it is needy, needy, needy, needy...*

Horsman (1999) writes of “the pressure to counsel” as a challenge for literacy workers. Her research echoes many of the concerns the LINC instructors had about listening to students' stories. Instructors recognized, in the LINC world, that different instructors might look at their roles quite differently. Although their identified role is to teach English language skills, all the people I interviewed perceived their roles as more than that. They spoke about different teaching approaches that may not be compatible with their own. As D said:

*And they're not—and they're (other instructors in LINC) not educated in the way that I have been or that other people have been and they bring different experiences to it, and they're really not that interested. They're interested in language—they're interested in—in the academics of teaching. And they want to leave the rest—it's not their job. And they're absolutely right—it isn't. You know, so—but still, you still have people in your classrooms like that. You still have to respond.*

Furthermore, instructors saw their roles continuing to change as they take on the role of counsellor because students have less access to resources and support to enhance their learning. The instructors were keen to share stories of the students they taught and to delineate the limits on their own ability to change the situation for students thought to be struggling with trauma. Frequently, the instructors mentioned the dwindling resources, cuts to services (such as Vancouver Association of Survivors of Torture, Family Services of Greater Vancouver and the Bridge Clinic) or cultural inappropriateness of medical, counselling or settlement services referrals available to their students. As M mentioned, *“Um—yeah, that there’s—there’s never been a lot and it seems like it’s (service) becoming less available”*.

### **3) Marginalization**

Young (1990) discusses how social groups have been excluded from “useful participation in social life” (Young, 1990, p. 53), and this could quite readily speak to the experience of students who have experienced trauma. The instructors I interviewed recognized the intersections of multiple forms of oppression for the students with histories of trauma. Instructors spoke of stratification within the class based on social class, race, literacy and technological skills. A number of the instructors commented on the structural inequalities such as poverty that exist for their students. Instructors described multiple barriers they encountered in supporting these students.

For instance, B discussed her understanding of racism as one form of marginalization among many. Her structural understandings seemed to support Young's (1990) analysis of oppression. B started by talking about an individual student from a

different country and socioeconomic status from the rest of the class. She moved to speaking more generally.

*...I ended up feeling this tension of this person is facing these barriers and just coming to the classroom is such different experience, racism from other students, perhaps seeming unusual compared to the norm because usually I found they were from a different country than the vast majority.*

There are similarities between B and T understanding and descriptions of racism. In T's first interview she described a classroom situation where there was a more subtle case of racism.

*There are class issues, there are language issues and even race issues there and she is obviously a different colour and for some of them, I would not say there was overt racism but they are more cautious around her. I do notice for example if she tries to be generous if she goes to the dollar store and buys a bag of chips for instance and spreads them out amongst people often people won't eat them, they won't touch them.*

In her final interview she spoke of racism as more of an intra-personal or individual problem and to be treated that way:

*And if there's racism in the classroom, it's not—it's not about, "Oh, here we go again—here's a bunch of rich Chinese people picking on a poor African refugee." We have to just say, "Okay, that's not a place for that*

*kind of analysis. I'd rather, " This individual is having some issues—with this individual, how do I deal with that?"*

As T emphasized, instructors might prefer to look at racism as an individual issue whereas B talked about addressing it as a broader issue. As I have seen in my practice, instructors may have varying understandings of racism and may isolate classroom practices from broader class discussion about social justice issues.

The instructors I interviewed described instances of their challenging the labelling of students by other students, addressing racism directly or intervening in classroom disputes. As B said:

*I ended up feeling this tension of this person is facing these barriers and just coming to the classroom is such different experience, racism from other students, perhaps seeming unusual compared to the norm because usually I found they were from a different country than the vast majority.*

M talked about conflict between students in the classroom and trying to deal with these conflicts. She said:

*I had a serious conflict between two, the same two from Iraq. One who is Christian and one who is Muslim and one of them made a terrible stereotypical statement about the people of the other one's group and the other one responded with a really terrible insult and they were going back and forth like that for some time. I have never had a situation like that in*

*class before. Is that trauma? Or is that people coming from a conflict zone? Or is that the same thing? It is all hard to tease apart maybe it doesn't really matter. It is the same difficulty.*

Racism, classism, isolation, sexism and how to address these forms of marginalization were important to the instructors because in EAL these forms of oppression are barriers for students. The exclusion of certain students based on economics, race, and access to resources can be applied to LINC classes.

### **Responding to Marginalization**

A number of the instructors used the term *social justice* and others spoke of aspects of social justice without using the term. The instructors talked about their understandings of power in their position as instructors and their own privilege. As D said when speaking about assumptions and privilege:

*uh judgments and things like that because we all have them—it's not like—and we—we are—to recognize our privilege—that's another thing I don't think enough teachers really do. That we have—in a total position of power, and we have a ton of—we can really screw people up.*

A few instructors, particularly B, spoke about going beyond an awareness of privilege to addressing and advocating for practical and institutional social justice.

*B: Can I just add one thing about the privilege thing, is that I think if we do anything about privilege it also has to include social justice—like not just to say we're privileged, but to say if we're talking about—*

*D: —what does it mean—*

*B: —we like—we're not just suggesting that we recognize our privilege but actually suggesting that we have a world that is just.*

A number of the instructors highlighted the importance of addressing issues of power and privilege in PD. I further explore this in the recommendation section of the final chapter. In the final interview I asked the instructors to define social justice since it was mentioned repeatedly by the instructors as an aspect of how they approached their classroom practices. M said:

*Fairness in, um, access to education, access to healthcare, access to education. Fairness in, of course, access to jobs. All of these things which we're losing.*

B highlighted her perspective on social justice:

*So—the three main ones being capitalism, patriarchy and um regionalization or national oppression—which I see both of those being*

*two parts of one thing. Um—so to me social justice is addressing those systems—*

Not all the instructors had the same perspective on social justice. T was reluctant to explore the concept in the classroom. She spoke about social justice in her personal life but said the following about the classroom:

*These are individuals and my job is to relate to them as individuals—not as any kind of representatives or anything else.”Okay, that’s not a place for that kind of analysis. I’d rather, “This individual is having some issues—with this individual, how do I deal with that?*

T separated social justice from teaching individuals. As pointed out above, she provided examples of structural racism but did not wish to discuss racism as observed in class. She was very clear there was a place for talking about social justice but did not want to talk about it in the classroom although she approached her classroom practices with certain aspects of a social justice framework.

In contrast M saw the importance of speaking about difficult issues, oppression, and realities as an integral part of her work *“I know some teachers there are a lot of things they just won’t talk about it in the class because it too touchy, too and I have a different point of view.”*

## ***Critical Thinking in the Classroom***

Differing ideas about social justice and about talking of oppression are an important part of how instructors see the classroom in relation to inclusiveness. This theme is significant when talking about using critical pedagogy or addressing issues of social justice as not all instructors will have a common understanding. As M said, “Well, critical thinking is scary. Critical thinking puts you into um possible conflict with your coworkers.” I felt that she may have been referring to going against the prevailing narrative of language education and being subversive can mean you are challenging other teachers' approaches and methods.

Furthermore, it is even more complicated talking about oppression and students' realities in LINC classrooms because, as B pointed out, there may be resistance from students. As she stated, students may not want to talk in the classroom about oppression they were experiencing or had experienced.

*They wanted to come to class and have fun and think about something different. That was the feedback I got from them they don't want me to be introducing a lot of about what is really hard in their lives. They are sort of like it is really hard we don't want to talk about it, we want to have fun at the end of a long working day.*

The findings of my research highlight one of the complications, isolation from co-workers, and resistance (from other teachers) in changing established structural and teaching practices to more critical practices. My research also demonstrates the risks

that instructors take in using more critical pedagogical practices and responding to oppression in their classrooms.

### ***Community Building***

Instructors also emphasized the importance of community in their work as a way of countering marginalization. For instance, B and D spoke about the notion of supporting and encouraging community building in the classroom.

*And that's where I feel my job is mostly—is to help create community with that—even though they might not speak the same language. And when they do—they make great friendships—which they do often—they take (the friends made in) another class to another class. (D)*

B explained the idea of community as an important piece of working with people who have experienced trauma:

*I can really see how being in a classroom where there is a really positive environment can help people and I know that from my own experience being in community. It can make a huge difference in my life too. Those are the sort of things I have tried to create in terms of dealing with trauma.*

The notion of classroom community was referred to by all the instructors. In the focus group we had a lively discussion about the notion of an inclusive classroom community.

I first began by asking the instructors, *“What would a responsive ELSA class look like?”* They reacted quite strongly to the word responsive. They felt it implied that they had to respond to the student who was known to or believed to have experienced trauma to the exclusion of the other students in the classroom. T said, *“...but as a strictly—as an ELSA teacher, I have to deal with everybody in my classroom, not just this person.”* The instructors wanted to use the term inclusive instead. M said *“I think a rewording of ‘inclusive’ works for me....”*

Initially I organized the data describing the aspect of community separate from the instructors' descriptions of their approaches to teaching. As I looked at the data again I began to reframe how I looked at classroom community. Their understandings of what constitutes an inclusive classroom community differed and were complex. I realized it was better to reframe how the instructors' values and political motivation shape the classroom. The instructors used the terms *values, listening, social justice,* and *connection* as aspects of their classroom practices as instructors within LINC.

### ***Relationship Building In and Outside the Classroom***

Another central theme the instructors talked about was closely tied to the importance of creating community in the classroom through openness and relationship building. They gave many examples of how they did this, including providing time for taking a break and having tea/coffee and other opportunities to share thoughts and feelings. For example D stated, *“...In those moments too. That’s where relationships are built.”*

D also commented on the importance of the role of the support of and trust in her colleagues:

*I don't know—at least my supervisors and my instructional coordinators have been extremely supportive of whatever I do—so they're fine with it. I mean, obviously if I was like we are going to McDonalds. I think they would be questioning that—but I generally feel like I've got a lot of support from them to—they trust me—to know what to do for the students that I have....*

Such support is also fundamental for enabling instructors to develop different approaches, talk through difficult situations, address realities, and encourage self-care.

As M said,

*And I feel safe to do that there because I—and I don't know why exactly—but I don't think the manager is gonna be upset about that. She doesn't—it's not—it's not there—I have worked at places where um people are afraid of anything political.*

Another important relationship was the connection to settlement workers and other resource people in order to develop links with various services outside the classroom.

As T said *“I mean basically the settlement workers are open to anyone with any kind of issue whatsoever and it does not have to be trauma for sure or mental health or anything like that.”* When talking about community in the classroom, B took a similar approach to T and highlighted the importance of settlement workers:

*We try to develop those relationships with students who need a one on one person because as teachers we are not available necessarily to do that. So definitely settlement workers have helped in that way and have connected students to other resources.*

The importance of settlement workers raised some questions for me around including their relevance and influence in supporting instructors. The instructors who had settlement workers on site spoke most favourably about the connections that could be made between students and settlement workers. Their thoughts on the role of settlement workers also made me wonder if settlement workers could play a role in training and professional development opportunities for EAL instructors. Additionally, how could government and policy makers further incorporate this recognition of the importance of settlement workers in LINC? Lastly it made me wonder how all the federal government cuts in 2010 to settlement services, particularly of settlement workers, further impact service to students, further marginalizing the already marginalized. I look at this further in the final chapter of this dissertation.

#### **4) Cultural Imperialism**

According to Young, “Cultural Imperialism involves the universalization of a dominant group’s experience and culture, and its establishment as the norm” (Young, 1990, p.59). As discussed in the literature review section of this dissertation, the English language and its role in promoting economic and social dominance is a key feature of LINC. The instructors I interviewed specifically discussed the stereotyping and the identification by

fellow students of students who had experienced trauma or were different from the majority of the students in some way or other. The instructors who worked in Vancouver talked about the shifting socio-economic backgrounds of individual students that were different from that of the majority of students in the class. As T said, *“I did notice there was definitely a divide between them other students who were here for different reasons so sometimes Mainland Chinese students come and they are not refugees.”* These students often had less formal education and had less access to or knowledge of technology and were more likely to be excluded. As B said:

*The majority of the students in my class have been Chinese and they would be from a different country so they would be facing different language, different culture and then on top of that sometimes unusual behaviour or really low literacy skills compared to someone who is university educated. Just because of living through war or displaced or maybe in their family situation dropping out of school really early.*

The arrival patterns for refugees and immigrants have changed quite radically over the past several years and the instructors' comments reflect this. Several of the instructors working in Vancouver mentioned they might have only one student who was a refugee in their classroom, the rest being immigrants. As T says when describing one of her students, *“She is isolated in every way possible. You know the composition of the class that I have now is fairly and sometimes extremely well off mostly Mainland Chinese”*. This points to the need for a nuanced analysis of research of racialized, gender and social class and also how students came to Canada (as refugee versus refugees).

Changes in immigration policies mean LINC classes may have one refugee student in the classroom with a group of students who are well-off and more advantaged. The effect of this can be marginalization of students who are already isolated.

The instructors who taught more demographically similar students did not make the same observation. They were more likely to refer to connections between students. D, who taught mostly refugees in classes outside of the city of Vancouver, spoke about friendships between students and a broad sense of inclusion and community. She spoke about these connections as a way to mitigate barriers for students. Here she provides an example situation that occurred while she was teaching a unit on family and several students in the class had lost family members. For example, she stated: *“And in fact, in some ways that’s also kind of created those relationships between the two—in a nice kind of way.”*

### **Responding to Cultural Imperialism**

All of the instructors spoke at length about how their work and lives were rooted in certain values and how this impacted their understanding of trauma and connection to their students. They used terms like compassion and openness. Several instructors talked of how they connect these values to their teaching practice: *“My lifestyle choices are completely rooted in compassion—you know?”* (T). A long-term instructor (D) spoke about the reasons people might get into teaching and characteristics they might have: *“Um—well, a deep sense of altruism, and a deep sense of connection to uh—a sense of community.”*

All of the instructors I interviewed talked about countering assumptions. The instructors worked against labelling the students based on their backgrounds. As T said:

*Looking at a person as a representative of their culture, or as a representative of—she is a representative of someone who has been beaten, she is a representative of someone who comes from a war torn country, I think that's a bit of a danger actually and the whole social justice thing springs from that.*

Several of the instructors mentioned calling attention to areas that are often overlooked in the curriculum. M recalls addressing the overlooked issue of women's health in her class. She said, *"I think I may have told you last year in the health section a number of women were coming to me asking me questions about women's health so I thought there is a real gap and let's try and fill that gap..."* She also explained:

*Well I think about some of the other teachers and things they have talked about. I think it is fair to say lots of people are fearful of conflict, fearful of politics, fearful of religion and fearful of sexuality. I think where you are kind of going to with this is that I think it would be really great to have some training where teachers could see how that could work and see what guidelines, protections could be put in place.*

She went on to talk about the importance of bringing up themes and subjects that speak to students' lives and experiences. As she said, *"Don't want to re-traumatize which is a*

*thing to think about to be concerned about but you know you want to be able for people to talk about their real lives.”*

## **5) Exploitation**

The instructors only briefly discussed exploitation or how to challenge it in relation to their classroom practices. Young's concept of exploitation states: “The injustice of exploitation consists in social processes that bring about a transfer of energies from one group to another to produce unequal distributions, and in a way in which social institutions enable a few to accumulate while they constrain many more” (Young, p.53). M briefly mentioned the concept when discussing changes to policy: *“they (students) need not to be shoved on to getting some meaningless badly paid job after the first year they’ve been here, when they barely have a handle on the language.”* As M said, students are being prepared for menial jobs that only need rudimentary language skills where there is little opportunity for any movement to better pay and more professional jobs. There is much written on the exploitative nature of current immigration policy, as listed in my literature review.

## **Chapter Summary**

In this chapter, I looked at how instructors understood trauma. Then I have used Young’s analysis of oppression as heuristic device to organize and present the result of my analysis of the data. I predominantly focused on violence, marginalization, powerlessness and to some degree cultural imperialism and exploitation. Young’s framework proved to be a good fit with how the instructors in my study spoke about the

challenges they faced in the class and the struggles of their students. It also provided a useful framework capturing the LINC instructors pedagogical practices in their effort to counter the oppression experienced both in and out of their classrooms. One of the most significant barriers identified by instructors was teaching in an increasingly neoliberal context where they are pushed towards measuring and asked to do more with less time. The instructors responses to counter oppression included listening and creating more inclusive classrooms for their students. In the next chapter, I turn my attention to discussing what instructors had to say about taking action; what did they actually do and what recommendations they would make for future change.

## Chapter 6: Taking Action

### Chapter Introduction

According to Freire (1995), “For the truly humanist educator and the authentic revolutionary, the object of action is the reality to be transformed by them together with other men—not other men themselves” (p.83). Freire (1997) wrote, “Consciousness about the world, which implies consciousness about myself in the world, with it and with others, which also implies our ability to realize the world to understand it, it is not limited to a rationalistic experience” (p.94). With this in mind, I explore in this chapter the recommendations and actions based on the instructors' thoughts and ideas about trauma and inclusive classrooms where learning is supported through various practices and systemic changes.

### Recommendations for Actions from Instructors

A large part of the focus group and final interviews were focused on linking knowledge to action--that is, what actions should be taken to change the LINC program. In the focus group, a key theme of instructors was changes that needed to be made to make the LINC program more inclusive. These recommendations ranged across large-scale systemic changes and policy activism to changes to teacher-training and PD.

B pointed out that many of the recommendations made by the instructors focused on changes within a tenuous and in-flux system *“But I do think it’s to keep in mind, that’s the direction ELSA is going and if we’re talking about changes, we are*

*talking about small things within a system.*” The other instructors responded with agreement. As T said following B's comment, *“That’s true.”*

There is a need to question the current practices and to provide strategies oriented towards social justice. There is also a need to look at how structural ideologies and practices intersect. The idea of large systemic changes was difficult to imagine within the boundaries of the current LINC program. It was also hard to imagine given the lack of clarity around where the LINC program was going and how changes would be implemented. The lack of clarity meant it was difficult to see how to best serve students who had experienced trauma. For example, some of the questions the instructors raised regarding the possible changes included: Would there be literacy classes for low literacy students? Would there be services to refer students to? What kind of preparation time would teachers have? How would attendance policies change? How will a push for more technology impact students who don't have access to it? As D said at the time of my final interview about the LINC contracts: *“We still don't know, they are still negotiating.”* Despite this uncertainty the instructors, made some concrete recommendations for change to current practices.

## **Policy Change**

Instructors had difficulty formulating policy recommendations as they did not know how federal government decisions and actions would affect current policies. There was much conjecture but not much clarity about policies around attendance, PD, and assessment. B spoke about policies and the idea of giving students more time to study:

*I feel like everything in the ELSA program because really quantifiable and you are talking about things that are not easy to assess or label. How would you decide who qualifies for this exemption or does everyone get as much time. There are all those things that I feel are like really interesting policy issues but I don't know what you would do with that necessarily.*

The group did explore different understandings of current policy problems but were hesitant to make recommendations until they had more information.

As stated earlier, my interviews happened during challenging times within the LINC program. Certain changes did take place that speak to M's recommendations including shrinking numbers in mid level classes 2, 3, 4 and an end to time limits for students. It is too early to say how these changes will impact students but this might be an area for further investigation.

### **Opportunities for Changes to PD**

Instructors believed PD was one avenue towards creating more inclusive classrooms. As B explained her thoughts on the potential role of PD: *"I guess the question could be, what do we feel like we need to know and other teachers need to know in order to be able to create as much as possible, an inclusive atmosphere...."* D echoed this in saying: *"I think that needs to be more like—um—how—how are teachers going to be trained in order to be able to cope with a variety of students in the class. And that's—and then being able to really identify what your role is, and refer as you need."* Through the group interview and final interview, I thought a good approach to discussing these

recommendations to PD would be to ask the instructors to talk about their hopes for PD and their positive experiences with PD.

The instructors proposed alternative conceptualizations of PD. They spoke about PD or community of practice that would promote reflection and reciprocal learning between like-minded professionals. They referred to PD that was more problem-posing and addressed the realities of their experience. M reflected on this: *“I guess like—I think it’s meaningful when people see things in their classroom that they’re questioning and wanting to do something about..”* Further to this, D said:

*I think at the outset, the professional development around what it means—what does a multi-barriered person look like—what does it mean to be um coming from these—from places, and your agenda as a teacher is not theirs, and those kinds of things—like step back and—and—and you’re not asking people to be all like, Pollyanna about things, but just to be you know—having that awareness and having an awareness of what it means to be a woman of colour in this culture and uh what it means to have ten kids at home—that you’re trying to look after. Um—I don’t think that there’s enough of that kind of um—you know it is partly compassion but it’s just really....*

D talked about the need to explore students' realities and the role and agenda of the instructors. This is an important theme in developing PD as it highlights what Freire (1987) said, “critical educators need to examine the social and political interests that construct their own voices” (p.22).

Further to this, the instructors spoke about PD that would include teachers looking at their own privilege, exploring concepts of fear of working with students who had experienced trauma, and looking at the teachers' own assumptions about students and teaching practices. Freire (1987) argued that educators need to question their own privilege and power. B echoed this when she spoke about the need for PD that questions privilege and teachers' own issues.

*Their own experiences of their students maybe—or their own experiences of class or racism or gender—but that's where I feel like teachers would want to be taking on the whole for their students or thinking they know when they don't—it's dealing with your own shit, rather than dealing with your students' problems. Like that's what I think teachers need to do. We like—we're not just suggesting that we recognize our privilege but actually suggesting that we have world that is just.*

D and M's exchange also spoke to this notion:

*D: Well that's why I think things like having workshops and understanding privilege, understanding class, and understanding race—I mean, we don't talk about those things—un less you're educated—you happen to have the right kind of education prior to becoming an ELSA—*

*Maya: Or interest.*

All the instructors spoke at great length about the need for different PD practices. M said,

*But I think that people really do—most people really do care, so if they can have enough background and understanding of somebody’s—difficulties and viewpoint and perspective and experience—I guess—I guess that’s kind of the way that I would go at it.*

They gave examples of good PD practices—using drama, popular theatre, and scenarios—and how they could be implemented to address issues of trauma, privilege, and social justice. In the following excerpts instructors provided some concrete examples of how to explore the realities of people’s experience. D gave the example of a very helpful short PD she attended that looked at the specific experiences students bring to the classroom:

*I went to a workshop on what the experience they have now in Bhutan and Nepal before they came to Canada. That was so helpful because when they came into the classroom and all their health issues and you know the culture and that was taught to me before they arrived was useful. I think if also there are certain organizations to try to get messages out, they need to get the word out. These are people coming from Syria and this may be what they have experienced. That kind of level of compassion or care can be set in place before.*

B furthered these ideas when talking about what would be helpful when looking at trauma:

*And I do think a basic level of understanding in common would be useful. That it's from someone who knows what they're talking about—I think you can be clear—“This is some information about trauma—don't be diagnosing left right and centre. You don't have the power to diagnose—we're just giving you some information so you might be able to recognize signals.*

The instructors I interviewed came to the study voluntarily with a strong desire to explore and address the idea of supporting marginalized students. As Freire (1987) said, “all critical educators are also learners” (p.22). This sentiment was echoed by the instructors throughout our discussions as well as the idea that “some openness to comprehending what is in the orbit of the challenged being's sensibility” (Freire, 1987, p. 94). They all spoke about a strong desire to understand global issues and the world around them.

This supports what the instructors said to me about their roles and how PD could change to better reflect this awareness. As well, questions of power and privilege and addressing students' realities were seen as important components in PD opportunities.

While these instructors outlined some key issues to be explored in the content of PD, they also commented that this might not be what was wanted by all EAL instructors. M said, *“The difficulty with that is who's going to show up to those workshops? People*

*who are already interested....*” As many of the instructors described, the approach of some instructors might be contrary to the approach other EAL educators might take. Rather than exploring students' realities and questions of social justice, other instructors in education may tend to seek out more of a technical perspective and banking approach to EAL education. As well, people might use certain terms such as social justice and inclusiveness but have very different understandings of the meaning and hence of implementation. D explained the different perspectives and the potential misunderstandings that might occur. She spoke about the challenges and conflicts that could arise with how different people might understand and interpret social justice.

*I would have a really hard time with one of the people I work with, sitting in meeting talking about social justice. I think he and I would (laughs) I don't think him and I would have a lot of understanding between each other and that can make it worse. It doesn't work so well in a work environment.*

The work of Angel Lin (2004) addresses challenges that the instructors highlighted around introducing critical pedagogy to teacher training. The instructors I interviewed talked extensively about the challenges in using a more critical or dialogical approach both in their classrooms and as a PD practice. They spoke about how it was not a common approach and other teachers and students may not be responsive to it.

### **Community of Practice**

The instructors spoke of building communities that would allow them to share concerns and thoughts on teaching with other like-minded instructors. Several of the instructors

spoke favourably about the experience of taking part in the study. As—*just having this conversation with you has been really useful*—. M said “*Oh Gosh*” This study demonstrated to me that there is a strong desire in instructors to have opportunities to dialogue with other instructors. Several of the instructors spoke about the concept of communities of practice (Wenger, 2000). According to Wenger “communities of practice are groups of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly” (p. 1). The instructors felt these communities could range from more formalized workplace groups, on-line or with instructors from various places. T said,

*“We’re gonna create this—it probably would have to be created online I suspect—you know I don’t think people could—maybe some could—I couldn’t dedicate regular nights to something like this—but maybe an online forum...”* Time is limited for EAL teachers who are often underpaid and often have many commitments inside and outside the classroom. M said, *“I mean it could—could be as simple as people just bringing that have happened in the classroom to the group to talk about. But I think it would be good to have a goal.”*

M identified one goal being an opportunity to discuss issues that come up in the classroom. M also said the following when I asked her about what the goal of such a group should be: *“I’m kind of really interested in your idea about thinking of um—professional development—teacher training that looks at social justice issues and class and racism and all that.”*

T also spoke about communities of practice, *“Um—I think that the whole community practice is definitely building up—becoming big. It’s like one of those little*

*mud bubbles that's starting to erupt....*" She spoke about building up in a positive way and referred to using on-line communities of practice: *"...and so people can post discussions, concerns, experiences and others can respond."* The concept of communities of practice could relate to working with students who have experienced trauma, as it could provide a good place to discuss how to support students, share ideas on resources, and address concerns. There is a body of literature that examines on-line or virtual communities of practice (Dubé, Bourhis, & Jacob, 2005; Murillo, 2008; Plastina, 2009). The instructors spoke of this happening informally in their workplaces where people were already talking about concerns or shared ideas about their classrooms or teaching practices. One important feature of the community of practice discussion was where they might take place. M felt it was better to have separation from her workplace. She said, *"I think it is important to be—for—you know, in thinking of a community of practice group—maybe even the teacher training group—that it be quite separate from one's employment situation."* Further to this, M felt it needed to be separate so that *"It's not going to go back to—and have impact on—people at their employment—it's not going to have impact on their jobs."* T, however, felt it was important that it happen within the current workplace context: *"Yes—it could be—I mean—the only sort of red flag that pops up for me—it sounds fabulous—is always the time issue."* As noted, instructors had different views on the location of communities of practice which illustrates the importance of considering where people might feel safe to share feelings and concerns. It also demonstrates how it might not be possible for instructors to attend PD activities when they have other commitments. There has been a focus on community of practice and connecting research to practice in TESOL

(Plastina, 2009; Tavakoli, 2015; Haneda, 2012) that addresses some of the concerns the instructors highlighted in my interviews.

### **Collective Action**

In this study, I have gathered and analyzed instructors' ideas about changes to current LINC policies and practices. My research was conducted at a time of great change within government-funded EAL provision in BC and a great deal of uncertainty. This fact greatly impacted the nature of my project. As a result, it was more difficult for the instructors to make policy recommendations and envision large scale systemic changes.

In the earlier chapter on methodology (Chapter 3), I identified various types of validity relevant to my work, including outcome validity, catalytic validity, process validity. I argued that my interviews and focus group were an opportunity for the instructors to reflect critically on their practices. The instructors expressed gratitude in having an opportunity to reflect on their reality of working in LINC as well as gaining a more complex understanding of their everyday experience. The group interview was energizing for me as an EAL educator and researcher, and it was an open dialogue through which I gained new understanding of the realities of LINC instructors. As the instructors have noted, the research and particularly the focus group became a kind of community of practice and so this method enabled a kind of catalytic validity to be realized.

As stated earlier, one key area in which several of the instructors felt they could make some practical recommendations was PD. For some instructors, a desire was

expressed to present the information discussed through the interviews and focus group of this research at a more public forum. Two of the instructors and I have been accepted to present at a BCTEAL conference this spring (2015).

## **Chapter Summary**

This chapter explored the recommendations for change made by the instructors in my study. These recommendations ranged from more responsive and relevant PD that goes beyond technical development to broader discussion of students' and instructors' realities inside and outside the classroom. As noted, instructors struggled to make specific recommendations regarding policy change, given the recent significant changes leaving those involved feeling much insecurity about the future of EAL for newcomers. One change that was highlighted, and partly realized through the focus group discussion was the need for communities of practice to be created to support and allow opportunities for discussion and for thoughts to be shared. In the next and final chapter, I summarize the findings of this study and outline suggestions for future research.

## **Chapter 7: Project Summary and Conclusions**

By employing an action research approach influenced by feminist action research principles, Freire's ideas of pedagogy for liberation, and Young's framework for analyzing oppression and working towards social justice, this project has explored instructor's understanding of LINC policies and practices as they pertain to working with people who have experienced trauma. Inclusion, participation, action, social change, and researcher reflexivity were all components that were strived for in the research process.

This research study helps to fill in the gaps and is unique in bringing attention to the LINC program and how certain policies and practices have created barriers for instructors attempting to create more inclusive space to support learners who have experienced trauma. It complements and expands upon existing studies, particularly Jenny Horsman's work, to consider the impact of trauma on language education learners. It speaks to the crucial role of the instructor in supporting students and how certain features of LINC make this challenging and to a certain extent are traumatic for learners. This research is oriented towards social justice and outlined changes needed in current EAL practices that can support students who are marginalized.

### **Time of Change**

On one hand we open our hearts and say with compassion that we're going to get you out of this terrible situation," she says. "But then we bring you here and then we're not going to give you the help you need," says

Christina Melnechuk, Family Services of Greater Vancouver, Manager of Counselling and Trauma Services, (The Tyee, 2014)

As noted, this research was conducted during a time of great change to settlement, language, and health services for refugees and immigrants in Canada. One example of these changes happened in March 2014 when CIC changed or denied funding to refugee mental health services in B.C. As a result, organizations that had been offering free counselling programs for years were forced to shut their doors or decrease services to refugees. These organization included Family Services of Greater Vancouver, Vancouver Association for Survivors of Torture (VAST) and Immigrant Services Society (ISS), all of which provided support to refugees who had experienced trauma. These programs were crucial to supporting newcomers, often working specifically with people who have experienced trauma. As Chris Friesen, Settlement Services Director of Immigrant Services Society of BC (ISS of BC), said in the Tyee (Feb 2014), “If traumatized refugees are blocked from proper help...it will only add more barriers to their settlement process.” These barriers can include a deterioration of mental health, stigma, family conflict, and an inability to focus on learning English.

As well, during this time the oversight of provincial ELSA program reverted back to the federal government and the program was changed back to LINC. This change has impacted how language services are provided and will be provided in the province of British Columbia although it is difficult at this time to know exactly how all these changes will transpire. As I was writing this dissertation, in January 2015, Vancouver Community College, which had one of the longest standing EAL programs in Canada,

suspended their Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) Department.

## **Rethinking Trauma**

The more I read and spoke to people over the course of this research, the more I realized that the extent of trauma for immigrants and refugees is widespread. The description of events and experience that induce trauma that were shared by the instructors included domestic violence, war, displacement, loss, discrimination, and poverty. The instructors talked a great deal about the students believed or known to have had experienced trauma as part of a distinct group and as different from the other students. Although the instructors did not speak about the students' self-identification as traumatized, they did speak about differences in terms of behaviour, experiences and background compared with other students they had in their classes. As Young says, "Groups are an expression of social relations; a group exists only in relation to at least one other group" (Young, 1990, p.41). This limited attention to trauma and EAL learning may reflect the shift in immigration policy including the decrease in the number of refugee coming to Canada yearly. It was, however, very easy for all of the instructors to think of numerous and varied stories of violence and trauma that affected their students and even themselves. My study points to the need for a re-conceptualization of trauma in EAL programming is one key part of how instructors and policy makers can bring about positive change for their students.

A first step would be to look beyond an individualized or medical model of trauma and attend to structures and histories; look at where the students come from and all the

experiences they bring with them. It is important to contextualize the experience of the students within the broader discussion of geo-sociopolitics. As Martin Baro (1994) stated,

The problem is rooted in a limited conception of human beings that reduces them to their individual organism whose functioning can be understood in terms of their individual features. Such a conception of existence denies their existence as historical beings whose life is developed and fulfilled in complex web of social relations. (p.109)

B reiterated this notion of a more complex understanding of the experiences people bring to the classroom:

*I think my big dream would be um that teachers would spend a lot of time thinking about how our students got to that classroom. So—which doesn't necessarily mean only thinking about how are students oppressed because some of them are extremely wealthy and they got to the classroom in very interesting ways.*

Thinking of trauma as a separate issue from other forms of oppression means that we as educators risk not addressing the complexities of people's experiences. We also need to recognize the traumatic experience people are currently facing living in Canada. If we as educators recognize the multiple forms of marginalization such as poverty, isolation, racism and low literacy skills that students face we can open up the

possibilities for rethinking how our classroom practices and policies should change. Young's (1990) work on the Five Faces of Oppression could be a good framework to start a discussion about the intersections of oppressions and helping students and teachers understand how these intersections play out in the classroom and identifying measure to empower learners.

### **Time of Tension**

In conducting this research it became clearer that the current direction in government-funded EAL education is quite different from the kind of programming the instructors and I outlined an approach that better serves people who have experienced trauma. As an educator who has worked with people who have experienced trauma, I have found the work is becoming more difficult. As mentioned in the focus group and interviews, the resources and places to refer people to are dwindling and disappearing. It is also difficult to learn about new approaches and ideas when relevant PD is scarce. The LINC instructors are often the front line or/and the first contact students have with a Canadian, which means they need to have training in recognizing and accommodating people with histories of trauma

The LINC program even when it was fully funded excluded many students; recent cut backs to LINC create even greater exclusion and instructors are pressured to focus primarily on measuring progress and on administrative tasks. This makes it more difficult for instructors to respond to the challenges of working with people who have experienced trauma.

Instructors did briefly talk about not being part of the decision-making process in LINC and they talked extensively about the direction in which the federal government was taking LINC. The government and LINC policy makers are shaping LINC into a program to promote the government's economic imperative and have taken away opportunities for students and instructors to feel supported and capable. Many of the instructors saw this happening through moves to a business model approach and also through the cuts to PD and preparation time for instructors. When EAL education moves further towards a business-model approach and a narrow focus on economic productivity it is likely that students who are already marginalized will become more marginalized. Even if the central orientation remains “economic productivity”, this could be interpreted more broadly such that classrooms are more inclusive and teaching learners is done in a more holistic way.

### **Systemic Changes**

Throughout my dissertation I have demonstrated that this is a time of great change to government-funded EAL. There are some practical changes that might be carried out as a result of the research. I do not believe, however, that these changes are not sufficient as more substantial changes are required. As the Canadian Council for Refugees stated on Human Rights Day (2013):

These rights (of Refugees) include the rights to asylum, to liberty, to protection from torture, to an adequate standard of living, to healthcare, to

be reunited with family and to the protection of the best interests of children.

People experiencing extreme marginalization need to be provided with proper health care and economic resources to improve health and well-being. As well, an integrated approach to EAL education that incorporates social justice (Young, 1990) and which recognizes the multiplicity of oppression. In LINC there needs to be more equitable distribution of and more access to educational opportunities and also respect for and understanding of the experiences of students.

There also needs to be recognition in the wider Canadian society of the vast experiences of and contributions made by immigrants and refugees. This recognition could serve to counter the dominant deficit discourse about immigrants and refugees. In keeping with Fraser (1990), recognition involves building authentic and respectful social relations between instructors, policy makers, settlement workers and students, how this plays in/outside the classroom is key. The discussions about oppression, language rights, economic imperatives, and access to education should be brought into public discourse to help highlight the harm in targeting already marginalized or vulnerable to being marginalized people. We must critically analyze the impact regressive government budgets have on immigrants and refugees.

### **Changing LINC Programming within the Current Context**

The process of this inquiry also created space for reflection leading to a more complex understanding of working with people who have experienced trauma. In arguing for

alternatives to the banking model of education (Freire, 1995) that provide more of a critical pedagogical approach, instructors talked about PD and training. The instructors suggested how PD can be as an exploration of ways of looking at a multiplicity of issues. PD could provide opportunities to explore the different perspectives within the dominant understandings of trauma, race, privilege, mental health, and language and could provide a deeper understanding of the social contexts of marginalized students and the multiple ways they mediate their lives in Canada. The instructors who participated in my research are located throughout the Lower Mainland and teach in a variety of settings which suggests there are instructors over a wide area in a variety of teaching settings with a commitment to inclusive classrooms. There are instructors who may not always take a critical approach, and this could make it difficult to promote PD and training as envisioned by these instructors to the broader EAL community.

Making the issue of trauma and marginalization visible in the LINC program is essential. This does not necessarily mean, however, the goal of the program should be a space where learners can tell their stories of trauma. As instructors described the act of listening to and supporting students so they are able to find the resources they need is vital; how to create those spaces remains a challenge.

It is also vitally important that LINC instructors feel supported in their work. The importance of an inclusive classroom in working with students who have experienced trauma was discussed throughout this dissertation. Teaching in LINC in the current climate is challenging and the importance of inclusiveness holds true for instructors too. Many LINC instructors, like B, have left the profession because of burn-out and lack of job security. LINC instructors need to establish a wide range of support inside and

outside their workplaces. Inclusiveness can be created through supportive and thoughtful managers and instructional coordinators and through creating good links with settlement workers. Research can serve as a space for these discussions. It also points to the need for collective activism to better support teaching that respects the expertise and commitment of instructors. As Freire (1987) said, “Moreover the intellectual dimension of teaching is never celebrated by a system whose main objective is to further de-skill teachers and reduce them to mere agents who are to walk unreflectively through a labyrinth of procedures” (p.124)

### **Limitations of Research**

There are a number of limitations to the current study:

While instructors were interviewed from a few different sites, it would have been beneficial to have more instructors from a larger post number of locations, including those with more bureaucratic structure in order to better understand the impact of such structures on the role of instructors in supporting students.

Instructors were interviewed about their own understandings. The potential exists that instructors responded in a manner in which they thought they should respond given the nature and structure (focus group) of the study.

This study researched how to better support EAL students in British Columbia who have experienced trauma. It would be useful to undertake similar studies with instructors outside BC who have worked in the LINC program to understand differences in how instructors respond to national policy.

It is not the intent of this research to offer the definitive perspective on working with students who have experienced trauma. This research offers and explores one particular perspectives of a small group of EAL instructors.

Given these limitations to the study, there are plenty of areas for further study and further research.

### **Further Research**

There is little written about trauma and EAL. Areas of potential research could include:

- A participatory approach that engages LINC students on how to make LINC classes more inclusive.
- An exploration of how the current government cuts to health and/or settlement services impact students who are marginalized, particularly dealing with trauma.
- An investigation into how to build meaningful communities of practice within the current political context of LINC, particularly given the possible closure of Language Instruction Support and Training Network (LISTN, formerly ELSA Net).
- The present study explored the perspectives of EAL instructors in one province in one country. However, I am left to wonder what the differences are between Canada and other countries with high levels of immigration, and how they provide support for EAL students who have experienced trauma.
- Further investigation is needed on how LINC instructors perceive their roles in and out of the classroom as government-funded EAL moves towards privatization.
- Research is needed that creates opportunities and enables EAL instructors to conduct their own research.

- Research that explores issues of gender with EAL instructors and students.
- Research is also needed to explore the hierarchies within EAL classes and these classes may be biased depending on how students arrive in Canada (i.e. entrepreneurs versus refugees)

### **Personal Reflections**

This research project has been very significant for me. Over the many years I have worked with people who are marginalized I have struggled to find ways to create inclusive classrooms. In the past seven years of being involved in the Doctorate of Education at UBC, I have seen many changes to EAL education in the province of British Columbia. It was a time of great flux which was very disheartening as I observed all the cuts to services that supported people who are marginalized. It has also made me realize the importance of the need for EAL research to connect to the daily practices of EAL instructors. In particular, my research has allowed me to better understand how to create inclusive classrooms even in times of great change. I am also hopeful that there are instructors out there working to support people in meaningful ways. I look forward to sharing my findings and promoting more inclusive classrooms. For example I'll present on this topic—alongside two of the instructors I interviewed—at the BC TEAL Conference, at the end of May. In the conversations had during the preparation for this presentation I've come to realize that the writing of this dissertation is only the beginning of my action research project. This project, as well as the building of a strong community of practice, is an ongoing process with no end in sight.

## **Concluding Statement**

The foregoing study offers a discussion on the challenges and strategies of EAL instructors working with people who have experienced trauma. This perspective on EAL education highlights the importance of making changes to how EAL is delivered to be more inclusive. The study illustrates that much further research and study is needed to better serve the needs of marginalized immigrants and refugees in Canada.

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## Appendices

### Appendix A: First Interview Questions

1. How long have you been teaching ELSA?
2. Have you worked with students who may have experienced trauma in your classroom?
3. If so, can you tell me about working with these students? Do any situations come to mind?
4. Can you tell me if you felt prepared to work with these students? What kind of preparation did you receive?
5. Are there any practices that you have changed to support students who may have experienced trauma?
6. Does your institution provide you with support in working with students who come from diverse backgrounds, particularly students who may have experienced trauma? If so, in what way(s)? Can you provide me with some examples? Are there policies or other things that constrain working with students?

7. What would be helpful for you in working with students who may have experienced trauma? Is there any information you would be interested in receiving or any approaches you would like to learn more about?

## **Appendix B: Focus Group Questions**

1. What is an image that comes to mind when you think of students who have experienced trauma?
2. What would a responsive ELSA class that acknowledges people who have experienced trauma look like?
3. What are your recommendations for making the ELSA program more inclusive and responsive?
4. What action can be taken based on those recommendations?

## **Appendix C: Final Interview Questions**

1. In the focus group several instructors talked about the notion of pity. What is pity?  
What is a counter to pity? Why do you think teachers feel this? If you were teaching professional development how would you disrupt this or counter this?
2. In the focus group talked about fear, why do you think fear exists?
3. In the focus group several instructors talked about social justice, how would you define social justice?
4. In the both the focus group and individual interviews instructors spoke about the need for professional development. What does professional development mean to you?
5. Can you tell me about an experiences you had with professional development that was good? What made it good?
6. Can you tell me about a bad experience you had with professional development?  
What made it bad?
7. How do think you can you make the professional development important?

8. In the focus group several people mentioned the need for a community of practice?  
What might this look like?
  
9. instructors also mentioned professional development that explores critical thinking and problem posing as opposed to a focus on administration or skills. Do you think this is possible in the current socio political context to focus on critical thinking? Why do you think there such a focus on skills and administration tasks?
  
10. In the focus group several instructors talked about professional development or teacher training that addresses social justice, global awareness and privilege, what would this look like?
  
11. How could profession development or training engage people who have never thought about these social justice and privilege before? Or those who see their role as an instructor entirely focused on academics ?
  
12. Several people spoke of the idea of a workshop, let's say we had three hours what activities would you do?
  
13. Lastly several people spoke of a need for a sharing of resources, what resources should be included? What would be helpful? How would these resources be shared?

## Appendix D: Codes

Codes associated with the understandings by LINC/ELSA Instructors from Focus Group

Understandings	Description	Example
Instructors' work or community background	instructors describing experiences that they had prior to teaching	I work in two separate programs—not just with ELSA but I also work with a youth program so um and they're all refugees pretty much in the classes that I work with so they um—yeah, I also see it a lot and I was—I draw on my past experience not as an ELSA teacher but in my work prior to that, working particularly with children and um it's am—
Student behaviour	instructors describing “traumatized” students behaviour in the classroom	So that—that—that alternation between having to <i>talk, talk, talk, talk, talk</i> —and then going almost catatonic
Challenging assumptions	instructors describing challenging their own assumptions based on where the students are from, etc	I've tried to be a lot more cautious around my assumptions of what's going on with them—just because they come from a place that's completely war-torn and shit's happening all the time that I don't have to go right to that step and go, “Oh, they're probably traumatized.” I don't know.

Understandings	Description	Example
Normal (?)	instructors describing the traumatized student's behaviour as not normal	So she was the most noticeable—but I've also had students that were very—I don't know if I can use the word normalized but they—they seemed to be kind of okay with stuff that had happened to them and they just wanted to talk about it. Not necessarily in a big kind of way—but just, "Okay, this thing happened to me and do you want to listen? I'd love to tell you." Kind of more like that—so the whole gamut—absolutely—like you say.
Coping	instructors describe students ability to cope or not cope with trauma	I've had students who come as refugees who tell me stories that I think, "Wow, if that happened to me I would be very traumatized" but who seem able to talk really clearly and are very mature and don't show any of those signs. And so I would—I don't know if they are traumatized—it's hard to say. They've been able to process things as they're happening and not have as many of those symptoms of—

Understandings	Description	Example
Physical behaviour	instructors describe the physical behaviour of students who have trauma	And there's something about a look and I don't know exactly what it is but it's something in the eyes and I can—I know what it is to see it, because I've seen it a lot. So um—it's very hard to describe but it's a kind of like blank stare. A blank look—kind of checked out—but not—but they're there. But they're not one hundred percent. There's not a lot of—there's not necessarily a lot of clarity.
Individual response	instructors describing individual response to trauma	I wouldn't say it as a general rule, I mean I think it's definitely case by case.
marginalization	instructors describing the other forms of marginalization( racism, cultural identity, class)and how that can impact people	Like both racialized within the classroom and within Vancouver and who are disproportionately extremely poor. And that seems to me anyways, in my experience in my life who are traumatized, that tends to feed trauma because there's a constant sense of not meeting your needs and not being able to take care of yourself and your family that might mitigate some of that harm.
Popular media	instructors describe media and pop psychologies definition of trauma	To a large extent pop-psychology and pop culture. I mean these are—the idea of trauma is not new to us.

Understandings	Description	Example
instructors background personal	instructors describe personal experience with friends or family who have had trauma.	And then my partner had PTSD and so I started learning from—just from her life—what some—I could see—like I was living with the symptoms (laughs) of trauma—which is really hard to do! And then started thinking, “How do I relate that to people in my class?” Like, I know what it is like from a very intimate relationship, but I don’t get that same information from them.
Pity	instructors struggling with feelings of pity	but it can also edge into creating a situation of pity. And I think sometimes I find that happening in my own mind—and I can also see it happening in students’ minds. Where I’ll be like, Oh, this person shared a story about going through war or something and all of a sudden they’re sort of willing to take more care of them, but they’re also sort of like, “Oh, poor —.” So it’s a weird—there’s sort of that double reaction and I don’t know the way around that.

Understandings	Description	Example
Not normal	instructors describe students to act like the “norm”and not fitting in	Like, behavioural sort of things, or physical tics, or inability to—to um—act “normally”—in quotes—you know, in a society, or to have normal relationships or things like that. I
Isolation	instructors describing students as isolated because they don't share the predominant culture, class, and experiences.	But sure enough, people at the end of the day I would notice the garbage bag full of these chips and it was just like, I don't know if she noticed—I mean the students were very, “Oh, thank you!”Kind of like not—it was good they didn't want to hurt her feelings, right? So it's not kind of an overt thing—“Like, oh, she's black—I don't want to touch this—she's creepy.”Nothing like that at all—in fact, I think they tried—you know, but there's barriers as you mentioned. Obviously a shared culture is huge, right? They don't—don't share that. So you know—it's a hard one. It's just—it's not simple.

Understandings	Description	Example
Inability to cope	instructors describe a students inability to cope	I think it's just an inability to cope—and maybe that's it. And an inability to move life along—not necessarily move forward, but move out of something. And I've seen also like you—in my personal life, I lived with a guy who was a refugee, and he was also pretty traumatized—things like that too.
Response	instructors describing not knowing how to respond to students	a lot of people acting as therapists—and they're not really having the qualifications. Or—and then—that's not really your job, right? How do you—I see that with teachers getting bogged down on that, and then I've also seen other teachers not knowing how to respond to students.

Understandings	Description	Example
Teacher role	instructors describing teachers varying perceptions of their roles	I think there's just such a range of teachers. And they're not necess—and they're not educated in the way that / have been or that other people have been and they bring different experiences to it, and they're <i>really</i> not that interested. They're interested in language—they're interested in—in the academics of teaching. And they want to leave the rest—it's not their job. And they're absolutely right—it isn't. You know, so—but still, you still have people in your classrooms like that. You still have to respond.
Responsibility	instructors describing feelings of responsibility for the students and their role in	I mean for me that also bugs me because okay, like, am I steppin' over some lines too? Have I created this relationship without realizing it? And then you question your own motives, right?

Understandings	Description	Example
increase admin and less PD	instructors describing the increase in the amount of administrative work they have to do and a shift away from students	So they're constantly—your interaction with methodology, just how are you administering your class, and you don't get a break to think about the other stuff, it's easy to get into that trap. Well like, that's what's important—that's what's on my mind, most of the time. And I think like we can say, well the other administrative training is good, but the more time that I spend doing administration, the less space I have to be thinking about the people.
Measurement	instructors describe the focus on everything having to be measured and quantified in ELSA	And if everything has to be measured, you lose the human. And I think they are not totally compatible.

## Appendix E: Initial Letter of Contact



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THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

### Department of Educational Studies

Faculty of Education  
2125 Main Mall  
Vancouver, B.C. Canada V6T 1Z4

September 16, 2012

Item 9.7 – Letter of Initial Contact

Dear Colleague:

My name is Amea Wilbur and I am writing to you as a doctoral candidate in the Department of Educational Studies at the University of British Columbia. My proposed doctoral dissertation, pedagogical understandings that English Language Services for Adults (ELSA) instructors bring to the teaching of students who may have experienced trauma, will be informed by a qualitative research approach that I'd like to invite you to be a part of.

The research I'm conducting is informed by my work with marginalized communities as an ESL instructor. I currently work as an instructor with Vancouver Coastal Health Mental Health Services in a program that teaches English to people who have a mental illness or mental health concerns. In this capacity, I piloted a program (in 2008) for people experiencing trauma or Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and I also taught at the Vancouver Association for Survivors of Torture (VAST) last year. Through my work, I have struggled with how to best serve students who are experiencing or have experienced trauma and how to minimize the barriers they face in their learning. I am hoping to have a conversation with other instructors interested in this area. As a part of my research, I will invite participants to explore policies, curriculum, and issues of power. I then plan to discuss education for ELSA teachers and structural issues (such as attendance policies) that may create barriers for ELSA students who may have experienced/who are experiencing trauma.

It is my hope that through this collaborative research process we will work together on ways to support diverse students, particularly those who may have experienced trauma. And in turn, we will develop ideas as educators to help each other to facilitate inclusion of students experiencing trauma in ELSA classes. If you agree to participate in this study, it will involve no more than four hours of your time.

*Study participants need to meet the following criteria:*

- Be an ELSA instructor;
- Have instructed students who may experienced trauma;
- Work in a neighbourhood house or community college.

*If you are selected to be one of the participants in this research study, you will also be asked to:*

- Participate in an interview relating to your thoughts on working with people who may have experienced trauma. This interview will take 60 minutes;
- Participate in a focus group that will create an opportunity for dialogue between study participants and myself. My hope is that this step will promote networks of collaboration, revolving around what teachers already bring to their practice. I believe it may also serve to inform potential strategies for diminishing barriers for students. This focus group will take approximately 2 hours.
- Participate in a follow up interview that will address if there have been any changes to your practice as a result of the research process. (This will take about 30 minutes.)

Your participation in this research is completely voluntary. If you agree to participate, you may withdraw from the study at any time without any negative consequences or any explanation.

The data for this study will be used to help inform the writing of my doctoral dissertation, presentations, professional development opportunities as well as any accompanying articles.

Confidentiality, in responding to questions during individual interviews, will be protected through the use of pseudonyms for all participants, their colleagues, and their departments. Furthermore, all recordings, data, and papers for this study will be kept locked in my home office with backup copies locked in the UBC office of my research supervisor, Dr. Michelle Stack.

In addition to myself, the research team for this study consists of the following members of the Department of Educational Studies: Michelle Stack, Ph D; Shauna Butterwick, Ed.D; and Maureen Kendrick, Ph D.

If you are interested in participating in this study, please complete the questionnaire on the following page and return to me within seven days via my email:

Best regards,

Amea Wilbur

## Appendix F: Letter of Consent



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### Consent Form

**Principal Investigator:** Dr. Michelle Stack, Associate Professor,  
Department of Educational Studies, UBC

**Co-Investigator:** Amea Wilbur, Doctoral Candidate,  
Department of Educational Studies, UBC

**Co-Investigator:** Shauna Butterwick, Associate Professor  
Department of Educational Studies, UBC

**Co-Investigator:** Maureen Kendrick, Associate Professor  
Department of Language and Literacy, UBC

#### Investigator

This study will be conducted by Amea Wilbur: a doctoral student at the University of British Columbia in the Department of Educational Studies.

#### Invitation to Participate & Purpose

You are being invited to participate in the action-oriented study that explores pedagogical understandings that English Language Services for Adults (ELSA) instructors bring to the teaching of students who may have experienced trauma. Through the use of interviews and a focus group, we will examine how teachers understand and recognize perceived trauma in their students, and how they support these students. Another key component of the research is also to facilitate a collaborative process with teacher-participants that aims to mitigate learning barriers for students and to promote a community of support among instructors. If you choose to

participate in this study, it would involve four hours of your time and include the following activities.

- Participate in an interview related to your thoughts on working with students who may have experienced trauma, your background, and your experiences as an ELSA instructor. This interview will take 60 minutes.
- Participate in a follow-up focus group with the goal of clarifying any points of confusion in the first interview. As well the second goal is to create a mode of collaborative inquiry, where we will define processes and areas for action-oriented changes to ELSA. This focus group will take 2 hours.
- Participate in a short interview around any potential change that has arisen from the research process. This will last 30 minutes.

The three phases of this research are interconnected and participation in all phases are necessary to make possible a rigorous analysis of data, and to establish a process that facilitates dialogue between participants (ELSA instructors) aimed at improving teaching practices and policies

### **Voluntary Participation**

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary and you may withdraw your consent to participate at any time during the process. This study is based on participation in all three phases of the research. If you choose to withdraw your consent in any of the three phases, the information derived from your participation in the study will be deleted from the findings.

Thank you for taking time out of your busy schedule to consider participation.

### **Methods/Procedures**

The methods of data collection for this study will involve a focus group and two individual interviews. The sessions will be audio-taped, and the audio-tapes transcribed, to ensure accurate reporting of the information that you provide. Transcribers will sign a form stating that they will not discuss any item on the tape with anyone other than the researchers. No one's name will be asked or revealed during the focus group or individual interviews. However, should another participant call you by name, the transcriber will be instructed to remove all names from the transcripts. The audio-tapes will be stored in locked files before and after being transcribed. Tapes will be destroyed within 2 weeks of completing the transcriptions and the transcripts will be destroyed 5 years after the completion of this study.

### **Confidentiality**

If you choose to participate, you are welcome to use your real name or a pseudonym in the focus group and interviews. The researcher will be using pseudonyms when speaking or writing about this research. The researcher encourages all participants to refrain from disclosing the contents of the discussion outside of the focus group; however, she cannot control what other participants might do with the information discussed. All findings used in any written reports, or publications, which result from this project, will be reported with no identifying information. You will be asked at the end of the interview or focus group if there is anything you said which you do not want included. The researcher will ensure that this information is not used. Direct quotes from participants may be used but any identifying information (e.g. – place of work, specific information about students or other teachers) will not be used.

### **Potential Risks and Benefits**

There will be minimal potential risks to you should you decide to participate in the study. Some instructors could be concerned about the confidentiality of their remarks if they were to say anything negative about the institution or organization. To mitigate this risk, pseudonyms will be used for persons to protect the identity of the participants. Furthermore, participants will be offered the opportunity to choose their own pseudonym. Additionally, participants will have the opportunity to review the interview transcripts and remove any comments they might be concerned about. If choose to participate you can expect to receive a copy of your transcript within 2 weeks of the interviews and you will have 2 weeks to request any changes. If you would like a copy of transcripts for review please initial here: \_\_\_\_\_.

Potential benefits from participation could arise from reflection and discussion about your thoughts and actions surrounding working with people who may have experienced trauma. Your participation may provide you with a community of support for the work you do with people who may have experienced trauma. Additionally, you could benefit from the results of the research as it may positive impact on how ELSA is implemented.

The research team will be happy to provide you with a summary of the major findings of the study, if requested, and will notify you upon publication of the doctoral dissertation.

### **Benefits**

A potential benefit of participating in this study for you could be having an opportunity to describe your experience with this research with others who have shared the experience. Additionally, the opportunity to connect with other allies and share similar and divergent experiences may help clarify and validate your experiences within this research project. Potential benefits of participation could come from reflection on and discussion of participants' thoughts about and actions in working with people who have experienced trauma. Participation may provide a community of support for work done with people who have experienced trauma. Additionally, participants could benefit from the results of the research as it may have positive impact on how ELSA is delivered.

### **Contact for concerns about the rights of research participants**

If you have any concerns about your treatment or rights as a research participant, you may contact the Research Subject Information Line in the UBC Office of Research Services or if long distance e-mail to.

### **Consent**

Your signature indicates that you consent to participate in this study and that you have received a copy of this consent form for your own records. Within one week, please sign and return this form to Amea Wilbur in person, via campus mail, or through email.

### **Authorization**

You will be given a copy of this consent form to keep for your records.

Once again, we thank you for taking time out of your busy schedule to participate in this evaluation process.

Printed Name of the Participant:

Signature of the Participant:

Date:

Printed Name of the Researcher:

Signature of the Investigator:

## Appendix G: List of Research Participants and their Pseudonyms

Pseudonym	Gender	Position	Interview Dates
M	Female	LINC Instructor	February 8, 2013 December 3, 2013 March 19, 2014
B	Female	LINC Instructor	March 1, 2013 December 3, 2013 May 5, 2014
T	Female	LINC Instructor	September 11, 2013 December 3, 2013 March 26, 2014
D	Female	LINC Instructor	October 21, 2013 December 3, 2013 February 19, 2014
J	Female	LINC Instructor	June 21, 2013