

LANGUAGE, BELONGING, AND HEALING: MENTORSHIP IN ESL AS A PATHWAY TO POST-TRAUMA RECOVERY IN TERTIARY EDUCATION

In the increasingly globalised and often chaotic world of today, tertiary education institutions are becoming venues that offer more than just traditional academic instruction. Particularly for those who are bearing the weight of having been displaced, experienced trauma, been in conflict, or have a very challenging financial situation, universities are becoming venues of personal change and rehabilitation. Under these kinds of circumstances, mentoring is increasingly crucial as it is a profoundly relational practice that develops resiliency, psychological healing, and a strong feeling of belonging. Building one's identity is a major part of language acquisition, far more than just a cognitive exercise. For students who have gone through difficult events, the English as a Second Language (ESL) classroom can be both a safe refuge and a cause of anxiety. Mispronunciations, hesitations, and silences typify the inherent vulnerability in language acquisition, reflecting the emotional fragility these students often carry. But this fragility offers a chance for personal growth and recovery of one's identity. An educational strategy that considers trauma's effects understands that successful learning depends on emotional safety, stability, and trust. The classroom transforms from being a place where language is taught to one where healing can occur when English as a second language (ESL) teachers and mentors understand this.

There are pedagogical issues particular at the junction of traumatic events with the learning of a second language. Many English as a second language learners come from homes where speaking out was not only dangerous but also discouraged. Such an environment might lead to internalised silence and disengagement. In these kinds of circumstances, language starts to hinder not only communication but also self-advocacy and involvement in social and academic life. Trauma-informed English as a Second Language (ESL) training, however, has great potential to be a road towards healing when done deliberately and with care.^[1] When students enter classrooms where mentors support consistent routines, give chances for low-anxiety speaking, and promote peer collaboration, they start to see language as a tool for expression rather than a site of deficit. These settings allow people to progressively rebuild their self-confidence and validate the events they have really gone through.

Among the narrative-based strategies shown to have a major influence on the healing process following traumatic events are oral presentations, journaling, and storytelling. Growing studies support the theory that students who have gone through traumatic events feel a restored sense of agency and validation when they are allowed to share their personal stories in surroundings that are safe and encouraging. Language thus becomes a means for students to take back authorship over their lives rather than a foreign imposition. Language helps one to achieve this. One cannot stress the value of mentors in this journey. Their awareness of the emotional terrain of their students helps them to create opportunities for children to express themselves in a real way and also set a tone for inclusive and sympathetic interaction. Beyond only academic growth, ESL mentors support the development of socio-emotional resilience and help shape identities. This is achieved with dialogic teaching strategies and culturally relevant comments. Effective mentoring in English as a second language (ESL) defines itself as empathy, cultural humility, and a continuous dedication to the well-being of students.[3] It calls for considering the student as a whole and listening to them instead of just concentrating on enhancing grammar or expanding vocabulary. Mentors act as liaisons between students and the materials the university offers. They both confirm their value and talents and help students negotiate challenging systems. Promoting policies that give mental health and inclusivity top priority helps advocates of structural reforms that benefit all students—especially those most vulnerable—push for these changes. Particularly ESL students are in need of a feeling of belonging, which has long been acknowledged as absolutely essential for educational success.[4] Learning a new language is not only a major intellectual accomplishment but also a reclaiming of one's position of agency inside a new cultural and social framework. When students have mentors who help them to embrace their linguistic identities and to completely engage in the academic community, they are able to do so.



The English as a Second Language (ESL) educator has to grow since educational institutions of higher learning are progressively serving people that are diverse, multilingual, and traumatised. When mentoring is truly human and informed by trauma, it becomes a powerful tool for academic success, personal empowerment, and group healing. This offers us a chance to rethink language as a means of attaining belonging, connection, and transformation rather than only as a talent that has to be developed.

As institutions of higher education become increasingly diverse and globally interconnected, the ESL classroom must evolve into a space where healing, identity, and academic growth intersect. Mentorship—rooted in empathy, cultural

responsiveness, and trauma-informed practices—is not a supplemental feature of ESL instruction; it is foundational. When mentors create environments of safety, validation, and belonging, they empower students not only to learn a new language but to reimagine their place in the world. Through language, students reclaim authorship of their stories; through mentorship, they rebuild trust in themselves and their communities. In this dual journey of linguistic and emotional transformation, tertiary education becomes not just a pathway to knowledge, but a catalyst for hope, healing, and human connection.

References:

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