

Supporting English language learners' (ELLs') social-emotional needs requires proactively prioritizing teacher well-being (Pentón Herrera, 2020). For English Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) teachers, well-being is particularly prominent because the content we teach and the population we support require continuous emotional work. One source of our emotional work arises from the diverse social-emotional challenges English language learners bring. This can affect the mental and emotional well-being of teachers, causing secondary traumatic stress. Not only is this detrimental for ESOL teachers, but it also affects our students.

Luis experienced secondary traumatic stress when he simultaneously felt deep empathy and despair in reaction to a student's situation. Julián was an 18-year old newcomer who arrived alone in the United States. He came to flee violence and to reunite with his mother after 12+ years. Upon his arrival, Julián had to navigate unfamiliar situations in a society with different customs, languages, and social expectations.

Julián had to live with his mother and her alcoholic husband, someone Julián did not know. His step-father would often physically attack Julián's mother, and eventually, he attacked Julián. Luis's suspicions that something was dangerously not okay back home were sadly confirmed when Julián arrived in class with bruises on his arm and neck. Luis called the school's nurse and counselor, and measures were taken. He had done what he was supposed to do, and the system was trying to respond to Julián's needs.

Regardless of the steps we took, however, Julián began to dissociate from school and eventually stopped attending. When Julián dropped out, Luis felt a deep sense of guilt and regret. Luis kept asking himself, What could I have done differently? How could I have supported him in our classroom? What could I have done to motivate him to stay in school?

Luis' students felt his initial inability to regulate his sense of guilt. "Anímese, mister, Julián va a estar bien" ("Cheer up, mister, Julián will be fine"), reassured a student. At that moment, Luis realized that his guilt and sadness were noticed by his students and were affecting the learning environment. His students saw worry and shifted their attention from instruction to comforting.

Luis's experience is not unique. Many teachers experience the

## ESOL Teachers and Well-Being

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emotional toll of supporting students. This feeling of helplessness can take a toll on teachers' mental and emotional well-being, leaving us overwhelmed, mentally drained, and emotionally exhausted (Mercer, 2020).

Draining our emotional reservoir leaves little or no personal, social-emotional resources for us to share with our ELLs, affecting the classroom's overall energy, our students, and our teaching practices. Following are self-regulation strategies we have found helpful in our work with ELLs:

1. **De-compress:** Take 5 minutes in-between classes to take a deep breath and clear your mind. Relax your body. Play music or use aromatherapy to briefly transport you to your happy place. Take another deep breath before the next class.
2. **Reflect:** At the end of each day, write three things you have learned. Then, reflect on how you can use that knowledge to de-escalate or resolve similar conflicts in the future.
3. **Share:** Have a *buddy* or *support team* who will listen to your emotional struggles. Share your situation and listen to feedback as you work together to answer questions like What else can I do? What resources can I marshal or consult? Who can I reach out to?

Taking care of ourselves is an important practice in caring for our English language learners. Student social-emotional experience depends on our ability to infuse positive,

adaptive emotions into our teaching practices and classroom environments. In our experience, discipline to care for yourself proactively enables you to care more empathetically for your students.

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### SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL LEARNING IN TESOL: WHAT, WHY, AND HOW

"In this article, I advocate for the adoption of SEL in Teaching English to speakers of other languages (TESOL) as a promising pedagogy for ESOL educators and ELs. For this, I divide the remainder of the manuscript into four sections in addition to the introduction. In the first section—What is SEL?—I provide a brief theoretical description of SEL as it remains a fairly new concept in the ESOL field. In the second section—Why SEL in TESOL?—I elucidate my position of why we (ESOL educators) should embrace SEL pedagogies in our learning spaces using personal vignettes as support. The third section—SEL Application in TESOL—is the heart of this article. In this section, I introduce four practices TESOL educators can use to incorporate SEL in their learning spaces. Lastly, in the fourth section—Final Thoughts—I share a final message of encouragement and strength for educators hoping to adopt SEL in their teaching practices."

Pentón Herrera, L. J. (2020). Social-emotional learning in TESOL: What, why, and how. *Journal of English Learner Education*, 10(1), 1-16. <https://stars.library.ucf.edu/jele/vol10/iss1/1>

