

The logo for TUTOR features a stylized 'T' composed of three horizontal bars of varying lengths, stacked vertically. The top bar is blue, the middle is white, and the bottom is blue. To the right of this graphic, the word 'TUTOR' is written in a large, bold, white, sans-serif font.

TUTOR

Teachers' upskilling aiming at a holistic inclusivity in learning

Specialisation Course Three

Strand One: Introduction to a socio-economically diverse classroom

Units One & Two



Project Number: 101056515

Agreement Number: 101056515 — TUTOR — ERASMUS-EDU-2021-PEX-TEACH-ACA

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Unit One: Identifying and Understanding Socio-economic Disadvantage

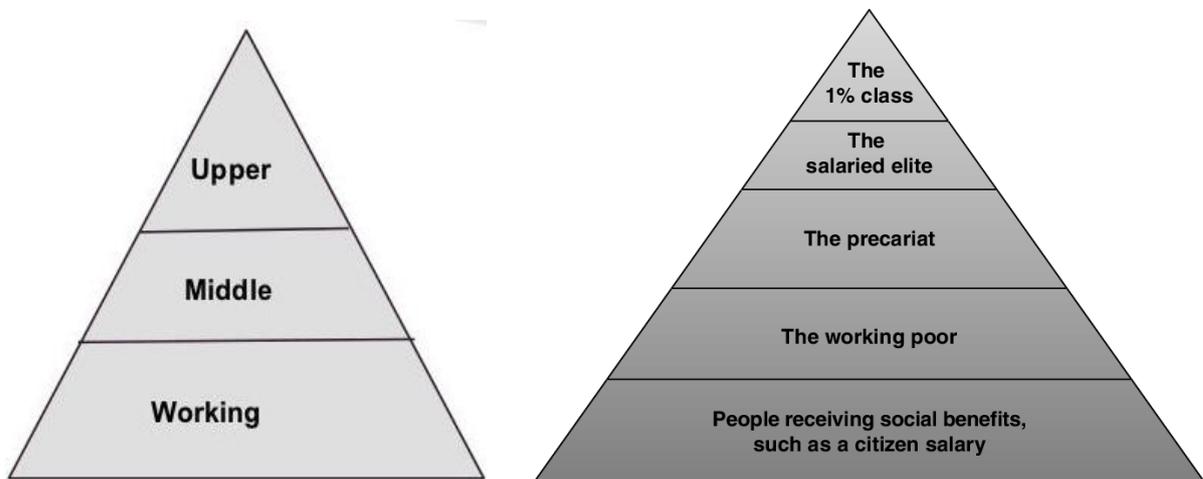
What is socio-economic disadvantage?

The American Psychological Association described Socio-Economic Status (SES) as follows: "Socio-economic status (SES) encompasses not only income but also educational attainment, occupational prestige, and subjective perceptions of social status and social class. SES reflects quality-of-life attributes and opportunities afforded to people within society and is a consistent predictor of a vast array of psychological outcomes." (APA, 2023).

From a sociological perspective, Parsons (building on the work of Max Weber in the area of social stratification) conceived of the idea of socio-economic status as something that was created through the maintaining of social structures and social stability – an individual's position within a social hierarchy with an emphasis on social structures and institutions. It focuses on social status (respect / honour), as well as economic factors (class), and relationship to power (politics).

What is social class?

Social class is a grouping of people in society based on their income, wealth, occupation, education attainment level, and social status. It is a way of classifying people. The distinctions between class groupings influences the people within the groups' life chances, relationship to power, ability to access certain resources, and their ability to be socially mobile. Typically, when people refer to social class they are referring to these two models:



Discuss:

What are the benefits and the disadvantages to categorizing groups of people as above, based on economic and social status? Are there any categories that you would change, take away or add?

Language, Labels, and Stigma

Language is more than just a means of communication - it is a carrier of identity, belonging, and cultural knowledge. Language does not function in clear, separate systems, but is lived as a dynamic, situation-dependent repertoire. Language is a powerful force in the creation of categorisation, labels, stereotypes, and stigma. It can be useful to categorise large groupings of people or communities for the provision of supports, services, and for government policy provision and implementation. However, that same language can also be used as a weapon, to re-enforce oppression and to *other* a group of people (i.e., setting people apart as not being like the dominant group). This creates binaries of "us" and "them".

By using language and labels to describe a whole cohort of people (particularly if the language: (1) did not emerge from their community, (2) was not agreed by their community, and (3) has connotations of deficit or negative descriptions) it can be described as an act of colonisation, and of weaponisation – a power move to keep society functioning the way it always has, in order to keep the status quo i.e., the systems of power and privilege, in place.

Language and labels can also have an empowering or disempowering effect on identity and identity formation, depending on how it is used. Identity is an expression of a fundamental human need: the desire for belonging, social recognition, and self-positioning in the world (Butler 1990). This need is also strengthened by belonging to groups that, on the one hand, convey esteem and, on the other hand, experience esteem both from their members and within the community. An essential component of identity is differentiation: the "we" is also created in contrast to a "you". As long as this differentiation is not accompanied by devaluation and disrespect, it is not problematic per se.

Context-dependent markers of valuation

When an individual member of a community, or a wider community group decide on language that they feel says something positive about their identity and/or which best describes who they are and their relationship with the systems and structures of power and privilege - this is a positive valuation of who they are and how they live in the world. It is important to note that this language may change from person to person within the group and is nuanced. For example, within the disabled community you will meet people who use "disabled" to describe themselves in their identity because they are describing how society has disabled them with the systems, structures, and barriers they are faced with rather than any one specific physical or mental disability. You will also meet people who use "person first" language (e.g. person with epilepsy). Within the Autistic community you will meet people who see autism as a valuable, positive part of who they are and as such prefer to be called autistic, others prefer person first language (person before disability) such as person with autism. It is best to ask the person in front of you what they would like to be addressed as, but you can

use the two languages interchangeably in a general context unless asked or told otherwise. In terms of socio-economic status (SES), language certainly holds both positive and negative valuations for those labelled and those who use the labels. For an example within the working-class community the term "working class" when self-ascribed can be positive – connotations of working hard, trustworthy, down to earth, able to create a lot from a little. When the same title is prescribed by others outside of the group (academics, policy makers, media, and other classes) the same term can be felt to be condescending, disparaging, and demeaning (i.e., a devaluation). Increasingly there has been a shift away from using the term 'socio-economic disadvantage' to the term 'underserved' – i.e. those from underserved communities to focus attention on how communities have been underserved by government and society, and away from a perspective that focuses the disadvantage or lack within the people.

Labels become problematic when the 'other' is constructed as inferior, or threatening - for example through stereotypical attributions, prejudices or discriminatory narratives (see Hall 1997). Such devaluing attitudes arise when affiliations are experienced as fragile or are not socially recognized. Whether, how, and which groups are devalued and disrespected depends, among other things, on individual socialization experiences, socio-economic factors, and the dominant political discourse.

Context-dependent markers of devaluation

Which characteristics are used for demarcation and devaluation varies depending on the social context, for example:

- Cultural racism and Islamophobia dominate migration-related debates.
 - Social class, income levels, disability, social welfare status, and even family type (e.g., one-parent families) can dominate national spending and economic debates
- Social class labels in particular have an identity-creating effect - for the majority as well as for the minority. They construct a seemingly clear "inside" and "outside": "middle class" is set as the norm, while an "working class" is marked as a deviation.

Stereotypes and labelling of minorities

In terms of socio-economic status (SES), it is considered best practice to use an intersectional lens, as those who come from minoritised communities tend to find themselves placed in the lower socio-economic status cohorts. In social discourse, groups that are perceived as ethnic minorities such as the Traveller Community and the Roma community are often devalued through repeated and sometimes historically evolved labels (see Wodak, 2009). This applies not only to ethnic origin, but also to characteristics such as language, religion, skin colour, social positions, or cultural practices.

Self-Directed Activity:

All families in the Ireland are entitled to and receive (without taking into account family income levels) universal, monthly, child benefit payments from the birth of a child until that child turns sixteen years old, or 19 years old if in full time education (See this link from gov.ie: Child Benefit). However, despite the fact that all families in Ireland receive a social welfare payment, only one type of family has had an historic, and ongoing, national discussion on a regular basis - both in the media and social media - about the type of family and their receipt of social welfare payments – one parent families (particularly if they are headed by a woman).

Read Byrne’s 2023 paper in the additional readings folder and examine the intersectionalities, language, and (ab)uses of power that are interrogated in examining Ireland’s history with one parent (female headed) families. Write a 250-300 word piece on how the language of ‘unmarried mother’ was/is weaponized to demonize and *other* women to re-enforce the status quo, its relationship to the catholic church and political power, and how it changed / did not change over time.

Consider: (1) how one parent, female headed families are discussed and treated in a middle class or elite/upper class community with those from a working-class community, (2) the provision (or not) of free and legal contraception and reproductive healthcare.

These labels serve to reproduce stereotypes and social bias - they stabilize existing power relations (the status quo) and legitimize the position of the dominant social groups (see Assmann, 2013). They also seek to de-humanise the people. The effect: people who are considered "different" or "not belonging" experience exclusion or marginalization - often subtly, but repeatedly and sustainably.

Reclaiming language (Labels)

The interrogation of language, labels, and the language which has been or is currently used to create labels or slurs which majority groupings weaponize to ‘*other*’, stigmatise, or instigate violence upon a minority grouping is a common practice within minorities groupings with a history of lower social status within society. See this video of Traveller activist and comedian Martin Beanz Warde’s [Facebook](#) reel titled, *The Traveller Language: Truth or Lies?* posted on 10th May, 2025, where he interrogates the history of words that, he argues, the Traveller Community are having foisted upon them as ‘their’ language by academics and policy makers but which he himself traces back to derogatory words meant to other and stigmatize the community. He asks his fellow Traveller Community members to have look, consider, and decide if they are indeed words that come from the Traveller Community or words that they have been given and adopted. He wants to have a conversation.

It is in the conversations as described above that shifts can happen in language. Historically, some communities have reclaimed words which were used as weapons against them for use amongst themselves as cultural reclamation, however these same words used outside their community are considered a slur – see the Black, African American community for such an example (Popa-Wyatt, 2020). Other times, words can be reclaimed by a community to disempower the slur and re-empower the former victim, see ‘crip’ as in crip theory (a reclamation of the word “crippled” by the disabled community). Some words or labels such as ‘queer’ and ‘working-class’ have a more nuanced history – historically those words or labels have been used both as an insult and weapon but also, simultaneously, as a positive identity marker – particularly within the community itself; see consideration below.

“First, the process of cleansing and detoxifying slurs is not limited to reclamation. Reclamation is only a part of a larger process of resistance and taking back control. It is not only necessary to create a new speech act that is proud and defiant, but also to create a social cost for employing the other derogatory speech act. Second, the experimental data points to the idea that you have to have some power to take back power over the labels used to refer to you. Reclamation begets power, but it also requires it. Third, reclamation may vary from case to case depending on the social gains that target groups have been able to secure so far. Sometimes reclamation is not attempted at all. Sometimes it succeeds, sometimes it fails. The process of reclaiming each slur word must be understood in terms of a specific history of oppression and in terms of the political goals of the community.”

Popa-Wyatt, 2020, p.13

The most important take away for any person who holds a position in a majority grouping, when it comes to the reclamation of language, is that it can **only come from the community itself**. A majority grouping cannot reclaim a word which has been weaponised and was/is used to inflict violence upon a minority grouping by the same majority grouping. The reclamation of language holds history, politics, power, and claiming of power at the heart of the endeavour.

Consider:

Read this article printed in The Conversation:

<https://theconversation.com/reviled-reclaimed-and-respected-the-history-of-the-word-queer-197533>

Consider the history of words that have been used to describe and inflict violence on a minority population. Historical, contextual, and cultural context must be considered, as well as remembering that a group of people are not a monolith and will have many different identities, considerations, opinions, and experiences of violence and oppression.

Even amongst a traditionally minoritised community, there are hierarchies of power and privilege. Intersectionality is even more important when we begin to understand the interactions and make up of any minority grouping. Each person has different intersecting parts of their identity, and experiences a different relationship to power, privilege, and oppression than the next. Therefore, you will find differences of opinion in relation to words and language based on their own experiences and levels of oppression.

Othering, binaries, and maintaining power

The concept of "binary opposition" shows how deeply rooted ideas and beliefs can emerge and contribute to the re-enforcement of discrimination and social injustice by privileging one definition and marginalizing another.

People's perception of reality in the world is closely linked to language.¹ Pairs of related terms or concepts that are opposite in meaning are referred to as "binary opposition". This corresponds to the historically evolved system of our thinking, which is organized and structured by the contrast between two opposing concepts such as good/evil, hot/cold, rational/emotional or right/left. For example, the binary concept of gender (male and female) is not a natural, biological given, but a social construct that has been shaped by historical, cultural and religious influences (Morgenroth, 2021). This binary view of gender is so deeply embedded in many societies that it often seems natural or unavoidable.

Through the hierarchical arrangement of binary oppositions, the "other" side can easily be portrayed as inferior, stigmatized and marginalized. Categories are formed on the basis of which power is unequally distributed in society. Groups that have power are privileged, i.e. they are given (better) access to resources, power and social advantages. Groups that are considered less valuable in the hierarchical order are oppressed, systematically excluded or disadvantaged, e.g. through political or economic underrepresentation or fewer educational opportunities.

Binary oppositions play a central role in the creation and maintenance of power structures resulting from perceived identities, social roles and hierarchies. Powerful instruments for maintaining and consolidating these structures are the aforementioned language and performativity, i.e. the behaviour, norms and practices of individuals, groups and institutions. The reproduction of inequality is evident in various social institutions such as education, business and politics, where systemic barriers prevent marginalized groups from achieving the same success or recognition as their privileged peers.

The repetitive mechanisms described above create a sense of naturalness, normality or even inevitability of social hierarchies; superiority seems to be "innate" or at least "earned". Once something has become the norm, it is more difficult to question and break it. We see this play out in the discussions of social welfare, employment, benefits, and social housing etc. versus high-earning, tax-paying, hard-working, mortgage or rent paying etc. discourses in the Media and on social media. The binary of the perceived "earned" due to the perception (and discourse) of *contributing to*

1 See also the TUTOR introductory course, Unit 1, The power of language

society is played off in direct opposition to the perception (and discourse) of "unearned" or *taking from* society. Working and paying taxes and owning or renting a house is seen as a natural norm of Irish society and anyone who deviates from this norm are considered to be a burden on society and *living off* "taxpayer's money". There is no nuance to this national discourse, no recognition of barriers and enablers. It can be used to divide and conquer – if the majority are blaming the minority for a housing crisis rather than all groups coming together and demanding that the Government build more (affordable) houses to include social housing (because they believe that housing is a basic human right) it is easier for the status quo or social order to remain the same.

Self-Directed Activity:

Read the headings from the national media about the housing crisis from Feb-May 2025, in 300 words write about the narratives that you perceive the language is describing to you.

The Irish Times · 18d

The Irish Times view on Ireland's teaching crisis: housing central to pressures in education

Ireland's housing crisis. While policymakers have long been aware of challenges in recruiting and retaining teachers, particularly in urban areas, the root causes are often misdiagnosed.

Housing policy assumes people couple up says Limerick TD

By Bernie English · April 29, 2025



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Health

Newly-qualified nurses being 'driven away' from profession due to high housing costs

The Irish Times · 3d

Landlord moved family out of property for daughter who only stayed there 'for weekends'

A Donegal landlord who terminated the tenancy of a family of seven, claiming his daughter required the home to live in, has been ordered to pay €15,000 in damages after a tribunal heard she ...

Hosted on MSN · 6mon

Exclusive: Ireland's housing crisis is making a third of residents consider moving to a more affordable country

Europe's broiling housing crisis is making almost a quarter of its citizens consider emigrating in search of a more affordable life, and it doesn't get much worse than in Ireland, a massive ...

Leinster Express · 1mon

Migrants more likely to be working than Irish people and worst-hit by housing crisis

READ NEXT: Irish citizens told to stock up on these six items and ... Migrants are disproportionately impacted by the housing crisis and are much more likely to experience income poverty and ...

Identity and class culture

Identity is not a fixed, natural or neutral concept. Rather, it is a social phenomenon that is shaped both by overarching social developments and by individual experiences and actions. Identity is a dynamic process that is constantly changing and reshaping itself through the interplay of various factors - such as intersectionality, cultural narratives and collective memory. It is constantly negotiated in different social contexts and is subject to continuous change.

A central concept for analysing this complexity is **intersectionality**. It describes how different social categories - such as ethnicity, gender, age, sexuality and social background - overlap and influence each other. Depending on these intersections, individuals experience different forms of privilege or marginalization. Identity is therefore not experienced one-dimensionally but is created through the interplay of multiple affiliations (see Crenshaw, 1991).

The volatility of identity is also reflected in the fact that people emphasize or de-emphasize different facets of their personality in different social situations. For example, a person's behaviour and self-perception towards colleagues and superiors in the workplace can be very different to that in their private life. Identity is therefore context-dependent and is constantly being renegotiated. This changeability is further reinforced by the fact that the underlying social categories - such as class, ethnicity, or gender - are not themselves stable. They are created through social negotiation processes and are dependent on historical and cultural contexts. One example of this is the development of social class, which has changed over time, with certain groups being categorized differently depending on social power relations and norms.

Another important factor influencing the construction of identity is **collective memory**, a concept introduced by sociologist Maurice Halbwachs and further developed by Aleida and Jan Assmann. It refers to the shared memories of a group that are preserved and passed on by social institutions such as the family, community or state. These memories are not purely individual experiences, but are shaped by cultural narratives, social norms and institutional practices - and thus contribute significantly to the formation of collective and national identities. National holidays, monuments and school textbooks are examples of how certain interpretations of the past are emphasized while others are suppressed. However, collective memory is not uniform. Different social groups can have different perspectives on the past. This can lead to contradictory ideas of national identity and illustrates how multi-layered and conflict-laden identity constructions can be (see Assmann, 2011).

Identity and belonging: Culture creates identity - it helps people to understand who they are and where they belong. Shared cultural values, traditions and symbols create a sense of familiarity and social inclusion. People often find comfort, orientation and a sense of "home" in their cultural affiliation - especially in times of uncertainty or change. *"Culture is a means of locating oneself in the world."*

Behaviour and social norms: Culture has a significant influence on what behaviour is considered "normal". It defines social norms, role models, forms of politeness, moral concepts and taboos. These rules not only govern everyday life, but also shape institutions such as education, law and politics. Culture is both visible (e.g. in clothing or greeting rituals) and invisible (e.g. in attitudes towards authority or gender roles).

Communication: Cultural influences affect how we speak, listen, remain silent, nod or laugh. Language, tone of voice, non-verbal signals, conversational behaviour and the way we deal with closeness and distance differ depending on the culture - which can lead to both enrichment and misunderstandings in intercultural encounters. A conscious understanding of culturally influenced communication patterns is therefore central to education, international cooperation and peaceful coexistence.

Innovation and social progress: Cultural diversity is a source of creativity, new ideas and perspectives. When different ways of thinking come together, innovative solutions to problems, artistic forms of expression and technological developments emerge. The exchange between cultures has always been a driving force for progress - from science to pop culture.

Exclusion and inclusion: culture can connect people - or divide them. Shared cultural characteristics create a sense of belonging, but at the same time cultural differences can lead to stigmatization or marginalization. Cultural norms often implicitly define who is considered "normal" or "different" - and can thus contribute to the exclusion of certain groups (e.g. through classism). It is therefore important to understand culture not as a rigid system, but as an open, dynamic structure that can be questioned, negotiated and changed.

Class cultures and social milieus: Socio-economic differences also create cultural diversity. The realities of life in a high-income milieu with access to golf clubs, opera subscriptions and trips abroad differ significantly from those of a working-class family, whose everyday life is characterized by different leisure practices, forms of communication and values. Such differences manifest themselves in so-called class cultures or social milieus.

These cultural characteristics are more than just economic statistics - they are lived experiences with specific symbols, routines and self-images. They not only influence lifestyle, but also perceptions of normality, success and education.

The simultaneous existence of the most diverse cultural forms of life makes it clear that culture is not a uniform system, but a multi-layered, often contradictory mosaic. Subcultures, class cultures and alternative affiliations make this inner differentiation visible. Anyone who wants to teach inclusive education must not only recognize this diversity but also understand it in its interaction - as the basis for an inclusive understanding of education that is sensitive to discrimination.

Unit Two: Mapping Socio-economic barriers

Revisiting Intersectionality and its relationship with socio-economic disadvantage

Socio-economic status (SES) is measured in a person or group's occupation status, income levels, education levels, and relationship to power. The lower their income levels, education levels, and occupation status equates to the further they are away from political power. **Social stratification** is the unequal distribution of wealth, power and status among different groups of people, and it sustained through intersecting barriers and systems of oppression. In an individualist, capitalist, ableist, misogynist, heteronormative society (hooks, 1994), the idea of meritocracy (the ability to get to positions of power based solely on your achievements, talent, and hard work) is very pervasive and appealing. It ignores the systemic and structural barriers in place that disadvantage. Socio-economic disadvantage is rarely ever about how much income, education, and occupation status you hold. More often than not it intersects with race, gender, disability, sexual orientation, ethnicity and age creating multiple different systemic and structural barriers resulting in low income, educational, and health levels coupled with little opportunity for better employment and social status.

What are socio-economic risk factors?

Socio-economic risk factors will be examined below placed in the systems that surrounds students as they learn in education:

Macro

- (1) Geopolitical instabilities
- (2) Globalisation dynamics
- (3) Environmental pressures and climate change
- (4) Social risks and human insecurities
- (5) Technological and digital transformations (technology gap)

See: (Regroup, 2025 - <https://regroup-horizon.eu/publications/drivers-of-economic-risk/>)

Mezzo

- (1) Historically low-income areas,
- (2) High concentrations of poverty: rural / inner city,
- (3) Social housing,
- (4) Diminished occupation opportunities,
- (5) Socially disorganized neighbourhoods,
- (6) High levels of family disruption,
- (7) Low community participation,
- (8) Social and cultural norms that encourage violence,
- (9) Health, educational, and social policies that help to maintain economic or social inequalities between groups in society.

See: (CDC, 2024):

https://www.cdc.gov/WPVHC/Nurses/Course/Slide/Unit3_10#:~:text=These%20include%3A%201%20High%20concentrations%20of%20poverty%202,economic%20or%20social%20inequalities%20between%20groups%20in%20society

Micro

- (1) Disability / Neurodivergence /Mental health / addiction / Physical health,
- (2) Educational Attainment
- (3) Income / Wealth / Housing /Poverty/ Debt/ Assets
- (4) Profession / Industry / Social capital / Social mobility / Language / Class
- (5) Quality of Life / Security (job, home, food, physical)
- (6) Access to healthcare / access to education
- (7) Citizenship or Migration status
- (8) Trauma or Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) – intergenerational trauma or poverty / period poverty / food insecurity / sleep deprivation / domestic violence / gender-based violence

Asynchronous Activity:

Read Chapter one (Should I stay or Should I go) and two (Work Ethic 1) in John Bissett's ethnography *It's Not Where You Live, It's How You Live* in the Readings Folder the Learning Platform.

Write a 300-word reflection about any tensions you can identify in relation to socio-economic risk factors on a micro scale.

Disadvantage – an accumulation of adversities:

As described above, disadvantage isn't simply living in a household with low income or educational levels, it is an accumulation of adversities. The following list is a non-exhaustive list of adversities which can typically accumulate in a person's life creating socio-economic disadvantage or low socio-economic status (SES), often originating from structural inequalities:

- Intergenerational trauma
- Lack of intergenerational wealth or social & cultural capital
- Intergenerational poverty
- Persistent poverty
- Divorced and/or separated parents
- One parent families
- Poor mental health in mother and / or father
- Living with domestic abuse and gender-based violence
- Low levels of education in parents
- Parental addiction issues
- Food poverty/ food insecurity
- Insecure housing
- Homelessness
- Abuse (Physical, Emotional, Sexual)
- Neglect
- Addiction
- Poor physical health
- Poor mental health
- Disability/disabilities
- Neurodivergence
- Insecure sleep and rest
- Living in social housing
- Living in low-income communities
- Living in emergency accommodation
- Living in shared housing
- Living / grew up in foster system
- Experience of criminal justice system

Adversities tend to be clustered, and cyclical (Kaye, 2023), which illustrates the importance of using a trauma informed lens and practice in inclusive education. Educational institutions are not designed to be spaces for students coming in with trauma. Trauma has changed the chemistry of the brain, how it processes information,

and learns (Zielger, 2023). Students with trauma are hypervigilant and untrusting. Students can be triggered by events and symbols in the classroom or learning environment (ibid).

“When symbols or recollections of trauma come up in the academic setting or classroom, children will either fight or act out, or they will flee, which is sometimes to go into their own space. Many teachers consider these children to be daydreamers or, what we call in psychology, dissociators. It’s simply the way that the brain is handling reminders that come up in the classroom or triggers that are related to their trauma... The traumatised brain does not want to be vulnerable. It does not want to be hurt again, yet you cannot learn without vulnerability. You cannot learn without making mistakes, which is a difficult challenge for kids with trauma.” (Ziegler, 2023, p.4).

Unit Two:

Asynchronous Activity:

- (1) Consider how you can map the accumulation of disadvantages and barriers your students may be experiencing before they come through your educational institution.
- (2) Read Chapters Two and Three in ‘Trauma Informed Education’ in the additional readings folder and write 250-300 words on how you could consider implementing the suggestions given with the age group you work with. For those of you working outside of a traditional classroom – how could you implement a trauma informed practice?

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