

Educational Linguistics

Luis Javier Pentón Herrera *Editor*

English and Students with Limited or Interrupted Formal Education

Global Perspectives on Teacher
Preparation and Classroom Practices



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I dedicate this edited book to all my students with limited or interrupted formal education who taught me how to be a better educator. I also want to dedicate this book to my paternal grandmother, Migdalia, and my father, Juan, both of whom would be considered adults with limited or interrupted formal education in traditional school settings. Thank you both for teaching me that human ingenuity, intelligence, kindness, and love transcend the confinements of formal education.

Foreword

I first met Luis Javier Pentón Herrera at the 2019 TESOL International Association Convention in Atlanta, GA. He was speaking about his experiences working with high school students from Central America. His *Teacher Tip* session was being held in the back of the cavernous exhibit hall, which was extremely noisy and distracting, but his attendees were on the edges of their seats desperately straining to hear because what he was sharing was of interest. Although the setting was certainly less than ideal, the message held their attention and mine. After the Convention, I contacted Luis to see if I could get a copy of his presentation since it was so difficult to hear, and I knew I had missed some of what he said. From that session has grown a professional friendship and partnership, which includes this book.

My experience with SLIFE (Students with Limited or Interrupted Formal Education) began when I was teaching English as a Second Language (ESL) at a middle school in Columbus, Ohio. Our city had traditionally hosted a large number of refugee families, but when large numbers of Somali families began arriving in the 1990s, we were unsure how best to meet their academic and social needs. So many of the children had had few (or no) prior experiences within formal school settings that our traditional programming was not sufficient. The district formed a task force and researched best practices, creating a newcomer program for middle and high school students (see Custodio, 2011). This experience led to personal research into the field of SLIFE, but at the time, there was little information available.

In 2002, I eagerly devoured *Closing the Achievement Gap: How to Reach Limited-Formal-Schooling and Long-Term English Learners* by Yvonne and David Freeman, and Sandra Mercuri (Freeman et al., 2002). I began using their acronym of LFS (Limited Formal Schooling) interchangeably with the acronym of SIFE (Students with Interrupted Formal Education), which had been adopted by the New York City and State Departments of Education in 1997 (see Advocates for Children of New York, 2010). When my co-author and I wrote our book on SIFE titled *Students with Interrupted Formal Education: Bridging Where They Are and What They Need* in 2017 (Custodio & O'Loughlin, 2017), we used this term because it was the term with which we were the most familiar.

The term SLIFE used in this edition was first coined by DeCapua, Smathers, and Tang in their 2009 book, *Meeting the Needs of Students with Limited or Interrupted Schooling*. This term has since become the most popular across the world to describe these students because of the addition of the ‘L’ to the SIFE acronym, drawing attention to the fact that some of the students in this category have had few (if any) experiences in formal school settings prior to migration. The SLIFE acronym will be used throughout this edited volume, showing how this term is now commonly found in both P-12 and adult settings, but I point readers to Chap. 2, where Browder, Pentón Herrera, and Franco raise important questions surrounding the acronym and its use.

Over time, our understanding of the issues of SLIFE has expanded to include more than simply linguistic and academic development. So many of these students have experienced situations and conditions that have added physical, emotional, and familial trauma that often add to or even overshadow their academic challenges. We have discovered there is much an educator can do to ameliorate these barriers without formal training through providing a welcoming environment, comfortable classroom routines, and culturally responsive curriculum and mindsets (DeCapua & Marshall, 2011; O’Loughlin & Custodio, 2021). The authors in the following chapters will provide specific, practical suggestions for creating classrooms that will meet the myriad academic and non-academic needs of SLIFE around the world.

A glance at the table of contents will quickly reveal that the topics and the authors represent a diversity of location and student population. Educators from North America, the Caribbean, South America, Europe, Asia and the Middle East share authentic, practical teaching strategies grounded in the latest theoretical frameworks. I believe that this volume will become an indispensable tool for teachers looking for an essential resource on best practices for meeting the unique challenges and obstacles that accompany so many of our students with limited or interrupted formal education.

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Brenda Custodio

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I would also like to express my most sincere appreciations to my friends, co-advocates, and colleagues Dr. Doaa Rashed and Mx. Ethan Trinh for translating the appendix in Chap. 5 in Arabic and Vietnamese, respectively. In addition, I am forever grateful to my dear students at The George Washington University, Siyu Shen and Guanjie Wang, for translating the appendix in Chap. 5 to Chinese.

Lastly, I would like to express my deepest gratitude to Dr. Francis M. Hult, the series editor of *Educational Linguistics*. Thank you for your encouragement, guidance, feedback, and support since we first began to explore the possibility of turning this idea into an edited volume.

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Editor

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Ethan Trinh (Pronouns: they/them) is a Vietnamese queer immigrant who is passionate about teaching and education for marginalized queer and trans youths of color and exploring teachers’ identities. They are an activist, feminist, Chicana-feminist writer, and decolonial researcher. They are an incoming third-year doctoral

student pursuing a PhD in Language and Literacy in the Middle and Secondary Education Department and earning a certificate in Women's Studies at Georgia State University. Ethan's work focuses on the intersectionality of gender, race, and language education in TESOL that embraces queerness as a healing teaching and research practice. Ethan has published their works in a variety of international journals and has been an active member of different professional organizations. Recently, Ethan has published a book titled *Critical Storytelling: Multilingual Immigrants in the United States* with Luis Javier Pentón Herrera. Originally from Mekong Delta in the South of Vietnam, Ethan enjoys creative writing and having a cup of Vietnamese iced coffee in their free time.

Martha Young-Scholten is professor of second language acquisition at Newcastle University, England. Since the 1980s, she has conducted research on the generative-linguistics-based L2 acquisition of morphosyntax and phonology, focusing on adults acquiring their L2 naturalistically. For the last 15 years, she has been investigating the reading development and acquisition of morphosyntax by immigrant adults with limited formal schooling and home language literacy and was one of the founders in 2005 of the Literacy Education and Second Language Acquisition by Adults (LESLLA) forum. She co-directs with a creative writing colleague the Simply Cracking Good Stories project on pleasure reading for adult beginners. She participated in the Digital Literacy Instructor project to create beginning-level reading software for adults, and from 2010 to 2018 she led the EU-Speak project, which designed on-line training and professional development modules for those who teach these learners. She now co-directs its board.

Chapter 1

Introduction: Students with Limited or Interrupted Formal Education in K-12 and Adult Education



Luis Javier Pentón Herrera 

Abstract My vision with this edited volume is to continue elevating the conversation and knowledge about students with limited or interrupted formal education (SLIFE) in English-speaking environments and how to best support them. More specifically, in this edited volume, I bring the SLIFE population front and center by collecting high-quality contributions that shed light, advance, and educate readers on how to best support SLIFE in learning settings (K-12 and/or adults), and organizations. Contributions included in this volume are theoretically sound and provide practical techniques, frameworks, approaches, practices, considerations, and useful insights that any stakeholder, at any level, can learn from and implement in their institution. Lastly, the intended audience for this book includes teacher educators, pre-service and in-service English and literacy educators, first language (L1) language professionals, graduate students, tutors, facilitators and instructors working in community organizations, and administrators with SLIFE populations at their institutions.

Keywords ELs · ESOL · K-12 schools · Literacy · LESLLA · Refugees · SIFE · SLIFE

This edited volume embraces two topics that have been lifelong passions of mine: (1) literacy and (2) the education of refugees and immigrants. I was born and raised in Cuba, a country often known for its high literacy rate and its focus on literacy education. While many mistakenly believe Cuba's history of literacy education began after 1959, the reality is that early in the twentieth century, many educators were already leading the fight to combat and eradicate illiteracy on the island. Among those teachers was Dr. Ana Echegoyen de Cañizares, the first Afro-Cuban woman to hold a tenure position as Professor of Education in *La Universidad de La*

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Habana (the University of Havana) (see Pentón Herrera, 2018). I first learned of Dr. Echegoyen de Cañizares's works during my doctoral studies, and I became impassioned about her incessant fight against illiteracy and injustice in Cuba (Pentón Herrera, 2019).

From 2016 to 2018, I extensively read and studied the works of Dr. Echegoyen de Cañizares. Her vision of freeing Cuba and the world from illiteracy invigorated my pedagogy and my career, and I quickly became interested in literacy and its power to free the individual and transform societies. By immersing myself in the works of Dr. Echegoyen de Cañizares, I learned that, in Cuba, print literacy was used as a weapon against those who could not read or write. For example, powerful individuals would often use their ability to read and write to persuade *güajiros*—farmers who lived and worked in rural parts of the country planting in the fields and who could not read or write—into signing away their lands without informed knowledge of what they were signing for. At the same time, I also learned about the stories of many wealthy Cuban refugees who migrated to the United States after the Cuban Revolution in 1959 and how they were able to use their robust formal education backgrounds to succeed in this new society.

Certainly, literacy contributes and has the power to transform lives and individuals in all societies around the world. This statement is even more true for today's immigrants and refugees who arrive in a new social, cultural, and linguistic environment and must quickly adapt to survive. However, more often than not, to succeed in a developed nation, immigrants must have print literacy skills in their first languages to help them function in these text-driven societies. Although much has changed since the twentieth century when Cuban *güajiros* were misled into signing away their lands, some things have remained the same. Today, language and literacy continue to be used as a mechanism to manipulate individuals who are not able to access the host country's dominant language or print (Reed, 2019). Today, in the twenty-first century, language and literacy continue to be a tool used by the powerful to control, disincentivize, and exploit individuals with emergent print literacy skills. Once again, we see the most vulnerable—refugees, asylum seekers, immigrants, individuals with limited or interrupted formal education—being abused by those with power and control over the constructs of language and literacy. It is my hope that books like this one will help our global societies understand the effects that language and literacy have had over those who have been marginalized for so long.

My vision with this edited volume is to continue elevating the conversation and knowledge about students with limited or interrupted formal education (SLIFE) in English-speaking environments and how to best support them. More specifically, in this edited volume, I bring the SLIFE population front and center by collecting high-quality contributions that shed light, advance, and educate readers on how to best support SLIFE in learning settings (K-12 and/or adults), and organizations. Contributions included in this volume are theoretically sound and provide practical techniques, frameworks, approaches, practices, considerations, and useful insights that any stakeholder, at any level, can learn from and implement in their institution. Lastly, the intended audience for this book includes teacher educators, pre-service and in-service English and literacy educators, first language (L1) language

professionals, graduate students, tutors, facilitators and instructors working in community organizations, and administrators with SLIFE populations at their institutions.

English and students with limited or interrupted formal education: Global perspectives on teacher preparation and classroom practices has been divided into five parts:

- Part I. Setting the foundation: How we want to frame our conversations about students with limited or interrupted formal education
- Part II. Overview of students with limited or interrupted formal education
- Part III. Pre- and in-service teacher preparation
- Part IV. Effective support for students with limited or interrupted formal education in K-12 learning environments
- Part V. Effective support for students with limited or interrupted formal education in adult learning environments

In the first part of the book, *Setting the foundation: How we want to frame our conversations about students with limited or interrupted formal education*, Browder, Pentón Herrera, and Franco (Chap. 2) frame and advance the conversation of the term SLIFE within this edited volume and beyond. More specifically, the authors problematize the label of SLIFE, its use, and propose future directions for the words *interrupted* and *limited* in formal education. In their chapter, Browder, Pentón Herrera, and Franco hope to become part of a growing conversation about the implications of using the label SLIFE in education. In addition, the chapter's arguments contribute to pushing exchanges towards using more asset-based vocabulary and avoiding labels to conglomerate a large, heterogeneous group of learners without benefits connected to its use.

The second part of the book, *Part II. Overview of students with limited or interrupted formal education*, shares an overview of the SLIFE population in K-12 and adult learning environments and also looks at important topics that stakeholders should consider when supporting this population of learners. Pentón Herrera (Chap. 3) shares an overview of SLIFE in K-12 learning environments in the United States, Australia, Canada, and the United Kingdom, as well as six significant challenges SLIFE encounter at the primary and secondary levels in these four countries. Harris (Chap. 4) provides an overview of adult SLIFE—also known as literacy education and second language learning for adults (LESLLA) learners—in the United States, Australia, Canada, and the United Kingdom, outlines four main challenges these students face, and summarizes relevant contributions these adult learners provide to the communities in which they live. Linville and Pentón Herrera (Chap. 5) explore the importance of advocacy for SLIFE and provide resources and suggestions schools can use to support the access, acquisition, and development of literacy for this group of learners. Montero and Al Zouhour (Chap. 6) weave personal and professional experiences to discuss educators' roles when faced with a student's trauma story.

The third part of the book, *Pre- and in-service teacher preparation*, takes a close look at opportunities pre- and in-service teacher preparation programs have to effectively prepare educators to meet the needs of SLIFE. Custodio and O'Loughlin

(Chap. 7) provide an overview of state-level requirements for pre-service teachers in the United States and conclude with suggestions for training current in-service educators teaching SLIFE. DeCapua and Marshall (Chap. 8) propose detailed practices teacher educators can use in their courses to address the unique needs of SLIFE. Ledger and Montero (Chap. 9) narrate a teacher's journey toward a student-centered professional knowledge base within an English literacy development (ELD) program rooted in early literacy pedagogy in Canada. Marrero Colón and Désir (Chap. 10) shares best practices teacher education programs and practitioners should know to effectively teach and support the adolescent SLIFE population.

The fourth part of the book, *Effective support for students with limited or interrupted formal education in K-12 learning environments*, proposes considerations, strategies, and practical applications educators of SLIFE in K-12 can use to serve this student population. Casanova and Alvarez (Chap. 11) make practical recommendations teachers can use to support underprivileged students, such as Latinx SLIFE, through the lens of community cultural wealth. Trinh (Chap. 12) introduces *queer SLIFE youth*, a little-known population, and argues that as sexuality and language education intersect, the affective domains and emotional aspects of this student population require special attention prior to, or in conjunction with, the teaching of language and literacy. Cruzado-Guerrero and Martínez-Alba (Chap. 13) focus on elementary-age SLIFE and discuss the potential of wordless books and literacy events to develop children and parents' reading, writing, listening, and speaking skills in their native language or in English. Aker, Daniel, and Pentón Herrera (Chap. 14) propose problem-based service-learning (PBSL) as an effective instructional framework to support SLIFE at the middle school, high school, and community college levels.

The fifth part of the book, *Effective support for students with limited or interrupted formal education in adult learning environments*, proposes consideration, strategies, and practical applications educators of SLIFE in adult learning environments can use to serve this student population. Frydland (Chap. 15) reports on three Mutually Adaptive Learning Paradigm® (MALP®) projects implemented with adult SLIFE at a non-governmental organization (NGO) and a community-based-organization (CBO). Friedman, Laitflang, and Pilosoph (Chap. 16) advocate for the use of explicit instruction for adult SLIFE and identify the curricular support and training that teachers require to adopt explicit methods of instruction. Lypka (Chap. 17) proposes the use of four participatory digital visual methods (PDVMs)—Photo-elicitation, PhotoVoice, VideoVoice, and Community Filmmaking—to support adults with limited or interrupted schooling in the classroom through multiple means of expression, modalities, and digital technologies. Mocciano and Young-Scholten (Chap. 18) explore the wealth of research on the acquisition of grammar by post-puberty immigrants with and without formal schooling to aid practitioners in understanding how learners' errors are a natural and encouraging sign of learners' progression towards higher levels of second language competence. Kidwell (Chap. 19) reflects on a four-month program in the United States offering English classes to adult refugee women from Afghanistan and Congo with emergent literacy to share promising strategies that practitioners and stakeholders should consider to adult SLIFE populations.

Final Comments

I would like to end the introduction of this edited volume by acknowledging some points that may create tensions for scholars reading this volume and that reflect the current inquietudes experienced in scholarly conversations in the field. Those points include: (1) in some chapters, the writing might appear as to create a “literate/non-literate” dichotomy which is not the objective, (2) the terms “education” and “schooling” might appear at times as interchangeable in the context of *formal education* and *formal schooling*, (3) the term “formal schooling” and “literacy” might appear at times as interchangeable which is not the objective, and (4) terms such as “limited literacy” and “low literacy” might appear at times as the normalization of a deficit terminology which is not the objective. In an effort to address these and other points of tensions throughout the edited volume, my colleagues Browder, Franco, and I have framed the conversation about SLIFE in Chap. 2 from an asset-based perspective while also acknowledging the tensions the acronym may cause from some readers.

My goal as editor of this volume is not to force a specific vocabulary or mindset on the contributors, but to advance the conversation about this particular student population by sharing the voices of practitioners in diverse contexts from around the world. This goal is also evidenced by the divergent views on appropriate pedagogies found throughout the volume where, for example, some contributors rely on liberatory and progressive approaches while others identify traditional practices as more appropriate. There is, certainly, much work that remains to be done in the theorization and application of literacy as both a construct and practice. My vision is that this edited volume advances this conversation further.

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Part I
Setting the Foundation: How We Want to
Frame Our Conversations About Students
with Limited or Interrupted Formal
Education

Chapter 2

Advancing the Conversation: Humanizing and Problematizing the Conversation About the Students We Call SLIFE



Christopher Browder, Luis Javier Pentón Herrera , and José Franco

Abstract In this chapter, the authors seek to advance the conversation of the term students with limited or interrupted formal education (SLIFE). More specifically, the authors problematize the label of SLIFE, its use, and advance the conversation to propose future directions. To accomplish this, the authors divide the chapter into four main sections: (1) introduction, (2) problematizing SLIFE, (3) expanding definitions of interrupted and limited formal education, and (4) final thoughts. Our goal is that this chapter will become part of a growing conversation about the implications of using the label SLIFE in formal schooling. Motivated by the ongoing dialogue criticizing the use of SLIFE and labels in the field of education, we hope this chapter will contribute to pushing exchanges towards using more asset-based vocabulary and avoiding labels to conglomerate a large, heterogeneous group of learners without benefits connected to its use.

Keywords SLIFE · SIFE · ELs · Literacy

Introduction

Historically, the topic of literacy has been an area of interest for industrialized nations, and it has been tied to impacting individuals' abilities to be employed and to contribute to the nation's economic development (Barton & Hamilton, 1990). For

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this reason, literacy has often been viewed as a monolithic technology or tradition (Collins & Blot, 2003) of the required skill sets needed to participate and meet the demands of the complex modern world. Thus, literacy, as a socially-made construction (Cook-Gumperz, 2006a), has sometimes been criticized for being narrow in its singular focus (Collins, 1995) as well as for contributing to a stratified system of social inequalities (Collins & Blot, 2003). Certainly, changes in the definitions of literacy respond to what is perceived as the changing needs of those in positions of power (Cook-Gumperz, 2006b).

Why does this theoretical explanation matter to students with limited or interrupted formal education (SLIFE)? It matters because, from the moment SLIFE arrive into our learning spaces, they are evaluated and viewed as illiterate or individuals who do not possess something useful; individuals who lack the abilities to be useful to their new society. Some may disagree with this declaration, and we understand it can be considered a harsh statement for others. Nonetheless, in schools, educators teaching SLIFE are encouraged by the educational system to focus on identifying the skills SLIFE lack and rarely, if ever, focus on learning about the literacies and skills SLIFE do have and bring with them into their host countries. It is in this deficit mentality (i.e., SLIFE *do not have* or *need*) often enforced in our educational systems that the label *SLIFE* and, in particular, the word *limited* may become problematic and lead to stigmatization and simplification of the learners' abilities and possibilities to succeed in school (Browder, 2019).

The purpose of this chapter is to advance the conversation of the acronym SLIFE. To accomplish this, the authors divide the remaining of the chapter into three main sections: (1) problematizing SLIFE, (2) expanding definitions of interrupted and limited formal education, and (3) final thoughts. In the first section—problematizing SLIFE—we problematize the term SLIFE by explaining raising tensions with the use of labels and the words *limited* and *interrupted*. In the second section—expanding definitions of interrupted and limited formal education—we expand the current use of the terms *interrupted* and *limited* by using a case study from Venezuela. Lastly, the chapter ends with three takeaways that practitioners and researchers need to consider as we continue to advance our understanding of the students we call SLIFE. Our goal with this chapter is that it will become part of a growing conversation about the implication of using the term *SLIFE* in formal schooling. Furthermore, we hope this chapter will contribute to pushing the education field forward towards using more asset-based vocabulary and avoiding labels to conglomerate a large, heterogeneous group of learners.

Problematizing SLIFE

In this section, we problematize the label SLIFE and its use in education. To do this, we explore the following problems: (1) Problems with its deficit focus and potential for enabling stigmatization, (2) Problems with its operational definition for identification and placement purposes, and (3) Problems with its ambiguity for precise

discourse and placement. We end this section of the chapter exploring the question *Do we need this construct?* As an important clarifying note, the purpose of this chapter is not to discredit or criticize the use of SLIFE or the vanguard work led by Drs. Andrea DeCapua, Helaine Marshall, and others who have consistently used this acronym in their works (including two of the authors of this chapter: Browder and Pentón Herrera). Instead, the purpose of this chapter is to acknowledge the rising tensions and the lingering concerns with using SLIFE (Browder, 2018, 2019) and labels to conceptualize language learners (Kibler & Valdés, 2016).

Problems with Its Deficit Focus and Potential for Enabling Stigmatization

One of the main problems with the term SLIFE is that it is used to label a group of people based on their supposed deficits and thereby enables their stigmatization. Social psychologists tell us that social stigmatization begins with labeling and ends with the damaging of identity (Link & Phelan, 2001). Thus, social psychologists warn that using nouns to refer to people is dehumanizing and devaluing as it enables us to forget we are talking about human beings, especially if the noun label refers to the lack of something that is highly valued. Approaching the labeling of SLIFE from a deficit-based perspective raises issues because this label is associated with low, limited, or no literacy and/or with low or limited formal schooling. Furthermore, this classification might be seen as problematic for some teachers and scholars, especially for those guided by emancipatory (Freire, 1970), Indigenous (Iseke & BMJK, 2011), and decolonizing (Hernandez-Zamora, 2010) epistemologies.

As we shared in the introduction of this chapter, the field of education is shifting towards an asset-based definition of literacy where the word *literacies* is preferred by some (see Collins, 1995; Collins & Blot, 2003) to capitalize on the knowledge and experience learners have and bring with them to their learning environments. As such, recognizing and acknowledging that SLIFE *do* have and bring different forms of literacies to the formal learning spaces is the first step towards fully embracing asset-based practices in our schools and institutions. Furthermore, this acceptance of viewing literacy as *literacies* creates spaces for educators to seek further learning experiences that equip them to understand their SLIFE' strengths, skills, and abilities beyond those standardized set of literacy skills enforced in our schools.

People in industrialized nations value literacy and formal schooling because they are viewed as assets affecting individuals' abilities to be employed and to contribute to the nation's economic development (Barton & Hamilton, 1990). Thus, literacy—and being literate—has been and continues to be attached to virtue, ability, and even usefulness (Cook-Gumperz, 2006a). On the other hand, illiteracy—or being illiterate—is associated with denigration, economic stagnation, cultural disorder, and political decay (Collins, 1995; Cook-Gumperz, 2006a). Thus, the use of the term SLIFE and its association with *illiteracy* and being *uneducated* may enable the

stigmatization of these students and simplification of their abilities and possibilities to succeed in school (Browder, 2019). Stigmatization could harm the identity of students identified as SLIFE.

It may be considered an issue that the use of the acronym SLIFE does not allow writers to follow the American Psychological Association (2020) rules for bias-free language. The American Psychological Association (APA) asks writers to avoid using nouns to label groups of people and instead consider using adjectives and/or person-first language phrases. Most importantly, APA recommends the involvement of communities and people in choosing their labels. An example of this is how APA prefers the phrase “persons with down syndrome” and considers the noun label *retards* to be offensive and unacceptable. The term SLIFE, however, does not allow people the choice of using person-first language because the personhood, or student, is subsumed into the acronym. In other words, writers lose the option of referring to these students as “students who *have* SLIFE” because (1) SLIFE is a plural acronym in which the letter *S* stands for students, and (2) SLIFE is a category people are placed into, not a characteristic they can have. It is also worrisome that SLIFE have not chosen this label for themselves or been asked how they feel about it.

Problems with Its Operational Definition for Identification and Placement Purposes

Critical examinations of the term, SLIFE (or students with interrupted formal education [SIFE] in New York State), argue that it is currently not well defined for the purpose of public school data collection and placement in interventions (Advocates for Children of New York, 2010; Browder, 2019). In school systems, to qualify as a SLIFE, a student must have low math skills and/or low first language (L1) print literacy *caused by* gaps in schooling attendance (Minnesota Statutes, 2015; NYSED, 2019). Attempting to measure limited or interrupted formal education this way is problematic because newly-arrived immigrant students can have developing math or L1 print literacy without having documented interruptions in their schooling and vice versa (Browder, 2019). Research shows that math and print literacy levels are often not correlated with years of schooling (Browder, 2019; Tarone, 2010; Tarone et al., 2009) because print literacy development can happen without schooling (Scribner & Cole, 1978), and schooling can happen without print literacy (Robson, 1982). Moreover, the adequacy of public schooling can vary greatly from country to country or locale to locale (Flaitz, 2006; UNICEF, 2014), and students do not benefit equally even when given equal schooling (Bigelow & Watson, 2011). As a result, when using documented interruptions in schooling history as an inflexible placement criterion for SLIFE services, students with low math or L1 print literacy skills may be systematically excluded from services they need simply because they do not show interruptions in their schooling histories (Advocates for Children of New York, 2010). Similarly, students who do not have developing L1 print literacy

or math skills may be inappropriately placed in SLIFE programs that are not in their best interest simply because they have interruptions in their schooling histories (Feinberg, 2000).

In contrast to the aforementioned school system criteria for identifying SLIFE, DeCapua and Marshall (2015) argue that SLIFE can be distinguished from other English learners (ELs) by their experience of cultural dissonance. They argue that these students come from collectivistic cultures, oral traditions, and backgrounds of informal or out-of-school learning, and that causes them to experience cultural dissonance when placed in formal, western-style schooling, which emphasizes individual achievement on abstract, decontextualized, and commodified learning tasks. Furthermore, DeCapua and Marshall (2015) argue that the challenge these students face is not simply a lack of print literacy or educational schema, but is instead the difficulty of adapting to a new way of learning. This definition of SLIFE has great potential because it offers a single criterion instead of relying on a set of uncorrelated and restrictive criteria, such as math test scores, L1 print literacy scores, and school transcripts. Unfortunately, there is currently no objective-quantitative operationalization of this criterion for school system use. In other words, schools do not yet have the means to identify cultural dissonance in newly-arrived EL students for the purpose of data collection and placement in SLIFE interventions. Hence, without some sort of objective criteria, there is a danger that placement decisions may be made based on assumptions or bias, and this can become a form of educational segregation (Feinberg, 2000).

Problems with Its Ambiguity for Precise Discourse and Placement

The public school operationalization of the term SLIFE is also problematic because it is a dichotomous variable used to refer to an incredibly diverse group of people with very different needs (Browder, 2019). As a result, it may lump people with very different needs together and encourage inappropriate one-size-fits-all interventions. To address this issue, DeCapua et al. (2020) argue that these students' challenges can be understood better with a continuum they refer to as *Ways of Knowing*. In their more nuanced view, SLIFE is not an all-or-nothing category to which a student either belongs or does not belong. Students can experience more or less cultural dissonance based on their backgrounds, and therefore, each student will need a different degree of support. Browder (2019) views the SLIFE construct similarly but complicates further. He argues that SLIFE is a multidimensional construct composed of many different continuous variables. His research shows that students can have one of the SLIFE traits without the other. For example, students can have interrupted schooling but can also have highly-developed L1 print literacy skills, or students can have low L1 print literacy skills without interrupted schooling. Browder (2015, 2018, 2019), DeCapua et al. (2020) and other advocates would like to bring attention to this group's diversity and needs.

The existing literature from our field already shows the diversity of the students we call SLIFE. In one of their articles, DeCapua et al. (2007), for example, describe a wide variety of students who might be identified as SLIFE: (1) Tom speaks English because he is from Sierra Leone but has no formal schooling; (2) Sonia has been moving back and forth from the Dominican Republic all her life, and as a result, has inconsistent and interrupted formal schooling; (3) John recently came from China, where he completed up to grade six before leaving school to work in a factory and has not been attending school for several years. In one of his articles, Browder (2018) studies a group of Chin refugees from Burma/Myanmar, an ethnic group with a long history of print literacy and formal schooling. Browder (2018) finds that most of them have varying degrees of Chin print literacy despite having lengthy interruptions in their schooling. In their article, Bigelow et al. (2008) describe working with recent-arrival Hmong immigrant children with various levels of print literacy and prior formal schooling experiences. Lastly, Franco and Abreu (2018) and Mac Donald et al. (2020) discuss how the term SIFE is being applied to university students in Venezuela who had to discontinue their studies, in many cases, due to forced migration.

From those examples, we see that the literature suggests the terms SLIFE and SIFE can include (1) both EL and non-EL students such as speakers of World Englishes (e.g., people from Sierra Leone); (2) both students who are recently arrived immigrants and those who are very transient, coming and going from the U.S. or other English-speaking nations; (3) both students who have and do not have L1 print literacy skills, as well as students whose L1 print literacy is not Roman-Alphabetic (e.g., Chinese); (4) both students who have never attended formal or western-style schools and those who have completed many years of formal schooling; (5) both students who have very low math skills and students who have very high math skills but are struggling to restart their formal schooling after being out of school for a long time; and (6) both children in K-12 or adults at the university level. Indeed, SLIFE is an umbrella term that includes a diverse group of students with very different needs.

For these reasons, the current construct of SLIFE may be inclusive to the point of ambiguity. When two people are talking about SLIFE, there is no guarantee they are talking about the same student population or about the same academic needs. When talking about Latinx students' academic needs, for instance, it would be problematic if we place this highly heterogeneous group of learners into a one-size-fits-all box because not all Latinx EL students speak Spanish as a first language, have the same formal schooling levels, come from the same countries, or have experienced the same social and economic privileges (Pentón Herrera, 2018). If the term SLIFE is to be used to identify students who need specific interventions, then it should actually refer to specific academic needs instead of being a vague umbrella term.

Likewise, the term SLIFE as a dichotomous variable is problematic because a large number of EL students fall into a large gray area and can, therefore, be included or excluded based on minimal differences in just one criterion. For example, currently, 77.8% of all EL students in U.S. schools are from families of Latin American

origin (U.S. Department of Education, 2017) and, therefore, usually speak Spanish as a first language. This is noteworthy because Spanish has a long history of print literacy, formal schooling, and scientific thinking. It is also noteworthy because Latin American nations generally have free public education up to sixth grade or higher (UNICEF, 2014), with 86% of their youth completing grade six and youth literacy levels around 98% (World Bank, 2020). Yet, children's formal schooling in these nations is often inconsistent or interrupted due to social injustice, violent crime, and political turmoil (Lukes, 2015). Given these facts, it is possible that many of the Latinx EL students in the U.S. actually fall more into the right side of DeCapua et al.'s (2020) *Ways of Learning Continuum*. They may have some of the characteristics of SLIFE to a moderate degree, but not all. Consequently, two very similar Latinx students might get classified differently based on a small difference in just one criterion, such as having or not having at least 2 years of documented interrupted schooling (Advocates for Children of New York, 2010). As a result, one of those two very similar students might receive services while the other student is denied services.

Do We Need This Construct?

Given the issues with the term SLIFE and the way it is currently being used, it is important to consider the need for this label or perhaps even consider its elimination or reform (Browder, 2019). In order to have this conversation, however, we must do more than find its faults; we must also discuss the benefits of having the term SLIFE or something similar. We, then, arrive at the important question, *How does having the term SLIFE benefit students identified as SLIFE?*

Browder (2019) explains that it is sometimes helpful or necessary to create dichotomous variables for public schools to identify students who are eligible for certain services. Thus, in this particular case, having the term SLIFE allows us to (1) identify students for the purpose of giving them the services they need and (2) disaggregate the data for these students to hold schools accountable (Minnesota Statutes, 2015; NYSDE, 2019). In fact, advocates for these students fought hard to get those laws enacted (Heilman, 2018) because they believed these students benefit from special services, and researchers (Browder, 2015; Pentón Herrera, 2021), as well as teachers' personal experiences, appear to approve the benefits of those supports for those students. Thus, removing the term from public schools might cause harm to these students. Furthermore, as long as the public schools continue to have the term SLIFE, researchers might be inclined to continue to use it when discussing students currently included under it. Consequently, consistent published research under this umbrella term of SLIFE will make research findings and advances more visible in academia and more accessible for teachers.

However, the realities that this term is already in use and has benefits should not dissuade advocates from introducing the use of more specific and more potentially beneficial terms. For starters, advocates and researchers could start referring to

SLIFE as persons, children, adolescents, adults, or students *identified as* SLIFE as the writers of this chapter do in the title. Similarly, individuals could use terms such as *students with developing L1 print literacy* to refer to students with one specific academic area of need instead of generalizing the literacy and academic needs of learners. For example, students with the cultural dissonance issue DeCapua et al. (2020) describe could eventually be referred to as students experiencing cultural dissonance (CD) in U.S. schools. To avoid having to repeat long and awkward phrases, the condition can be referred to with an acronym such as CD and students with shorter phrases such as students *experiencing* CD. Over time, the term SLIFE might eventually be supplanted by several other terms that are more specific. Similarly, advocates could start promoting terms that are growth-focused instead of deficit-focused, such as EL students learning print literacy, students new to print literacy, or print literacy EL students.

As part of a larger struggle, it would be ideal if public schools became less dependent on systems that classify students but could also make greater progress on helping students with their individual needs. One way to achieve this progress is to create legally-enforceable plans that are created to help individual students overcome their temporary needs. An example of this is the 504 plans currently used in U.S. public schools (U.S. Department of Education, 2020). The 504 plans do not need to label students in order to require they be accommodated, and 504s serve as a legal document. A 504, for example, can be used to help a student who recently had hand surgery and needs temporary special accommodation. In fact, the Americans with Disabilities Act has been broadening the range of people protected under law to include psychiatric and substance abuse conditions (Fleischer, 2001). A 504 plan can currently be used to accommodate and provide counseling services for students who have post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Likewise, a 504, or something similar, could someday be used to require schools to be flexible and supportive with students who have been out of school for a while (i.e., interruptions) and are reintegrating back into formal schooling. In the current system, state and federal authorities can already disaggregate the educational data for students with 504s to evaluate how well those students' needs are being met, and advocates can also use these documents in educational lawsuits if necessary. The implementation of a plan similar to the 504 plan for students identified as SLIFE could require accommodations and services for the specific needs of each student instead of a one-size-fits-all intervention.

Expanding Definitions of Interrupted and Limited Formal Education: A Case Study from Venezuela

In this section of the chapter, we provide a case study to shed light on the expanding uses and definitions of the term SLIFE and, more specifically, SIFE. Our vision with incorporating this case study is that practitioners, researchers, administrators, and

educational stakeholders at all levels will be able to understand the growing diversity within the population of students identified as SLIFE.

Background Information

During the last years, Venezuela has been experiencing economic, social, and political turmoil that has led to a generalized crisis of unimaginable dimensions, dramatically impacting the way people live. Such crisis has caused chronic shortages of food and medicine, lack of access to basic services, insecurity, insignificant salaries, unemployment, discouragement, and demoralization. The result of this crisis has been the massive displacement of Venezuelan citizens to neighboring countries such as Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, Brazil, or even more distant nations such as the United States and Spain.

People's fight-or-flight response against a situation that threatens their very survival reflects the forced nature of the migration in Venezuela (Franco & Abreu, 2018). Even more alarming is the fact that most of the population leaving the country are young adults, mostly highly-trained professionals and university students who have been forced to abandon their studies due to the above-mentioned reasons (Franco & Abreu, 2018). Consequently, tertiary education has been the most affected education sector in the country due to the high student dropout rates and also because of the high resignation rates of university professors. Thus, in our context, we use the term students with interrupted formal education to refer to university students forcefully leaving Venezuela (Franco & Abreu, 2018; Mac Donald et al., 2020).

The most remarkable difference between students identified as SIFE in the context of Venezuela (young adults) and the population of SIFE appearing in most of the literature (e.g., Custodio & O'Loughlin, 2017; DeCapua et al., 2020; Freeman et al., 2002; Lukes, 2015; Schmidt de Carranza, 2017; WIDA Consortium, 2015) is that the former are university students with highly-developed print literacy skills in their native language (Spanish). However, language may represent a constraint for those who move to countries whose official language is not Spanish. With this in mind, Venezuelan students identified as SIFE do not fit in the popular characterization of *students with interrupted formal education*. The popular definition of SLIFE and/or SIFE currently used in the literature to primarily refer to K-12 students who are ELs with emerging print literacy skills in L1 and interrupted formal education may also exclude other groups of learners with diverse realities from around the world.

Expanding Our Understanding of Interrupted and Limited Formal Education

The aim of this case study is not to establish a unique term to refer to the student population identified as SLIFE or SIFE, but to understand how these labels can be expanded—or challenged—depending on the context in which they are adopted. In this context, the fact that Venezuelan university students drop out implies a form of interruption, which, unfortunately, is an indefinite type of interruption. As such, the term *interrupted formal education* is the one that best describes the situation of these students leaving the university to migrate to other countries in search of a better life. Also, for the Venezuelan migrants and refugees described in this case study, legal regulations of permanence in the host countries and economic hardship present additional barriers to returning to higher education (Franco & Abreu, 2018), which, in a way, might also expand the term of *limited formal education* as these students have *limited* access to continue *formal education*.

Final Thoughts

As we end this chapter, we would like to leave our readers with three important takeaways: (1) we need to continue exploring what it means to be a student with limited or interrupted formal education because, as we saw in the case study above, current global events are pushing the boundaries of the label SLIFE and/or SIFE; (2) we need to continue exploring more reliable forms of individualized assessments to comprehend the knowledge students identified as SLIFE bring with them and craft individualized plans to help these students achieve the skills needed to succeed; and (3) the field of education and applied linguistics need to continue advancing the conversation about the necessity of humanizing the constructs of literacy and language in formal educational environments as well as in society as a whole. We hope the information shared in this chapter generates beneficial discussions in the field and contributes to the advancement of asset-based knowledge about the student population we call SLIFE.

Reflection Questions

1. What are the benefits and drawbacks of using the label SLIFE in your context? As you draft a list, ask yourself if the positives (benefits) outweigh the negatives (drawbacks).
2. What topics or concerns that you are familiar with about the student population we call SLIFE was not addressed in this chapter?

3. What are your thoughts about the authors' call for *problematizing* and *humanizing* the conversation about the students we call SLIFE?

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Part II
Overview of Students with Limited or
Interrupted Formal Education

Chapter 3

Students with Limited or Interrupted Formal Education in Primary and Secondary Classrooms in the U.S., Australia, Canada, and the UK



Luis Javier Pentón Herrera 

Abstract This chapter shares an overview of students with limited or interrupted formal education (SLIFE) in the United States and three other prominent English-speaking countries with a growing number of SLIFE: Australia, Canada, and the United Kingdom. Thus, this chapter has been organized into four main sections: (1) introduction to SLIFE, (2) in-depth overview of SLIFE in primary and secondary U.S. classrooms, (3) overview of SLIFE in primary and secondary classrooms in Australia, Canada, and the United Kingdom, and (4) six significant challenges SLIFE encounter at the primary and secondary levels in these four countries. Notably, the primary purpose of this chapter is to bring clarity to the current state and reality of the K-12 SLIFE population in the United States, Australia, Canada, and the United Kingdom, as these four countries represent the largest recipients of refugees resettling in English-speaking nations.

Keywords ELs · ESOL · K-12 schools · Literacy · Refugees · SIFE · SLIFE

Introduction

The acronym *SLIFE* was first introduced in 2009 by Drs. DeCapua, Smathers, and Tang to refer to students with limited or interrupted formal education (DeCapua et al., 2009). SLIFE, sometimes preferred over deficit-based terms such as *illiterate*, *uneducated*, *nonliterate*, or *low-educated*, is used in academia to identify immigrant populations of K-12 learners arriving in English-speaking countries—such as the United States (Browder, 2018) and Canada (Montero et al., 2014)—with interrupted

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or limited schooling. In addition to SLIFE, other terms can be found in publications to describe learners with limited or interrupted formal schooling. Additional terms and phrases found in the literature today include students with interrupted formal education (SIFE) (Custodio & O’Loughlin, 2017), students with interrupted or minimal education (Salva & Matis, 2017), binate language learners (Pentón Herrera & Duany, 2016), newcomers with limited formal schooling (Custodio, 2011), and students with interrupted schooling (Matthews, 2008; Potochnick, 2018), to name a few.

SLIFE is a relatively small, but growing (DeCapua, 2019; Hos, 2016) population in U.S. classrooms and around the world. According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)’s latest report, an estimated 3.7 million refugee children are out of school around the world today (UNHCR, 2019a). Furthermore, the United States, Canada, and the United Kingdom were identified in 2018 as the three top countries of resettlement for refugees and asylum seekers, with Australia being seventh (UNHCR, 2019b). Considering that over 90% of refugees referred by the UNHCR resettle in English-dominant countries (Montero, 2019), giving attention to the SLIFE population in English teaching and learning environments is becoming increasingly necessary.

The exact number of SLIFE in English-speaking countries is neither current nor precise. For example, publications agree that the SLIFE population represents somewhere from 10% to 20% of newly arrived English learners (ELs) in the U.S. (Custodio & O’Loughlin, 2017; Hoover et al., 2016; Potochnick, 2018), but the specific percentage is not available. In Australia, data reported in 2005 revealed that approximately “6.9 per cent of the 46 821 ESL [English as a second language] secondary students started school...with minimal, severely interrupted or no previous formal schooling in any country” (Miller et al., 2005, p. 21). More recently, a study conducted by the Australian Institute of Family Studies in 2016 reported that “around 15% of adult respondents reported having never attended school, and a further 34% had fewer than 10 years of schooling” (Jenkinson et al., 2016, p. 3). On the other hand, in the United Kingdom (Williams, 2018; Young-Scholten, 2013) and Canada (MacNevin, 2012; Montero et al., 2014), SLIFE populations are recognized, but the government does not track specific national percentages.

In educational settings, the term SLIFE is used to describe learners who arrive in classrooms with at least two grade levels below their peers, with low or no print literacy in their native language (L1) and numeracy skills, and with critical social-emotional needs (Custodio & O’Loughlin, 2017; DeCapua & Marshall, 2015). However, the reality is that SLIFE are far from uniform and should not be thought of as a one-size-fits-all population. As explained by Matthews (2008), these students come “from a wide range of national, cultural, linguistic, ethnic and racial backgrounds, [as well as] with different experiences of forced migration” (p. 32). In addition, within the SLIFE population we can find refugees, asylum seekers, immigrants¹ fleeing countries undergoing civil, military, and political unrest, and

¹In this chapter, I use and understand these terms the same way they are defined by Amnesty International (n.d.). *Refugees* are people fleeing their countries due to serious human rights violations and persecutions. *Asylum seekers* are people who left their country and are seeking protection from persecution or serious human rights violations in another country. *Immigrants*, sometimes referred to as *migrants*, are people staying outside their country of origin.

individuals who chose not to participate in formal education (Custodio, 2011), to name a few. Other specific cases where students can become part of the SLIFE population is during their migration journey. A recent example of immigrants experiencing forced interrupted formal education was when Central American children were detained indefinitely in U.S. detention centers without access to formal schooling.

Presently, schools in English-speaking countries face many challenges to provide adequate support to ELs with limited or interrupted formal education. Some of the challenges include lack of administrative understanding of the population, adequate instructional materials to support their cognitive and linguistic mismatch, and sound approaches to assess their cultural and linguistic needs and development. In a previous publication, I shared my experiences of how administrative personnel, including school counselors, are often unaware of the linguistic and academic needs of SLIFE, which results in assigning classes that are not adequate for the SLIFE' academic and linguistic levels (see Pentón Herrera, 2018a). Similarly, English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) and mainstream educators often lack adequate training to support, teach, and evaluate literacy development effectively for this unique group of learners (Custodio, 2011; Custodio & O'Loughlin, 2017; Montero, 2019). Furthermore, it is even more difficult to adequately support middle and high school SLIFE because there is a lack of textbooks and materials specifically designed for adolescents. Finally, "there is a lack of in-depth proven research on what works with SLIFE" (Custodio & O'Loughlin, 2017, p. 11) and how to assess them properly (Gonzalez, 2018).

The purpose of this chapter is to provide an overview about the current state of SLIFE in primary and secondary classrooms (K-12) in the United States, Australia, Canada, and the United Kingdom, as these four nations represent the largest recipients of refugees resettling in English-speaking nations (Montero, 2019; UNHCR, 2019b). Thus, the remainder of the chapter has been divided into three sections: (1) in-depth overview of SLIFE in primary and secondary U.S. classrooms, (2) overview of SLIFE in primary and secondary classrooms in Australia, Canada, and the United Kingdom, and (3) six significant challenges SLIFE encounter at primary and secondary levels in these four English-speaking countries. My vision with this chapter is to bring clarity to the current state and reality of the K-12 SLIFE population in these four English-speaking nations. Furthermore, it is my hope that ESOL and mainstream educators will use the information shared in this text to educate themselves and help our SLIFE not only survive, but thrive in our schools.

SLIFE in Primary and Secondary U.S. Classrooms

The topic of ELs with limited or interrupted formal education in U.S. schools was cursorily introduced in academia in the late 1980s and early 1990s due to the high dropout rates (Chang, 1990; Tellez & Walker de Felix, 1993). During that period, civil wars, political instability, and economic hardships caused a big wave of

migration from Central American countries to the United States (Lesser & Batalova, 2017). Thus, many immigrant children arriving in U.S. classrooms had gaps in formal education or had never attended a formal school environment. In the hopes of supporting ELs and preventing dropout rates from increasing, innovative programs, such as the newcomer program (see Chang, 1990; Gonzalez, 1992), were introduced. However, these pioneer publications reflect the infancy stage of the literature surrounding ELs with limited or interrupted formal education at the time. The first in-depth manuscript about SLIFE was published in 1998 (see Mace-Matluck et al., 1998), and one of its major contributions to the field was making the distinction between the SLIFE population—identified as immigrants with limited schooling—and their non-SLIFE counterparts.

In the present day, newcomers with limited or interrupted formal education remain one of the most vulnerable populations within ESOL, facing enormous disadvantages (Short et al., 2018) and representing “the neediest of our English learners” (Custodio & O’Loughlin, 2017, p. 1). The SLIFE population is highly heterogeneous and has widely varied educational, socioeconomic, cultural, linguistic, and psychological backgrounds and experiences (DeCapua & Marshall, 2010). Presently, the highest percentage of ELs with limited or interrupted formal education in the United States are from Latin American countries, primarily Mexico, Central America, and the Caribbean. “Refugee children make up the second highest number, with students from Asia, Africa, and the Middle East” (Custodio & O’Loughlin, 2017, p. 2).

In the literature, SLIFE have been described as resilient (Montero, 2018; Pentón Herrera, 2021a), strongly motivated (Potochnick, 2018), and determined individuals with a drive to succeed (Custodio & O’Loughlin, 2017). Nonetheless, through no fault of their own, they tend to academically attain less (Potochnick, 2018) and are at a greater risk of dropping out of school than their non-SLIFE counterparts (DeCapua, 2016; DeCapua et al., 2007). For this reason, it is important for ESOL programs in K-12 to disaggregate available language proficiency and achievement data for SLIFE to better identify unmet needs and “develop solutions that will improve educational services and schooling conditions” (Short et al., 2018, p. 88) for this group of learners.

Presently, in the U.S. the term SLIFE continues to be used as an umbrella term denoting a population of students who may have never attended a formal school environment or have over 2 years of interrupted formal education (DeCapua, 2016). However, although this term is commonly used in the field of education, it is not accepted or considered ideal by all (DeCapua, 2019; DeCapua et al., 2020). For example, Browder (2019) explains his concern with using SLIFE as a construct to homogenize this group of ELs who are highly heterogeneous. In his argument, Browder (2019) advances the SLIFE conversation by questioning if the construct justifies the creation of new interventions for vulnerable students within the SLIFE continuum—such as SLIFE with special needs (see Pentón Herrera, 2021b)—or if it further stigmatizes this student population. Browder et al. venture to further explore the problematization and use of the SLIFE acronym in Chap. 2 of this book.

Primary School

For elementary-age ELs, arriving as a SLIFE means having extremely limited or no experience with formal schooling. As a result, these learners may have had limited to no instruction in reading and writing in their L1 and would have little or no understanding of sound-symbol correspondence. Basic activities and concepts learned in primary years such as learning to wait in line, taking turns, sitting down at a desk for long periods, using school instruments (i.e., holding a pencil and using scissors), raising their hands to ask a question, using the American-style lavatory, eating at a school cafeteria, and working cooperatively with classmates, might need to be taught upon their arrival (Custodio & O’Loughlin, 2017; also see Cruzado-Guerrero & Martínez-Alba, this book, Chap. 13). Albeit academic challenges increase with grade levels, Potochnick (2018) found that “for primary-grade-age arrivals with interrupted schooling, the results suggest that by 10th grade, they may be able to catch up academically in some areas” (p. 855).

Secondary School

The consequences of interrupted or limited formal education are greater for adolescent newcomers. Secondary schools place great demands on students in the content areas, which adolescent ELs with limited or interrupted formal education have minimal time to meet. “By the time they acquire enough English to handle instruction in content areas, they are significantly behind their mainstream peers in content knowledge” (Hos, 2016, p. 481). In addition, even the implementation of evidence-based literacy programs may prove ineffective or harmful for this particular student population (Gonzalez, 2018). As a result, high school SLIFE become heavily influenced by a tangle of pre-migration and post-migration challenges (i.e., personal, print literacy, economic, social, emotional, psychological, etc.) they are often unable to overcome within the shortened time available and, after 10th grade, are highly likely to drop out of school or not enroll at all (Potochnick, 2018). Adolescent SLIFE remain, without a doubt, one of the most vulnerable and disadvantaged populations within the context of English language teaching (ELT) in the United States and around the world.

SLIFE in Primary and Secondary Classrooms in Australia, Canada, and the United Kingdom

Different from the United States, the majority of the SLIFE population arriving in Australia, Canada, and the United Kingdom consists of resettled asylum seekers and refugees from all over the world. In these three countries, the SLIFE population

is acknowledged, but there are currently no available numbers found at the national level for students with limited schooling served in K-12 schools. In this section, I provide an overview of the latest data and publications available about SLIFE in primary and secondary classrooms in Australia, Canada, and the United Kingdom.

Australia

The latest available scholarship from Australia shows the growing interest in literacy education for refugee SLIFE—sometimes referred to as low-literate refugees (see Dooley & Thangaperumal, 2011; Maadad, 2020; Windle & Miller, 2012). According to these works, “Australian schools have received growing numbers of students with disrupted schooling arriving from places of conflict and persecution” (Windle & Miller, 2012, p. 317), including Afghanistan, Burma/Myanmar, Iraq, and Syria (Watkins et al., 2019). The increase in migrant and refugee populations has expanded through inner regional areas, but a significant number has also relocated in rural and remote areas of the country (Davie, 2015). Due to the growth of this student population, some school districts are incorporating programs to support their refugee SLIFE. For example, the Victoria State Government began the Refugee Education Support Program (RESP) with the aim of having “a positive impact on the educational and wellbeing outcomes of young people from refugee backgrounds in Victoria schools” (Victoria State Government, 2018, para. 8). In this initiative, the Victoria State Government provides whole school support programs that focus on improving refugee students’ print literacy as well as mental, emotional, and social wellbeing (Victoria State Government, 2018). Similarly, the University of South Australia recently began a study titled *Refugee Student Resilience Study* where the aim is to “develop an understanding of the complex and intersecting ways in which school and policy environments shape refugee student resilience” (Refugee Student Resilience Study, 2019, para. 3).

Available publications have primarily focused on the literacy education of SLIFE in secondary schools (Dooley & Thangaperumal, 2011; Maadad, 2020; Windle & Miller, 2012) as well as refugees transitioning into higher education (Naidoo et al., 2018). Furthermore, most attention has been given to social-emotional needs (Refugee Student Resilience Study, 2019) and to foundational language support. As a result, there is currently a need for research and works delving into the topic of providing refugees with adequate support in other in-school requirements (Maadad, 2020), such as mainstream, content classes. A recent study sheds some light on school leaders’ thoughts about their responsibility for educating refugees which includes engaging in caring, nurturing practices to support the whole child (Wilkinson & Kaukko, 2020). There is still much work to be done in Australia on how to best support refugee SLIFE. Nonetheless, the latest works disseminate hope for this student population in K-12 Australian classrooms.

Canada

Historically, Canada has welcomed refugees and asylum seekers escaping persecution, war, eviction, and statelessness (Government of Canada, 2017). Since 2000, Canada has primarily welcomed Karen, Bhutanese, and Iraqi refugees. In addition, since 2015, Canada has welcomed 40,081 Syrian refugees “through government-assisted, privately sponsored, or blended visa office-referred programs” (Montero, 2019, p. 317). Although no specific data is available at the national level for refugees and asylum seekers arriving in K-12 schools, many children can be considered potential SLIFE as they had limited access to formal education prior to resettling. Due to SLIFE’ growing presence, the Ontario Ministry of Education created a document for teachers to support ELs with limited prior schooling (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2008). This document shares practical tips that teachers from 3rd to 12th grade supporting SLIFE can use in their learning environments. It is important to note that this document approaches the topic of SLIFE from an asset-based mindset stating that “every English language learner with limited prior schooling can learn and be successful when given appropriate supports and opportunities” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2008, p. 5).

Publications from the Ontario Ministry of Education share some insights about the steps the nation is taking to support the SLIFE population in primary and secondary schools. For example, Ontario’s ESOL curriculum is divided into two programs: (1) English as a second language (ESL) and (2) English literacy development (ELD). The ESL program was designed for students learning English as a second language who “have had educational opportunities to develop age-appropriate first-language literacy skills” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2008, p. 7). Conversely, the ELD program was designed for students whose “access to education has been limited, and they had limited opportunity to develop language and literacy skills in any language” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2008, p. 7). The ELD program focuses primarily on differentiated literacy instruction (see Ledger & Montero, this book, Chap. 9). As such, ELD teachers are expected to implement teaching strategies that acknowledge student identity into their learning while providing modification and accommodations as needed (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2014).

In addition to individualized and modified instruction, publications about SLIFE in Canada have recently focused on humanizing literacy instruction (Montero, 2019), considering this population’s psychological and social-emotional needs (MacNevin, 2012). These works explain the effects of psychosocial needs on SLIFE’ academic development and success (Montero et al., 2014). For this reason, researchers encourage teachers to facilitate learning environments that provide intensive psychosocial supports (Montero et al., 2014). Montero (2018) proposes the integration of “educational practice through a trauma-informed lens [to] help educators understand their role in supporting refugee newcomers’ recovery from trauma within their academic mission” (p. 93). In this study, Montero (2018) found that refugees, when supported, have the ability and resilience to self-heal from

trauma. This study's findings paint a positive picture for the future of K-12 refugee SLIFE in Canada and around the world.

The United Kingdom

At the time this chapter was being written, the United Kingdom (England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland) was undergoing a difficult social and political situation where the nation recently separated from the European Union (EU). According to recent news, immigration is the single strongest issue driving Brits to support leaving the EU (Garrett, 2019). In fact, over half of the United Kingdom (Garrett, 2019) voted to leave the EU inspired by their feelings of anti-immigration, making this event a refugee crisis that is reframing immigration within the United Kingdom context. This event is crucial because it affects refugee visibility, education, and support in the United Kingdom's K-12 schools. For example, recent statistics show "in primary schools, 33.5% of pupils of school age are of minority ethnic origins" (Department for Education, 2019, p. 8). On the other hand, "in secondary schools, 31.3% of pupils are minority ethnic origins" (Department for Education, 2019, p. 8). These statistics, however, do not reflect the number of refugees or SLIFE being served in K-12 schools presently.

Visibility is currently one of the most significant challenges facing refugee SLIFE in the United Kingdom's primary and secondary schools. Available publications from the United Kingdom about the SLIFE population have mainly focused on adults, referred to as low-educated immigrant adults, low-educated adults, or literacy education and second language learning for adults (LESLLA) learners (see Haznedar et al., 2018; Young-Scholten, 2013, 2015; Young-Scholten & Limon, 2015). The focus on SLIFE who are adult immigrants might be connected to the statistics showing that most reported asylum seekers and refugees arriving in the United Kingdom are over 18 years of age (Cerna, 2019; also see Harris, this book, Chap. 4). Much work remains to be done in the United Kingdom today for primary and secondary SLIFE; specifically, as it pertains to supporting their print literacy, language learning, and social-emotional needs.

Challenges SLIFE Encounter in Primary and Secondary Classrooms

Many factors affect the academic success of SLIFE in K-12 schools in the United States, Australia, Canada, and the United Kingdom. However, in this section, I address six important elements that need to be taken into consideration to improve the academic opportunities of SLIFE and promote school success. The six factors shared in this section are (1) identification, (2) age of arrival, (3) social-emotional

needs and integration, (4), language and literacy learning, (5) assessments, and (6) parental support and involvement.

Identification

Currently available data on “immigrant children with interrupted schooling is largely out of date or limited in its relevance, particularly on a national scale” (Potochnick, 2018, p. 860). This is partly due to a lack of identification among schools, counties, and states and/or inconsistencies in how they are identified and tracked. According to DeCapua (2016), educational entities are having a difficult time identifying what exactly characterizes this diverse sub-group of ELs “who range along a continuum from those who have never had any schooling and arrive pre-literate, to those who may be two or three years behind their grade-level peers in content knowledge and literacy skills” (p. 225). Furthermore, many school districts do not keep track of how much formal education ELs have received in their native countries and their level of L1 print literacy (Custodio & O’Loughlin, 2017). As a result, it is not uncommon for Latinx SLIFE, for example, to be assigned to Spanish classes² that are above their print literacy level at the time of enrollment without taking into consideration anything beyond the students’ country of origin (Pentón Herrera, 2018a).

Lack of effective processes and programs to identify SLIFE is harmful for this student population and impedes the implementation of appropriate, wrap-around support. Similarly, when school administrators, leaders, and counselors have insufficient knowledge about the academic needs of SLIFE, this student population suffers because they are (mis)placed in classes above their current academic abilities and with educators who have not been properly trained to teach them initial print literacy (Montero, 2019). In addition, SLIFE “bring a variety of learning needs to the classroom which directly impact reading and which may be misinterpreted as indicators of a learning disability” (Hoover et al., 2016, p. 12). Thus, it is necessary for educational institutions to collect as much data as possible about each English learner and share all available information with school leaders and classroom teachers. To provide the best instructional program for each child, schools must assess the students’ print literacy in their L1—which may be an Indigenous or a less-commonly spoken language—and ask for a history of formal education in the students’ native country. For more information about how school leaders and teachers can advocate for SLIFE, see Linville and Pentón Herrera, this book, Chap. 5.

²In the United States, *Spanish* is commonly offered as a class that fulfills the world/foreign language graduation requirements at the middle and high school levels.

Age of Arrival

The age of arrival is an important factor for the future success of SLIFE. As explained by Potochnick (2018), SLIFE who arrive in primary schools have a better chance of reaching academic and language-level literacy skills by high school. Nonetheless, SLIFE in elementary schools still have difficulty understanding and getting used to classroom routines (DeCapua & Marshall, 2011) as well as adjusting to the academic rigor of a formal educational system (Birman & Tran, 2017). Common knowledge and practices, such as understanding classroom expectations, eating in a lunchroom or cafeteria, and working in groups might be new and challenging concepts for elementary SLIFE (Custodio & O’Loughlin, 2017).

Adolescent SLIFE, on the other hand, have an even more difficult time adjusting to a formal educational setting, reaching expected content and linguistic levels, and staying in school. The majority of the SLIFE population in the U.S. are currently enrolled in middle and high school (Salva & Matis, 2017). However, most secondary teachers are unprepared to teach the foundational print literacy skills needed by adolescent SLIFE arriving in middle and high school classrooms (Montero, 2019; Montero et al., 2014; Pentón Herrera, 2017). As a result, SLIFE in secondary schools become trapped in a cycle where they are expected to expeditiously learn content without receiving explicit instruction on how to read and write. Being trapped in this cycle where much is expected but little appropriate support is offered, paired with the urgency to learn applicable English skills they can use in their real-life settings, reaching the age limit for free access to public education, and economic responsibilities make the estimated dropout rate of high school SLIFE an estimated 70% (Fry, 2005) to 75% (Hoover et al., 2016). For more information about how to support adolescent SLIFE in high school, see Marrero Colón and Désir, this book, Chap. 10.

Social-Emotional Needs and Integration

The majority of the SLIFE population arriving in the United States, Australia, Canada, and the United Kingdom has been raised in difficult environments or refugee camps. According to Hoover et al. (2016) many SLIFE “have experienced emotional trauma and therefore have social-emotional developmental needs in addition to literacy” (p. 12). In fact, many refugee children arrive in our classrooms suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)—whether they and their family know it or not—and, in many cases, PTSD follows them into adulthood (Flaitz, 2018). These social-emotional challenges and the isolation often experienced during their formative years can affect adolescent SLIFE’ ability to integrate into a formal educational environment and interact with their teachers and classmates (Flaitz, 2018; Pentón Herrera, 2018b).

Social-emotional needs and challenges with integration to a formal classroom environment—particularly during the adolescent years—are two difficult barriers that SLIFE need to overcome before or while learning print literacy. It is important for schools and educational personnel to recognize that, without addressing social-emotional needs and potential psychological barriers for integration, SLIFE will have a difficult time feeling safe in the new environment. In addition, without appropriate support, SLIFE will not have the opportunity to make meaningful social connections with their peers and school staff, which are vital emotional anchors during the process of integration (Pentón Herrera, 2018b). Lastly, it is important to recognize that teaching print literacy without addressing trauma, social-emotional needs, and psychological barriers might result in frustration, disconnect, and apathy with a potential end result of school truancy leading to school dropout (Pentón Herrera, 2018b). For more information about how to understand and incorporate social-emotional learning to support English learners, see Montero and Al Zouhour (this book, Chap. 5), O’Loughlin and Custodio (2020), Pentón Herrera (2020), and Pentón Herrera and Martínez-Alba (2021).

Language and Literacy Learning

Teaching language and literacy to SLIFE needs to be a gradual process where educators first learn about the students’ cultural, linguistic, and academic background to better devise a realistic course of action. Teaching content to SLIFE immediately, without getting to know the students’ background and needs, will only delay their language and literacy learning experiences. Instead, educators should begin by teaching and developing existing foundational print (Montero et al., 2014) and numeracy skills. In this process, L1 may be used as support and/or may be strengthened while acquiring English skills (Custodio & O’Loughlin, 2017; Pentón Herrera & Duany, 2016). If possible, during the first year, SLIFE should be immersed in a sheltered, day-long newcomer program where foundational print literacy learning is the focus. For SLIFE, “literacy instruction must be systematic, explicit, and targeted at diagnosed needs... What gets taught is what is needed by the students” (Custodio, 2011, p. 39). As learners become more comfortable, educators can start integrating standards taking into consideration that “each lesson should include vocabulary, essential background knowledge, and some type of activity to encourage use of the language to manipulate content” (Custodio & O’Loughlin, 2017, p. 98). For more information about effective practices to teach language and literacy to SLIFE in K-12, see Marrero Colón and Désir, this book, Chap. 10; Cruzado-Guerrero and Martínez-Alba, this book, Chap. 13; and Aker et al., this book, Chap. 14.

Assessments

The topic of assessment as a challenge experienced by SLIFE in primary and secondary schools is perplexing and multifaceted. The first challenge encountered by SLIFE is not being evaluated for L1 print literacy upon their arrival at school. As pointed out by McKay and Weinstein-Shr (1993), “most national surveys and assessments fail to report on L1 literacy because they collect no data on it” (p. 403). This statement was true at the end of the twentieth century, and it continues to be true today in K-12 schools around the United States as well as in Australia, Canada, and the United Kingdom. The problem with ignoring L1 print literacy when evaluating newcomers’ English skills upon their arrival is that instruction automatically shifts into a deficit-based model where the primary goal becomes filling the English proficiency gap without acknowledging the ELs’ prior knowledge. In addition, ignoring L1 print literacy and prior formal schooling sets unrealistic expectations for newcomers who, then, are placed in ESOL classes and are expected to progress at a pace that is both frustrating and unsupportive.

Another assessment challenge SLIFE face in primary and secondary classrooms is understanding types and expectations of assessments. SLIFE arriving at U.S. schools, for example, often come from refugee camps or from countries where they have not experienced or been exposed to standardized testing. Thus, common assessment practices in the U.S. such as using scantron answer forms, answering multiple-choice questions, or taking computer-based tests might result in confusing and anxiety-inducing experiences for these learners. For this reason, it is particularly important for SLIFE to be explicitly taught and receive ample practice with these forms of assessments before being required to complete one. I recommend teachers see Salva and Matis (2017) and Calderón and Slakk (2019) for a few personalized ideas that may also help SLIFE become acquainted with assessments. Furthermore, an important consideration to have is that informal and formative assessments might prove more effective methods of evaluation for this student population.

Lastly, as explained by Custodio and O’Loughlin (2017) an additional issue facing “newcomers with limited formal schooling involve the increasingly rigorous state standards that are in place across the country and the assessment-driven atmosphere of most school districts” (p. 10). Many SLIFE, especially students in secondary schools, are expected to take standardized state-mandated tests only an academic year after they have arrived in their schools. As a high school ESOL teacher myself, I saw firsthand the effect standardized testing had on my SLIFE population. At my high school, many SLIFE arrived in 9th grade as newcomers, and after 4–5 years, they were promoted to 12th grade. As seniors (or 12th-graders), my SLIFE had taken standardized state-mandated tests at least two times by then but, often, were not able to pass them. Because passing standardized state-mandated tests is a high school graduation requirement in the state of Maryland, U.S., (see Salmon, 2018), SLIFE who could not pass the tests were then required to find alternative routes to meet this requirement. Often, my SLIFE were required to complete long and

complicated academic projects, known as Bridge Projects (Salmon, 2018), as alternatives. During my tenure as a high school ESOL teacher, I saw a few SLIFE complete the Bridge Projects with teacher support and were able to graduate, but I also saw many others who felt demotivated and quit school during their senior year. Without a doubt, standardized state-mandated tests continue to be one of the most difficult barriers for SLIFE in K-12 learning environments.

Parental Involvement and Support

SLIFE, as a richly diverse and heterogeneous population, arrive at our schools with different life stories and living arrangements. Some SLIFE have lost family members due to war conflicts in their native countries; some arrive with their family having lived in refugee camps for many years; some have been living their entire lives with grandparents, relatives, or friends of relatives in their countries of origin and have not seen their parents since they were children; while others might have been born in the United States and were forced to move back to their parents' country of origin because their parents were deported. Through the many life stories we learn from the SLIFE population, one pattern identified is that parents and guardians have not been involved in their children's schooling directly for many (or most) years. This means that parents and guardians might not know how to support their students at home (i.e., knowing what school supplies to buy, enforcing study habits, helping them in school projects, etc.), might not know how the formal school system works, might be afraid to approach the school for different reasons, or might also be adults with limited or interrupted formal education who are not able to support print literacy learning or enforce academic discipline in their households.

For these reasons, it is necessary for teachers and administrators to understand that the parents and guardians of SLIFE might not readily know what to expect from their children's schools or school staff. In addition, they might have different cultural and religious expectations about their children's education or their role (as parents/guardians) in their children's academic development. As an example, in some Latinx cultures, parents often demonstrate support to their children by making sure they are raised well and cared for at home, as opposed to the parents attending school functions (Khalifa et al., 2016). The disconnect between Latinx parents cherished cultural practices and U.S. schools' expectations of parental involvement is the reason why "school personnel often criticize the poor involvement of [Latinx] parents" (Khalifa et al., 2016, p. 1292). Thus, it is important for schools to directly talk to the parents and guardians of SLIFE to learn from their lived experiences, living arrangements, cultural and religious practices, as well as to share school expectations for parental/guardian involvement. In addition, it is important for schools to recognize that SLIFE often come from low-income households that rarely allow for the acquisition of tools such as computers, laptops, printers, and other expensive equipment (Flaitz, 2018) often recommended (or required) in schools today.

Final Thoughts

The population of SLIFE is unique because they often need personal, social-emotional, and instructional services that their non-SLIFE counterparts might not need to succeed in school. At the same time, they also represent the most vulnerable group of students within the EL population and without the support of their teachers, administrators, and school staff, they are sure to fail. This statement is certainly true for vulnerable populations within the SLIFE umbrella—such as SLIFE with special education needs (see Pentón Herrera, 2021b) and queer SLIFE youth, see Trinh, this book, Chap. 12—who remain nearly invisible, seldom addressed in academic publications, and underserved in our classrooms. Thus, as educators supporting SLIFE, it is important to know and understand that the first step to help our neediest students (Custodio & O’Loughlin, 2017) involves changing our own attitude, awareness, and perspective by focusing on what they bring rather than on what they lack (i.e., asset-based perspective). As their educators and advocates, we have to be prepared to change our mindset, recognize the need “to take a highly individualized approach to instruction” (Cohan & Honigsfeld, 2017, p. 173), and be patient. The learning process for SLIFE might be slow at first—especially for special education and adolescent populations. However, with confidence, support, and individualized instructional practices, students will stay in school, progress, and succeed.

Reflection Questions

1. How does age affect the development and success of SLIFE in their classrooms?
2. Why is it important for SLIFE to be properly identified and assessed during the registration/intake process?
3. As a stakeholder at your level (administrator, teacher, etc.), how can you and your leadership support SLIFE at your institution? In your response, take into consideration their personal, social, emotional, and academic needs as well as their living arrangements.

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Chapter 4

Adult English Learners with Limited or Interrupted Formal Education in Diverse Learning Settings



Jamie Harris

Abstract This chapter provides an overview of adult students with limited or interrupted formal education (SLIFE) who have immigrated to English-speaking countries and participate in literacy education and second language learning for adults (LESLLA) programs. In order to provide an accurate perspective of LESLLA students, this chapter will (1) examine characteristics of the adult learner population, (2) provide an overview of diverse learning settings for LESLLA learners in the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom, and Australia, (3) outline four main challenges LESLLA students face in various learning settings, and (4) summarize contributions these adult learners provide to the communities in which they live. As an important clarification, the main purpose of this chapter is to highlight the current state and reality of adult SLIFE in the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom, and Australia.

Keywords Adult education · ELs · ESL · ESOL · Refugees · Asylees · LESLLA · SLIFE

Introduction

The world has witnessed historic migration trends in recent years (International Organization for Migration, 2019a). In 2019 alone, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) documented a total of 86,531,669 refugees and asylees globally (2020). According to the United Nations (2019), in 2019, approximately 51 million international migrants moved to the United States, ten million moved to the United Kingdom, eight million moved to Canada, and eight million moved to Australia. This equates to a total of 77 million migrants who relocated to countries with high populations of English speakers (Migration Policy

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Institute, 2020; United Nations, 2019). According to the data, migrants come from all over the globe, and one-third of countries from which migrants originate come from ten countries, some of which includes India, Mexico, China, the Russian Federation, and the Syrian Arab Republic. According to a 2018 survey, 122 languages were spoken by a subgroup of migrants (LESLLA, n.d.-a), which reflects the linguistic diversity of the migrant population (DeCapua & Marshall, 2010).

There are different ways international migrants enter English-speaking countries, and the method of entry affects the rights they receive within the host nation, to include access to education. Some migrants have an endorsement of a country that authorizes them to enter, leave, or transit freely, and they have rights to educational resources within that nation. Other migrants are forced to leave their native countries due to “external aggression, occupation, foreign domination or events seriously disturbing public order in either part or the whole of his country of origin or nationality” (International Organization for Migration, 2019b, p. 172), which can mean limited access to educational resources. Lastly, some migrants enter a country but do not have the endorsement to enter or live within the nation sometimes resulting in limited access to educational resources.

Despite the manner of entry into an English-speaking country, international migrants arrive with diverse education backgrounds. Some have high-achieving educational backgrounds with postgraduate degrees. Other migrants are individuals with emergent first language literacy and limited formal education—these individuals are called students with limited or interrupted formal education, also known as SLIFE (DeCapua & Marshall, 2010). In the adult education context, these individuals are more frequently referred to as “literacy education and second language learning adults” (LESLLA) (LESLLA, n.d.-b, para. 1). The term LESLLA¹ was adopted in 2005 as Low Educated Second Language and Literacy Acquisition for Adults. The corresponding expansion was changed to *literacy education and second language learning adults* in 2017 (LESLLA, n.d.-b). The LESLLA organization defines LESLLA individuals as “adults with little or no home language schooling or literacy, who are now learning to read and write for the first time in a new language” (LESLLA, n.d.-b, para. 1).

LESLLA learners represent a rich diversity of gender, race, age, and they have reasons for having limited formal educational experiences. According to UNESCO (2020a), there are “773 million adults—two-thirds of whom are women—[who] remain illiterate” (para. 1). The data represented accounts for adults from 15 to 74 years of age (UNESCO, 2020b). Limited schooling and emerging literacy can be the result of these adults residing in war-torn countries, living in rural areas with limited resources, dwelling in regions of famine which can result in forced migration, or living in refugee camps where educational resources do not exist (Bigelow & Schwarz, 2010). Limited schooling can also be the result of cultural norms and gender role expectations (Pew Research Center, 2016; UNESCO, 2019).

¹For the purpose of this chapter, the terms *adult SLIFE* and *LESLLA student/learner* will be used interchangeably.

This chapter provides an overview of adult students with limited or interrupted formal education who have immigrated to English-speaking countries and participate in LESLLA educational programs. The English-speaking countries that welcome the highest numbers of refugees (United Nations, 2019), the United States of America, the United Kingdom, Canada, and Australia, will be of focus in this chapter. In order to provide an accurate perspective of LESLLA students, this chapter will (1) examine characteristics of the LESLLA learner population, (2) provide an overview of diverse learning settings for LESLLA in the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom, and Australia, (3) outline four main challenges LESLLA students face in various learning settings, and (4) summarize contributions these adult learners provide to the communities in which they live. As an important clarification, the main purpose of this chapter is to highlight the current state and reality of LESLLA students in the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom, and Australia.

Examination of Adult Learner Population Characteristics

Understanding Literacy

Initially, the term literacy exclusively referred to the reading of print (Snyder, 1993). In recent years, however, the definition of literacy expanded to include functional literacy. UNESCO (2020c) defines functional literacy as

the capacity of a person to engage in all those activities in which literacy is required for effective function of his or her group and community and also for enabling him or her to continue to use reading, writing and calculation for his or her own and the community's development. (para. 1)

As technologies emerged and access increased, the definition of literacy continued to expand to include multiliteracies. Some of these types of literacies are media, digital, and information literacy. In order for adults to function well in a global society, development of literacy in multiple areas is vital. While all areas of literacy are beneficial to adult learners, this chapter, however, will focus on print and language literacy.

Literacy for LESLLA learners can be defined in three ways: pre-literate, non-literate, and semi-literate (Bigelow & Swartz, 2010). Pre-literate learners are a part of a community or culture that only uses oral language; this culture does not use print or is in the very early state of using print in its language. A non-literate adult is part of a community or culture with print literacy, but the individual did not learn print literacy skills and only relies on oral language. Thirdly, a semi-literate learner is one who knows that print has meaning, but he or she cannot interpret the meaning of print (Bigelow & Schwarz, 2010). In this chapter, LESLLA learners will refer to adults who are pre-literate, non-literate, and semi-literate.

Reasons for Lower Literacy

LESLLA learners migrate from many different countries that have different languages, cultures, government structures, and backgrounds. The backgrounds and experiences of these adults lend to the reasons why they arrive in their host countries with varying levels of literacy. Some adult learners “emigrate from politically unstable and/or impoverished regions of the world to highly literate post-industrialized societies” (Young-Scholten, 2015, p. 1). This means that some of these adults have experienced war, oppression, and trauma (Hickey & Choi, 2015). Additionally, poverty can be a reason that individuals have emergent or limited levels of literacy because families cannot afford the cost of books and education, so they are unable to send their children to school. Furthermore, because of poverty, parents may be unable to participate in formal school and provide literacy training to their children. Other migrants come from cultures that provide fewer rights to specific genders and do not prioritize the education of females (Bigelow & Schwarz, 2010).

Strengths

International migrants are resilient, resourceful, and experienced. They possess unique perspectives and experiences that can benefit those who are in their communities. According to Astles (2016), migrants contribute to communities in three ways: sociocultural, civic-political, and economic. Sociocultural contributions focus on cultural factors, civic-political contributions include volunteering and engaging with governments, and economic contributions relate to economic growth through entrepreneurship and employment (Astles, 2016). Instructors of English learners (ELs) teach hard-working students who provide new, insightful perspectives, beliefs, attitudes, and relationships. Consequently, it is imperative that classrooms are seen by these hard-working individuals as a place where they can contribute freely without reprimand or being made to feel inferior.

Culture and Characteristics of LESLLA

Culture, defined by Merriam-Webster (n.d.) as “the customary beliefs, social forms, and material traits of a racial, religious, or social group” has various aspects. Examining LESLLA students through the lens of culture helps us examine these adult learners’ characteristics. While we address LESLLA learners through the lens of culture, it is important to note that these generalizations do not capture every individual but serve to provide a general picture of this student population in countries that differ from their native experience. One aspect of culture is context, which is often measured as high or low. Low-context cultures are cultures characterized by individualism, independence, and directness (Banner, 2016; Oxford & Gkonou,

2018; Storti, 2011; Westbrook, 2014). Individualism is a result of individuals within the culture having fewer ingroups and requiring more explicit and direct communication. Countries that are often associated with low-context cultures are highly literate post-industrialized societies. In contrast, high-context cultures that value relationships and community are collectivistic (DeCapua & Marshall, 2010; Oxford & Gkonou, 2018; Westbrook, 2014), and have many ingroups, which results in more implicit and less direct communication (Banner, 2016; Oxford & Gkonou, 2018). Almost three-quarters of the world's cultures are collectivistic, or high-context (DeCapua & Marshall, 2011).

Adult SLIFE immigrating to the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada, and Australia often move from collectivist (high-context) to individualistic (low-context) cultures, and they experience the challenges associated with this abrupt change of practices and values. The United States, the United Kingdom, Canada, and Australia are individualistic, high-context countries (Banner, 2016; Fantino, 2006). This means that the cultures, expectations, and norms of most residents differ drastically from the cultures of those who migrate to these English-speaking nations. With such a high percentage of the world's population being high-context, the migration of individuals from a high-context to low-context culture has educational implications.

Overview of Diverse Learning Settings for LESLLA

Low-context formal educational systems like those of the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada, and Australia vary in structure but not in cultural expectations. According to Westbrook (2014), individuals who move from a high-context to a low-context educational system can experience many misunderstandings. High-context individuals use nonverbal cues, informal communication, and silence due to their desire to foster harmony and success among the collective whole. Therefore, students coming from high-context cultures may expect a network of support to help them navigate the educational system and learning. However, students and instructors from low-context environments may not readily provide that support because individualism is the norm for low-context cultures and, as a result, it is expected for students to locate materials and information individually. The understanding of culture and communication is vital for all programs that provide learning settings for LESLLA learners.

The United States

In the United States, the learning setting for LESLLA learners is in adult education programming that operates in places of employment, community-based organizations, refugee and asylee resettlement organizations, community colleges, universities, religious organizations, or public schools (Workforce Innovation and

Opportunity Act of 2014, sec. 203). In some organizations, programming is funded under Title II of the Adult Education and Family Literacy Act (AEFLA) which includes English as a Second Language (ESL) instruction. In 2018, \$617 billion was allocated to AEFLA funding (United States Department of Education, 2018). LESLLA students are often placed in these ESL courses through standardized and/or formative assessments focused on one or two language domains in order to identify the learner's level of English proficiency. Learning settings funded by AEFLA that deliver these programs follow specific standards and assessments in order to achieve outcomes that increase or decrease funding. Other learning settings in the United States may not be funded in the same capacity thereby allowing for less rigorous assessments and differing student outcomes.

Classes are traditionally offered face-to-face and can range from a daily schedule to evening classes offered multiple times a week. These classes can be multi-leveled or leveled according to assessment outcomes. Recently, more educational technology has been developed for adult learners resulting in blended and distance learning enhancements to adult education programming. LESLLA learners are taught along with other ELs, but sometimes they have the opportunity to enroll in literacy councils or other community-based organizations that provide services such as one-on-one tutoring.

Canada

As residents or protected persons, in Canada, adults are eligible for government-funded Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada (LINC) classes in English or French—the two official languages of the country. To be eligible for these classes, a Canadian Language Benchmarks (CLB) assessment must be taken to determine the level. When a resident or protected person receives a “CLB level 4 or higher in speaking and listening, [he or she] can use that certificate as proof for meeting the citizenship language requirement” (Government of Canada, 2018, para. 3). LINC classes are offered at various types of organizations. Also, in the 1960s, “the Newcomers Language/Orientation Classes (NLOC) allowed some creative community-based adult educators the opportunity to offer mother-tongue literacy to immigrants who were not literate in their mother tongue and, it was argued, could not easily learn English as a second language” (Shohet, 2001, p. 193). These classes teaching mother-tongue literacy offer various scheduling options and are located in communities where LESLLA learners reside.

The United Kingdom

England

The United Kingdom is composed of England, Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland. According to European Literacy Policy Network (ELINET) report (2016), adult literacy and English can be provided discreetly, offered as part of vocational education and training, or tailored for job seekers receiving government benefits. These services fit under further education and skills, workplace learning, or community learning. Workplace learning includes basic skills, and community learning includes informal classes for disadvantaged groups. According to the ELINET report, adult literacy fits under functional skills in English, which replaced the existing adult English that was a part of the Skills for Life strategy and equips learners to use English in everyday situations. Adult education is monitored by the organization Ofsted, which provides and monitors standards for adult literacy providers. Ofsted's standards range from *Entry 1* to *Level 2*. The standards for Entry 1 states at the onset that learners who lack language proficiency in their native language or are emergent English learners will require extended time and explicit instruction to reach Entry 1 standards (Excellence Gateway, 2015). The lack of standards for emergent learners, which informs instruction, shows a lack of structural instructor and LESLLA student support in England.

Scotland

In Scotland, LESLLA learners are often educated through policies and programming available to refugees. The New Scots refugee integration strategy 2018–2022 (Local Government and Communities Directorate, 2018) focuses on the following seven themes: needs of asylum seekers, employability and welfare rights, housing, education, language, health and wellbeing, and communities/culture and social connections. Adult literacy, within the education theme, is overseen by the Community Learning and Development (CLD) education sector. CLD provides initial assessments of adult English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) learners, and the levels determined by the assessment are correlated with the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) and Scottish Qualifications Authority, both “derived from the Common European Framework” (The Scottish Government, 2010, p. 2). Based on this assessment outcomes and correlations, adult ESOL learners are placed in courses based in local CLD providers, but the standards are not provided to support LESLLA instruction.

Wales

As in England and Scotland, adult ESOL instruction is provided for immigrants in Wales. The REACH+ project is funded by the government of Wales and operated by Cardiff and Vale College. REACH+ centers provide central points of contact for learners wanting to learn English (Adult Learning Wales, 2020). When a learner contacts the REACH+ center, he or she is given a date and time to go to the center to complete an assessment. When the learner goes to his or her scheduled appointment, he or she is assessed by a listening and speaking skills interview and then is given a reading and writing task. Based on the assessment, learners are informed of the appropriate course and location to take the course (Reach+, 2020a). The courses are provided with a variety of schedule options, “short and long course, full-time, part-time, morning, daytime and evening courses” (REACH+, 2020b, para. 1). REACH+ also provides additional supports such as employment, housing, education to refugees (REACH+, 2020a).

Ireland

The *Learning for Life: White Paper on Adult Education* was published by Ireland’s Department of Education and Science in 2000. The document outlined that “a Refugee Language Support Unit has been established in Trinity College to coordinate language assessment and tuition on a national basis” (p. 172) for refugees. The policies of Ireland before 2000 did not provide instruction for asylees, so the white paper proposed new policy guidelines, such as “free access to adult literacy, English language and mother culture supports” (Department of Education and Science, 2000, p. 173) for asylees eligible to work. The Refugee Language Support Unit, a two-year pilot program, was then merged into Integrate Ireland Language and Training (IILT) (WRC Social and Economic Consultants, 2006), which included English instruction for asylees. Initially, the IILT provided language instruction based on the Common European Framework in 14 centers around Ireland. However, due to the number of “learners [presenting] themselves for classes in IILT with no literacy skills or very low levels of literacy in their mother tongue” (Gilmartin, 2008, p. 99), *English with Literacy* classes were offered to meet the needs of these students (Gilmartin, 2008). In 2008, The Irish Times reported the closure of the IILT (Mac Cormaic, 2008) and, since then, no additional updates have been provided regarding this programming.

Australia

Australia offers learning settings and makes little distinction based on the manner of migrant entry. The Australian government focuses on five settlement obligations of which education and training are included. The Immigration (Education) Act of

1971 (2011) and the Immigration (Education) Regulations 2018 (2018) states that 510 hours of English instruction must be provided for free, and this occurs through the Adult Migrant English Programme (AMEP). Additionally, commonwealth and/or state programs offer 800 more hours in which online learning at a distance, tutors, and classes are available. Australia also offers training for incumbent workers via the Settlement Language Pathways to Employment and Training (SLPET) program. This training and the Workplace English Language and Literacy (WELL) program provide hours of training and funding to employers who will train their employees (Fozdar & Banki, 2017).

Assessment Considerations

In all the learning settings of the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada, and Australia, assessment is needed to identify the proficiency level of learners. This presents a challenge as the resources to assess adult learners with no or emerging English proficiency is limited or nonexistent. In the United States, the Comprehensive Adult Student Assessment Systems (CASAS) is a beginning literacy reading assessment that, while useful for beginners, is not effective for learners who are unfamiliar with traditional forms of evaluations such as multiple choice (Gonzalves, 2017). On the other hand, the Basic English Skills Test (BEST) and the Tests of Adult Basic Education Complete Language Assessment System-English (TABE CLAS-E), both created for ELs, do not include evaluations as basic as the CASAS beginning literacy reading assessment.

In the United Kingdom, the commonly used tool for identifying language proficiency is the Common European Framework Reference (CEFR) or derivatives of CEFR. The recent update to the CEFR included a new level, Pre-A1. This level is described as a level where individuals can recognize common, everyday words and numbers (Council of Europe, 2018). The challenge created by this level is that it does not take into consideration the different writing systems of learners' native language or educational backgrounds. This can result in a classroom filled with a mixture of individuals who are highly schooled along with individuals who received limited formal education in their native countries (Sunderland & Moon, 2008); this type of educational setting does not accommodate learners with limited or interrupted schooling. It is also important to note that instructors who go through formal training are taught according to the CEFR thereby lacking necessary preparation to explicitly instruct LESLLA learners.

In Canada, migrants are assessed by certified assessors with the Canadian Language Benchmarks Assessment (CLBA). The Canadian Language Benchmarks are linked to the CLBA assessment and provide English proficiency descriptors for reading, writing, speaking, and listening, based on the outcome of the assessment (Fantino, 2006). In light of the LESLLA population, the Canadian Language Benchmarks stated that "none of the levels can be interpreted as 'illiterate'. Most individuals at the lowest level (1) are usually able to carry out reading tasks of some

kind” (Stewart et al., 2004, p. 6). Similarly, The Adult Migrant English Programme of Australia uses a scale, the International Second Language Proficiency Ratings Scale, for placement that is not inclusive of pre-literate learners (Moore, 2007). Assessments that are not inclusive of adults with emergent or little literacy fails to identify the areas of proficiency and document the achievements of these learners over time. This is a concern for funding and outcomes of programs in all English-speaking countries.

Main Challenges LESLLA Students Face in Various Learning Settings

Learning a language is a challenging task due to complexities found within its four domains of reading, writing, listening, and speaking. Teaching reading and writing to an adult is also difficult because of the cognitive, sociocultural, and critical aspects of literacy (Colliander et al., 2018). Additionally, adult migrants with emergent literacy can come to the classroom with additional barriers such as poverty, lack of familial bonds, loss of identity, and lack of social capital.² LESLLA instructors, therefore, have the challenge of addressing language learning and the different aspects of literacy while sometimes also mentoring, counseling, and guiding their students. The following section of the chapter explores how culture and roles, classroom curriculum, language transfer, and social capital affect LESLLA students in learning settings.

Cultural and Instructional Differences

The diversity of learning settings can be overwhelming for LESLLA students not only because of the many, varied options available (i.e., community college, non-profit organizations, etc.) but also due to the differences in instructional praxis between low-context and high-context cultures. The educational implications can often be unidentified because cultural context can be so embedded in educational systems (DeCapua & Marshall, 2011). Instructors are often not equipped to effectively teach LESLLA students as their needs differ from learners with formal educational backgrounds. “Many L2 [second language] teacher education programs focus on techniques and strategies that have been successful with literate learners and those with formal education experience” (Farrelly, 2013, p. 26). Some of these learning techniques and strategies are beneficial for LESLLA learners, but not all effectively provide emergent learners with what is needed for language acquisition at their level (Farrelly, 2013).

²Also known as networks of relationships.

Despite the cultural context of a country, educational programs should provide instruction that adopts the five assumptions of the adult learning theory, or andragogy. The five assumptions highlight the importance of allowing learners to direct their own learning, to utilize their prior knowledge, to leverage their readiness to learn, to apply learning immediately, and to foster their internal motivation while learning (Knowles, 1984). The application of these assumptions can support adult SLIFE who need English proficiency to function more effectively in society. However, if these assumptions are not adopted, learning can become a major challenge for LESLLA students. LESLLA students learn best within context; thus, the adjustment to learning outside of context or learning content theoretically instead of learning information to apply right away, which can occur in low-context cultures, can be extremely difficult (DeCapua & Marshall, 2010).

An example of learning in context can be found in apprenticeships or vocational education, which are a contextualized learning environment. In United States' adult education programs, there has been the recent development of Integrated English Literacy and Civics Education and Integrated Education and Training (IELCE/IET) programming funded by the Office of Career, Technical, and Adult Education (OCTAE). This program, specifically created for ELs, aims “to prepare adults who are English language learners for, and place such adults in, unsubsidized employment in in-demand industries and occupations that lead to economic self-sufficiency” (Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act of 2014, sec. 243, p. 200). Unfortunately, because of the literacy demands of apprenticeships (i.e., adults are expected to have some print literacy before joining the program) and IETs, LESLLA learners are often not given the opportunity to participate in these programs; although, the contextualization would create a beneficial learning environment for them.

Classroom Curriculum

Learning to read can be complex and requires specific areas of focus for improvement: alphabets, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension (Curtis & Kruidenier, 2005). Because English is an alphabetic language, the understanding that letters represent sounds is necessary. Phonemic awareness, which is the knowledge of phonemes, and word analysis are necessary to accomplish this understanding. Non-readers are not aware of phonemes and emerging readers have difficulty manipulating phonemes; therefore, including explicit alphabets increases reading achievement (Kruidenier, 2002). Additionally, fluency is an important component of learning to read. Fluency is demonstrated when a reader can read at a good pace while using rhythm, intonation, and expression. Curtis and Kruidenier (2005) confirm that “individuals who are learning to read often are not fluent” (p. 6). Vocabulary and comprehension also impact reading, but the need for alphabets and fluency instruction are foundational for an emergent reader. LESLLA learners require explicit instruction (see Friedman et al., this book, Chap. 16) because “phonemic awareness

emerges only with instruction in alphabetic script reading or phonemic awareness training” (Young-Scholten & Strom, 2006, p. 49).

Time and Language Transfer

Progress in acquiring literacy and language may also be slower for LESLLA learners (Bigelow & Schwarz, 2010; Kurvers, 2015). Slower acquisition can occur because learning a second language is greatly impacted by the knowledge of a first language. At the same time, the skills gained from learning in the first language can be transferred by the learner to the second language (Goldenberg & Coleman, 2010; Schwartz et al., 2012). According to Goldenberg and Coleman (2010), “one language contributes to a general proficiency (in reading or in other academic domains) that then helps boost learning and achievement” (p. 31). For language learners who received formal instruction in their first language, decoding and comprehension can support decoding and comprehension, to some degree, in the second, third, and additional languages (Young-Scholten & Strom, 2006). LESLLA students do not get to have the advantage of language transfer (Young-Scholten & Strom, 2006) because they received little to no formal instruction in their first language. Lack of formal education presents a challenge for adult learners as they are introduced to an academic context, which may or may not provide foundational skills and knowledge to support academic success and language acquisition.

Social Capital

Connections and relationships are vital. For LESLLA students, “the cornerstone of learning is the unity of people and knowledge” (DeCapua & Marshall, 2010, p. 165). Learning settings that focus on retention can meet LESLLA students’ need for communal learning. According to the New England Adult Learner Persistence Project (Nash & Kallenbach, 2005), a sense of belonging and community in adult education classes can increase student persistence and “build trust and camaraderie” (p. 66) (see also Kidwell, this book, Chap. 19). If, however, connection and relationship is not a high priority for English learning classrooms, LESLLA students may struggle to learn because the primary need for connection, trust, and relationship is not met.

Another need of LESLLA students, because of their lack of social capital, is additional support and resources for life outside of the classroom. LESLLA learners may struggle with trauma, isolation, discrimination, and post-traumatic stress disorder (Fazel et al., 2005; Lonn & Dantzler, 2017). According to Kirmayer et al. (2011),

Specific challenges in migrant mental health include communication difficulties because of language and cultural differences; the effect of cultural shaping of symptoms and illness behaviour on diagnosis, coping and treatment; differences in family structure and process affecting adaptation, acculturation and intergenerational conflict; and aspects of acceptance by the receiving society that affect employment, social status and integration. (p. E959)

Resources such as childcare, counseling services, and employment services can help reduce barriers. If educational programs do not provide these accommodations or connect learners to these resources, barriers can remain in the learner’s life and impede participation and/or progress in learning (see Kidwell, this book, Chap. 19). Oxford and Gkonou (2018) provide three competencies necessary for learning another language and culture: cognitive flexibility, ethnocultural empathy, and intercultural understanding. “Within 21-st century classrooms, there is indeed an urgent need for language learners first to just fit in interculturally in order to be able to learn” (Oxford & Gkonou, 2018, p. 408). Additionally, Lonn and Dantzler (2017) state that “successful resettlement depends on more than just the ingenuity, resilience, and personal characteristics of the refugees, but also on the response of the host countries and the resources available to newcomers” (pp. 61–62). Lonn and Dantzler (2017) also state that Maslow’s hierarchy of needs is relevant to providing a framework in assisting migrants.

Contributions LESLLA Learners Provide to Their Communities

Although LESLLA learners experience many challenges in the countries to which they migrate, these adults benefit the communities in which they live. Their life experiences provide unique perspectives, bring diversity and culture, and introduce new languages. Migrants have *funds of knowledge* that can contribute to their communities and classrooms; funds of knowledge is a concept that takes a positive approach and highlights the assets ELs have and focuses on the capabilities of learners based on their “histories, identities, attitudes and values” (Larrotta & Serrano, 2012, p. 318). Communities can benefit from the unique knowledge of LESLLA that comes from their cultures, which can include cuisine, art, languages, specialized vocational skills, and perspectives. Additionally, since LESLLA range in age, they bring prior knowledge and experiences to learning such as “linguistic knowledge, life skills, coping strategies, and resilience” (Bigelow & Schwarz, 2010, p. 3).

Conclusion

This chapter has provided an overview of the educational experiences and needs of LESLLA students in the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada, and Australia. More specifically, examination of learner characteristics, exploration of learning settings, identification outlining challenges that adult SLIFE face in educational settings, and a summary of the contributions these individuals make to the communities in which they live have informed the overview. This overview has clarified the need for additional supports and resources to encourage the success of LESLLA

learners. Although these students experience challenges in migration, differing educational settings, and integration into the different culture to which they reside, they also provide economic, sociocultural, and civic contributions to communities and societies.

Because there are LESLLA learners around the globe, the adult SLIFE population cannot be ignored. Fortunately, there is an increasing amount of research that shows how educators, policymakers, and support services can effectively support these adults (e.g., Kidwell, this book, Chap. 19; Lypka, 2019; Pentón Herrera, 2020). Organizations, such as LESLLA, provide guidance for working with these adults; this organization provides professional development, research, and resources to support educators working with LESLLA learners. To provide the educational opportunities that LESLLA learners need, instructors need professional development to effectively address the specific educational needs of this population to include the explicit areas of reading, cultural responsiveness, scaffolding, and sufficient time. Organizations that provide instruction to this population should partner with other resources to support the social, economic, and psychological needs of adult SLIFE to increase their social capital and allow for success in multiple areas of their lives. Communities in which LESLLA reside can benefit from the funds of knowledge, diversity, and experiences that LESLLA learners have and should build positive relationships that offer respect and dignity to these individuals. More work needs to be done, but taking these initial steps can begin a progressive path to honoring the diversity of the LESLLA student population.

Reflection Questions

1. What improvement to policies can support the progression of LESLLA learners in your community and/or society?
2. What are best practices for teaching LESLLA learners and how can you evaluate the success of these practices?
3. What organizations in your community provide holistic support (i.e., literacy, wellness, health, employment, etc.) to LESLLA students? Make a list for these organizations and the services they provide for the adult SLIFE population.

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Chapter 5

Why, How, and Where to Advocate for English Learners with Limited or Interrupted Formal Education



Heather A. Linville and Luis Javier Pentón Herrera 

Abstract This chapter addresses students with limited or interrupted formal education (SLIFE) as a global concern (Custodio B, O’Loughlin JB, Students with interrupted formal education: bridging where they are and what they need. Corwin, 2017; UNESCO, Global education monitoring report 2019: Migration, displacement and education—building bridges, not walls. UNESCO, 2018) resulting from national and international migration of children and families around the globe, whose limited access to education may be the result of war, religious beliefs, poverty, or other reasons. We explore the importance of advocacy for this population, the exact numbers of which are unknown. SLIFE have different, and greater, academic needs, tend to suffer from stress-related issues, and have a much greater risk of dropping out of school. Educators must take into account these and other needs and differences, including the potential for interconnecting concerns from special education, immigration status, and intergenerational trauma, to advocate effectively for SLIFE. In this chapter, we identify opportunities for and practices of advocacy to improve the education of SLIFE of all ages, in K-12 and adult learning contexts. We emphasize advocacy for equitable access to literacy instruction and mother tongue literacy in particular. We also provide resources and suggestions to improve school environments for SLIFE. We envision that this chapter will be essential to all stakeholders who wish to effectively advocate for and support the access, acquisition, and development of literacy for SLIFE in any learning environment.

Keywords Advocacy · SLIFE · EL · Migration · Social justice

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Why Advocacy for SLIFE?

Advocacy is an important part of what we do as teachers for many students; those who are marginalized for their race or ethnicity, those who have, or are perceived to have, lower socioeconomic status, and those who are culturally or linguistically different from the majority of students in their schools. In the case of students with limited or interrupted formal education (SLIFE), these multiple factors can converge, with the added burden of limited prior experience with education, making advocacy even more important for this group of students. Advocacy is often associated with action and change, although various definitions exist depending on the context and field where advocacy is applied (Daly, 2011). In the context of SLIFE education, advocacy is particularly important in order to prioritize organized efforts which are focused on meeting the urgent educational needs of these learners. In this chapter, we refer to advocacy as a series of actions intended to influence decision-making and gather support in favor of SLIFE. More specifically, advocacy for SLIFE focuses on combining the voices of key stakeholders concerned with the wellbeing and success of SLIFE to create different layers of organized actions leading to the social-educational inclusion, support, and eventual self-sufficiency of these learners (Thomas, 2016).

The plight of SLIFE is a global concern. Numerous children around the globe continue to have limited access to education because of poverty, conflict, religious beliefs, gender discrimination, geographic location, or global occurrences, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, just to name a few. Global migration can be both a result of and a reason, in some cases, for this lack of access to education. There are currently about 272 million migrants in the world (UN, 2019), of which 26 million are refugees (UNHCR, 2020). Migrants who end up in refugee camps or other temporary settlements for an extended period time and those who continue to live as nomads often may have limited or no schooling options, perpetuating SLIFE' concerns in a vicious cycle (Brock, 2011).

The United Nations' Millennium Development Goal #2 (UN, n.d.-a) focused on achieving full access to education for all primary school-aged children around the world. This goal was partially achieved as the percentage of children enrolled in primary schools increased from 83% in 2000 to 91% in 2015. Yet 64 million, or 9% of all children, continue to be out of school today (UNESCO, 2018). Sustainable Development Goal #4, quality education, continues to address this issue, focusing more on reaching literacy and numeracy for all children. Estimates are that 617 million children and adolescents worldwide lack minimum proficiency in reading and mathematics (UN, n.d.-b).

The international community and UNESCO continue to fight for full educational access for all children, noting that, "Migrants, refugees and internally displaced people are some of the most vulnerable people in the world...Yet they are often outright denied entry into the schools that provide them with a safe haven and the promise of a better future" (UNESCO, 2018, p. iii). In the United States, *Plyler v. Doe* (1982) ensures that all children have the right to an education, regardless of

their immigration status. However, not all children around the world have the same protection; requiring citizenship or legal residency for enrollment is the most common form of exclusion for migrant children (UNESCO, 2018). Even where all children have the right to education, the “provision of education in itself is not sufficient. The school environment needs to adapt to and support the specific needs of those on the move” (p. iii). It is at this point that we address this chapter on advocacy for SLIFE. Opening our schools for SLIFE is not enough; we need to actively advocate for full inclusion and high-quality education, including literacy, for these students.

Education is a human right (Article 26 of the Declaration of Human Rights, United Nations, 1948) and “has massive potential for good” (Brock, 2011, p. 1), yet it is a “global concern” (p. 18) when its quality, access, and goals are in doubt. Everyone needs an education to understand their world, and literacy, in the mother tongue and second language for migrants, is essential to that understanding. Interrupted schooling can disrupt lives. SLIFE tend to suffer from higher drop-out rates (Freeman et al., 2002; Potochnick, 2018), dealing with past trauma and current stress issues, or “critical social and emotional needs” (Custodio & O’Loughlin, 2017, p. 1), and the lack of academic and literacy skills, even in their first language (L1) (Custodio & O’Loughlin, 2017). Migrant children may have significant, specialized forms of literacy skills appropriate for non-traditional education contexts (i.e. religious institutions, communal spaces, etc.) which are not perceived as valid or useful in traditional formal education environments (García-Sánchez, 2019; Pacheco & Morales, 2019). As educators, we must advocate to ensure SLIFE have full access to education. This includes advocacy for programs that contribute to the strong development of literacy skills.

SLIFE and Advocacy for Literacy

In recent times, “theories of literacy have evolved from those focused solely on changes in individuals to more complex views encompassing the broader social contexts (the ‘literate environment’ and the ‘literate society’)” (UNESCO, 2005, p. 147). As such, literacy has now become associated with societal transformation (Freire, 1970), equitable accessibility and opportunity, and inclusion for all. This means that literacy is no longer considered an individual asset; it is now considered a social responsibility and a human right (Keefe & Copeland, 2011). The understanding of literacy as a societal phenomenon opens new doors for groups of peoples and communities who have been historically marginalized and oppressed, such as SLIFE. Societies are now tasked with equipping all of their citizens with the necessary abilities (reading, writing, numeracy, technology, etc.) they will need to effectively function in their communities and around the world. Furthermore, the increasing reality of globalization makes literacy an even more immediate world-wide issue.

Certainly, equitable literacy access for SLIFE in K-12 and adult learning environments is increasingly vital in highly-literate nations across the world. Nonetheless,

English-speaking nations welcoming immigrants with limited schooling, such as the United States, Canada, the UK, and Australia, continue to struggle with providing adequate assessments to evaluate SLIFE' literacy in their first language upon arrival. Similarly, nation-wide inaccuracies concerning the actual percentage of SLIFE makes it increasingly difficult to plan organized, well-prepared advocacy efforts. Remaining an invisible, misrepresented population in society and in educational settings places SLIFE at the margins of learning due to academic oppression and inaccessibility. As such, print literacy, English, and rigid educational systems become additional barriers for the academic, social, and economic advancement of SLIFE in their new society.

We, then, reach the question, *how do we advocate for SLIFE?* To answer this question, we must first agree to take action by creating spaces where transformative learning can occur; this means, focusing on advocating for SLIFE in our classrooms first. The concept of transformative learning, sometimes addressed as transformative literacy or transformative education, goes beyond traditional schooling methods of filling empty minds with preselected information—also known as the banking model of education (Freire, 1970). Transformative education involves a never-ending process of reflection that uses information to analyze reality, employs learning to stimulate curiosity and empower learners, emphasizes equality of all human beings, and recognizes the principles and values of diversity in all of its forms (Berhard, 2004). In theory, transformative learning translates into all educators approaching learners' realities with an asset, rather than a deficit, mindset. Educators must have a positive vision of what SLIFE and other struggling students can accomplish with adequate support instead of focusing on what they lack or how behind they are in comparison with their non-SLIFE peers. In practice, transformative learning begins when educators create spaces for SLIFE to explore how they learn best and use their abilities to shape meaningful learning; learning that applies to their immediate context and contributes to their academic, social, and linguistic growth.

In the K-12 and adult learning environments, transformational learning entails diversifying instruction, assessments, and participation. SLIFE tend to become frustrated in classrooms where print-driven learning is enforced and tests and activities are tailored for the non-SLIFE majority (DeCapua et al., 2020). In transformative learning environments, educators learn about their SLIFE and use the abilities they already bring as funds of knowledge (Moll et al., 1992) to acclimatize them into the classroom and ease them into the process of print literacy and English language learning. This means other forms of literacy, such as storytelling, arts, and the elaboration of crafts can be initially used to involve SLIFE and validate their knowledge. For adolescent and adult SLIFE, however, instruction should focus on supporting the skills they identify as more pressing or necessary to their realities (Custodio & O'Loughlin, 2017). For example, an adult father attending an evening English as a second language (ESL) program might be more interested in learning how to express certain messages or ideas in English for his work, than learning how to conjugate the verb *to be*. Our recommendation is to listen to your students and allow them to

share with you what information they need to learn first to function in their social circle (work, community, etc.).

How to Advocate for SLIFE

Keeping in mind the need to advocate for access to high-quality, literacy-focused education for SLIFE, in this section, we recommend a five-step advocacy process as proposed by Linville and Whiting (2020). This five-step framework for advocacy is described below.

Step 1—Noticing: The first step to advocacy is to become aware of a problem. In our experience, problems affecting SLIFE often surface through personable, sustained communication with students and parents/guardians.

- *Example:* You learn from a newcomer placed in an advanced level ESL class that they were not performing as expected with reading and writing and were unhappy with the grade they received. Through conversations with the student and their parents, you determine that the student is SLIFE and that their needs are not being met by the instructor of that class, who also happens to be the ESL department chair.

Step 2—Determining action: When an issue is identified, advocates must then decide on a course of action to solve the problem. To determine the course of action, advocates need to first evaluate the many factors involved in their current situation, such as institutional hierarchy, politics, stakeholders, and the advocate's own position in their organization. In addition, we need to take into account best teaching practices, student services available (such as mental and emotional health services), and other resources available.

- *Example:* Taking into account the fact that the student is enrolled in the department chair's class, you determine the best course of action is to advocate to have the student moved to two of your classes, the newcomer class and the literacy-focused class, where you can individualize instruction for this student.

Step 3—Building alliances: After evaluating all of the factors involved in the advocacy efforts, advocates must rally support. Effective advocates develop and maintain stable, strong collegial and professional relationships with community members, local organizations, and stakeholders inside and outside the school system. At this step, reach out to allies (co-advocates) and explore opportunities for support for your advocacy action.

- *Example:* You reach out to the paraprofessional and the school counselor, your co-advocates from previous situations, to garner support to change the student's schedule.

Step 4—Gathering information: After establishing strong alliances in favor of your advocacy efforts, advocates must then thoroughly assess potential risks associated with taking strategic actions. At this step, advocates must build their knowledge about the case at hand and collect as much evidence/materials as possible to strengthen their action plan. Importantly, during this step, advocates must remember to maintain a diplomatic and strategic mindset to avoid any potential friction within existing and hierarchical structures in their organization.

- *Example:* Knowing that you may be going against the wishes of the ESL department chair, you reach out to the parents with your proposed plan. You also review best practices for SLIFE students to support your case.

Step 5—Taking strategic action: Equipped with co-advocates, knowledge, and appropriate evidence/materials, the advocate is now ready to take strategic action for their students.

- *Example:* You call a meeting with the ESL department, including your co-advocates, and the parents of the SLIFE student, and propose your plan. You succeed and the student’s schedule is changed!

Advocacy in Action for SLIFE

In this section, we describe real-life advocacy actions taken for SLIFE in three cases. While we do not explicate all five steps of the advocacy process described above, the process will be apparent as each case is explored. We hope each case will be an inspiration for advocacy in your teaching context.

Case #1: Maria¹ (as Told by Luis)

Maria arrived in our classroom in the United States from Guatemala in the month of December 2016. She was very timid, always smiling, and determined to learn English. My first interaction with Maria was when I introduced myself and explained to her our classroom routines and asked her to first write down in her notebook three sentences in Spanish about her. As soon as I saw her handwriting, I suspected she had interrupted education. I further asked her about her experience attending school in Guatemala, to which she replied that she had only attended four years of formal schooling (to 4th grade). Now, as an 18-year-old student placed in 9th grade, Maria was considerably behind her peers. In addition to being SLIFE, Maria stated “*Maestro, yo soy especial*” (“Teacher, I am special”). I soon learned, through our classroom interactions, that Maria had a slight processing delay.

¹All student names used in this chapter are pseudonyms.

During her first year at our school, Maria was enrolled in sheltered classes specifically designed for newcomer English learners (ELs), but she was also assigned two mainstream classes: art and Spanish. After noticing and learning about Maria's interrupted education, I decided to take action by first gathering the support of all the teachers assigned to Maria for that academic year. With the vision of augmenting Maria's chances of success, all of her teachers came together to talk about her instructional needs and how we could each help her. I was particularly interested in collaborating with the art and Spanish teachers because both of their classes are mainstream, and thus more difficult for newcomer ELs. At the end of our meeting, we came to the understanding that Maria needed instruction that was tailored to her specific needs—differentiation for Maria was a non-negotiable.

Learning that Maria had a challenging time understanding texts, the art teacher proposed the idea of placing emphasis on visualizing textual print. In highly-literate societies and in traditional/formal learning spaces, print literacy holds a central role in education because it is central to the standardization of language and curricula (Collins, 1995). The hyper-emphasis on print literacy in our schools contributes to the (il)legitimate recognition of literacy as a monolithic tradition of only reading and writing (Collins & Blot, 2003). The art teacher and I understood that print literacy across the curriculum (see Custodio, 2011) was important for Maria's success in our school. At the same time, we acknowledged that as an adolescent in high school, Maria had limited time to catch up to her classmates. As such, our plan of action needed to explore Maria's strengths, skills, and interests in an effort to better involve and motivate her. Without a doubt, Maria's engagement was necessary for effective literacy learning (Irving et al., 2007).

As we (Maria's teachers) created a plan of action to systematically develop her literacy skills in all of our classes, we approach the topic of literacy from a standpoint that

there is no universality to literacy; there are many literacies. To describe only one set of uses and functions (those associated with school or essayist literacy) is to miss the myriad other uses and functions found among the literacies of communities around the world. (Collins & Blot, 2003, p. 44)

As such, we proposed the incorporation of less-validated forms of literacy that were of interest to Maria such as storytelling, arts, and the elaboration of crafts as important practices for her literacy development. In addition, we decided to place an emphasis on the use of personal writing and reflections instead of more formal forms of writing (i.e. argumentative, compare and contrast) because the use of personal storytelling is empowering literacy practices that validate ELs' previous experiences (Peregoy & Boyle, 2017).

The art teacher explained that, in her classes, students were expected to write papers about famous artists, but this was not realistic for Maria yet. Instead, she decided to introduce Maria to the same artworks as her classmates (paintings, drawing, etc.), but Maria had the primary task of writing one to two sentences about each artwork—connecting visual elements with written text. At the same time, the art teacher started to incorporate assignments where she would give students a sentence



Fig. 5.1 Maria's artistic creation

or two (in English) and ask them to create a visual art piece of their choice bringing to life their understanding of what they had read. In Fig. 5.1 we can see elements of nature (tree, sun, the soil), as well as Guatemala's flag in the middle, and Guatemala's national flower *La Monja Blanca*, or The White Nun, on top of the flag. In this picture we see Maria's artistic response to the sentences, "*My country is the most beautiful country in the world. I know who I am because I know where I come from.*"

Simultaneously, Maria's Spanish teacher and I engaged in a year-long collaborative advocacy and planning effort where Maria was learning in her Spanish class the same information we were learning in English. The Spanish teacher and I placed a primary focus on writing and reading skills, as these two skills had been neglected for some time during Maria's educational journey. Also, we modified our assignments to match Maria's academic reality. For example, it was not realistic to expect Maria to write a paragraph in English a month after her arrival. Instead, while Maria's peers were writing full paragraphs, I individualized instruction focusing on writing a strong thesis statement (sentence) and increasing the amount of writing expected as she felt comfortable. The Spanish teacher did the same in her class. By the end of the school year, Maria was able to write a full paragraph in English and Spanish. This might not seem like a lot, but for a student who could not properly spell her name upon arrival, and who had a difficult time writing and reading in Spanish, her first language, writing a full paragraph in both languages was certainly an accomplishment.

Case #2: Ana (as Told by Heather)

Ana was a Mexican immigrant who had lived in the U.S. for about six years when I first met her at Wolfe Street Academy, an elementary school in Baltimore, Maryland, in 2013. Ana had attended school for two or three years as a child in Mexico but then had to drop out for

economic reasons. Her daughter attended 1st grade at Wolfe Street Academy, and Ana was motivated to attend the free Spanish literacy class offered there for parents and other adults in the community because of her daughter. Ana wanted to learn how to read and write in Spanish, and also learn English, so she could help her daughter learn and be a role model for her. She spoke Spanish and Mixtec, an Indigenous Mexican language, and had a steady job at a local restaurant.

Advocacy for Ana, and other adult SLIFE like her in the community surrounding the Wolfe Street Academy, began long before I volunteered there teaching Spanish literacy skills. Wolfe Street Academy is one of the many community schools in Baltimore City. These schools, created by a partnership between Baltimore City Public Schools and the City of Baltimore, are a part of the Coalition for Community Schools (<http://www.communityschools.org/>), an initiative from the Institute for Educational Leadership (<http://iel.org/>). Such schools work with community partners to support children, families, and communities, supported by an on-site Community School Coordinator.

Connie Phelps, the Community School Coordinator at Wolfe Street Academy, first did a needs assessment to identify potential problems and issues to focus on in her work at the school. In her advocacy-focused position, Connie purposefully began noticing potential challenges through conversations with teachers, staff, and administrators in the school, and with community members.

Connie heard from staff and others that family members of children in the school had difficulty communicating in English with their children's teachers and the school staff. In response, Connie initially organized free ESL classes to be offered at the school. However, it soon became clear that there was another, greater need. At least half of those who attended the ESL class were adult SLIFE (sometimes referred to in the literature as literacy education and second language learning for adult [LESLLA] learners; Vinogradov, 2013), and they struggled to learn English because of their developing L1 print literacy. Connie came to understand the need to know how to read and write in their L1 as a bigger issue than not speaking English because it affected adults socially and economically as they lack access to full participation in society (Gunn, 2020). Having developing print literacy skills in Spanish, in a city where many services were offered in Spanish, meant relying upon other parents, the interpreter or translator, or Connie to help them understand or fill out any forms for the school, not being able to open a bank account on their own, not being able to use email or other text-based services to communicate with family members locally or back home, and feeling a great sense of personal shame. Not being able to read or write put these adults in a compromised, dependent position in their new, highly-literate society.

After noticing that Spanish-language literacy was a more immediate issue than learning English, Connie determined a new advocacy action was needed. She sought support from co-advocates in the school and community and started a Spanish literacy program, open to any adult who had a child in the school or who lived in the community. Connie was able to apply for and obtain a grant to fund a teacher for the literacy program. When the grant funding period ended and was not renewed, Connie sought another type of support; I came in as a volunteer teacher and taught in the program for over a year.

The adult Spanish literacy class was offered once per week, in the afternoons while the children were in the after-school program. There were about seven students who attended class regularly during my time, and we experienced success. Ana, for one, attended class regularly, helped other students while there, completed her homework, and gained enough literacy skills to make a difference in her day-to-day life. Through the class, she developed the ability to communicate via text message in Spanish, an essential literacy skill that allowed her to more easily communicate with her husband while she was working, to coordinate the day-to-day logistics of raising children and sharing a household.

While this Spanish literacy class was itself an act of advocacy for SLIFE adults in the school and community, its success did not mean the end of advocacy. As a volunteer teacher, I struggled with the typical issues of such literacy classes; the slow gaining of skills which can leave learners unmotivated, space issues and constantly having to be flexible with what and where I was teaching (including in Connie's office once or twice, and in the school cafeteria!), as well as attendance issues for working adults. Such adult literacy programs are also very vulnerable; funding can come and go (Sheppard, 2019), as can volunteers like myself who might move away, as I did, or leave for other reasons. In fact, Wolfe Street Academy's Spanish literacy program no longer exists due to changes in priorities with the new Community School Coordinator.

Connie also notes that a literacy or ESL class is not a magic bullet (C. Phelps, personal communication, June 8, 2020). There are other issues that stem from migration, poverty, and a lack of schooling for SLIFE, including shame and discrimination, both present at Wolfe Street Academy. The ESL teachers and paraprofessionals worked to celebrate Mixtec and trilingualism in order to combat some of the discrimination the non-Spanish-speaking Hispanics experienced in the community and school. Additionally, a parent was identified to translate and interpret Spanish-Mixtec when needed.

The community school model itself is also a way to advocate for SLIFE in schools and communities. Baltimore City went from 20 such schools at the time I was volunteering to over 120 now. Connie stresses the importance of the purposefulness of the city and school district in making the decision to create community schools. This decision made the difference for Wolfe Street Academy, and would in any school, by instilling the ideology of the school as a community resource (C. Phelps, personal communication, June 8, 2020). The community surrounding Wolfe Street Academy now provides space and resources for after school activities, programming which serves almost 90% of the school children. That commitment makes a difference for all.

Case #3: Celina (as Told by Luis)

When Celina, a 16-year old student originally from Guatemala, started her first day of school, a school paraprofessional informed me, her ESL teacher, that Celina is a little hard of hearing. During the first week of school, I notice that, in addition to being hard of hearing, Celina does not know how to read or write and cannot understand Spanish very well. When I called Celina's mother, I learned Celina speaks Mam, a Mayan language, as her L1 and she has limited conversational skills in Spanish. In addition, Celina's mother shares that Celina only attended two years of formal schooling in Guatemala because Celina lived with her grandparents in a rural area where the school could not support her special needs.

Sometimes, advocacy efforts conducted by teachers yield positive results in favor of students. Sometimes, however, advocacy efforts do not. In Celina's particular case, I advocated for her right to appropriate special needs and literacy accommodations. To accomplish this, I noticed her needs, determined a plan of action, and used my alliances (i.e. other teachers and school personnel) to support my advocacy efforts. Nonetheless, these efforts did not yield positive results and, before the end of the year, Celina was withdrawn from school without ever receiving appropriate differentiation for her special and literacy needs beyond those provided by her teachers. Inspired by this reality, we (Heather and Luis) would like to analyze this real-life case to propose an appropriate plan of action for advocates who may find themselves in a similar scenario.

Many K-12 institutions welcoming SLIFE rarely collect information about newcomers' L1 literacy (Custodio & O'Loughlin, 2017), first language, or special education needs. As a result, teachers have to learn about their newcomers' backgrounds in their classrooms. In this particular scenario, we notice three important areas of need for Celina are: (1) special education services, (2) interrupted education, and (3) limited L1 literacy. We suggest the best approach to advocate for Celina's access to equitable literacy instruction is to first advocate for adequate services. More specifically, the ESL teacher (Luis) and the school leadership need to first explore Celina's areas of need and identify collaborators who could help in this process.

To address the first area, providing adequate special education services, the ESL teacher should follow school procedures to recommend an evaluation for special education services. Something to keep in mind is that the under-identification of special needs services among the EL population is not uncommon in K-12 schools (Pentón Herrera, 2021; Zacarian, 2011). For this reason, the ESL teacher should involve the administration and the counseling team in the recommendation process and explain Celina's needs from his perspective. An important aspect of this evaluation process is that the school is required by law to conduct the special education evaluation in Celina's L1 (Mam), not in Spanish (see Appendix for a non-exhaustive list of laws protecting vulnerable students). In this case, the school county's central office might need to be involved to successfully recruit a special needs evaluator who can speak Mam or a Mam translator who can be present in the special needs evaluation.

After the evaluation has been successfully conducted and an individualized education plan (IEP) has been created for Celina, the ESL teacher should now set L1

(Mam), second language (L2) (Spanish), and English literacy goals and objectives for Celina. To do this, the first step should be meeting with Celina's parents/guardians, the ESL department chair, and the counseling team to create a multi-layered approach to support Celina. An adequate literacy support program should include, at least, a differentiated school schedule. In this schedule, Celina could potentially be enrolled in a daily literacy course in addition to her ESL course to reinforce reading, writing, and language learning. For L1 literacy support, the ESL (or literacy) teacher can find literacy programs for Mam speakers (see Pentón Herrera, 2019), as well as in the Guatemala Department of Education website: <https://www.mineduc.gob.gt/digebi/publicaciones.html>, and use these resources in their literacy classes. For L2 literacy, the ESL teacher can collaborate with the Spanish teacher if one is available in the school (see Pentón Herrera & Duany, 2016, as an example). Furthermore, the administration, the special education team, and the ESL teacher are encouraged to advocate for the incorporation of transformational learning opportunities in all Celina's classes.

Conclusion

In each of these cases, we see how advocacy was needed to support and gain access to literacy and education for SLIFE. In the case of Maria, Luis co-advocated with the Spanish and art teachers in order to create an educational experience that drew upon Maria's funds of knowledge to develop her literacy skills. Maria experienced success due to her teachers' asset-based approach and joint efforts. In Ana's case, like many adult SLIFE, she needed to develop her L1 (Spanish) literacy skills first before focusing on her English-language skills. A community school with caring individuals who listened to what their community members needed offered Ana the first step towards reaching her educational goals. Finally, while Celina's case is not a success story, it offers ideas and guidance for educators who are working with students who, like Celina, have many educational challenges. We hope Celina's story will be an inspiration for others to carry on this work.

As we have seen, advocacy for SLIFE is essential to ensure their full access to all the opportunities available in highly-literate societies. SLIFE are often overlooked in conversations about ELs and how to best meet their linguistic needs. Unlike ELs who arrive with adequate formal schooling (Freeman et al., 2002), SLIFE are tasked with learning English, while also facing additional academic barriers linked to the strong emphasis placed on print literacy in our schools today. Migrants tend to have lower rates of access to education around the globe, which in turn leads to greater difficulty in learning and developing vital literacy skills when access to education becomes available. Education is a human right and we must continue to advocate for SLIFE' access to education that is appropriate for their needs and goals.

Reflection Questions

1. In what ways might advocacy for any learner be the same as advocacy for SLIFE? In what ways might it be different?
2. Recall a situation you have been in that required advocacy for SLIFE. How did you follow the steps of advocacy suggested in this chapter? What other steps did you follow? What would you do differently if you were in that situation again?
3. The authors suggest that advocacy for literacy is most important for SLIFE in schools in high-literacy societies. Do you agree or disagree? Why?
4. What is the legislation relevant to SLIFIE in the country in which you work? In your response, you might like to consider educational policies in general, education policies directed at learners of English, other policies with implications for SLIFE (for example, standardized literacy testing), and policies on inclusive education. Furthermore, what are the policies and requirements of the schools or school systems in which you work?

Appendices

Appendix A: U. S. Student Rights (English Version)

Name	What does it mean for you?	Find out more!
Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964	This law prohibits discrimination in schools (and other places) because of someone's race or where they are from. This means that you have the same right to education as any other person in the U.S.!	https://www.dol.gov/agencies/oasam/regulatory/statutes/title-vi-civil-rights-act-of-1964
Equal Educational Opportunities Act of 1974 (EEOA)	This law extends the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and also prohibits states from discriminating against students based on gender or for not speaking English. This means that schools must help you fully participate in school no matter how much English you speak!	https://www.history.com/this-day-in-history/equal-educational-opportunities-act-1974-signed-into-law-nixon
Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)	This law ensures that children with disabilities receive a free appropriate education, including special education and related services. This means that all children receive the education they need, regardless of ability!	https://sites.ed.gov/idea/

(continued)

Name	What does it mean for you?	Find out more!
Plyler v. Doe (1982)	The Supreme Court determined in <i>Plyler v. Doe</i> that states must give a free public education (K-12) to any student, regardless of their immigration status. This means that all students, including undocumented students, have the right to go to school, too!	https://www.americanimmigrationcouncil.org/research/plyler-v-doe-public-education-immigrant-students
Lau v. Nichols (1974)	In this case, the Supreme Court ruled unanimously that schools must work to overcome educational barriers faced by English learners. This means that an education in a language you do not understand is not enough!	https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lau_v._Nichols
Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) (2015)	This law governs how public schools educate children in the U.S. This law means more flexibility in how English learners are tested, but higher standards in making sure English learners have a high-quality education!	https://www.ed.gov/essa?src=rn
Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA)	This law protects the privacy of student educational records. This means that information about you as a student is not available to everyone!	https://www2.ed.gov/policy/gen/guid/fpco/ferpa/index.html
McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act	This law ensures education for homeless children and youth. This means that you have a right to schooling, transportation from and to school, and academic support even if you are homeless!	https://nche.ed.gov/mckinney-vento/
Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA)	This law, especially Title II, guides education for adults for basic skills, completing high school, and transitioning to college. This law also ensures English language classes for adults!	https://www.dol.gov/agencies/eta/wioa/

Appendix B: Derechos de los estudiantes en los Estados Unidos (Versión en español)

Nombre	¿Qué significa para ti?	¡Aprende más!
Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 Título VI de la Ley de Derechos Civiles de 1964	Esta ley prohíbe la discriminación en las escuelas (y otros lugares) debido a la raza de alguien o al lugar de origen. ¡Esto significa que usted tiene el mismo derecho a la educación que cualquier otra persona en los Estados Unidos!	https://www.justice.gov/crt/sus-derechos-segun-el-titulo-vi-de-la-ley-de-derechos-civiles-de-1964-title-vi-civil-rights-act
Equal Educational Opportunities Act of 1974 (EEOA) Ley de Igualdad de Oportunidades Educativas de 1974, (EEOA, por sus siglas en inglés)	Esta ley extiende la Ley de Derechos Civiles de 1964 y también prohíbe a los estados discriminar a los estudiantes por motivos de género o por no hablar inglés. ¡Esto significa que las escuelas tienen la responsabilidad de ayudarle a participar plenamente en la escuela sin importar cuánto inglés hable!	https://www.justice.gov/crt-espanol/eos/resumen
Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) Ley de Educación para Individuos con Discapacidades, (IDEA por sus siglas en inglés)	Esta ley garantiza que los niños con discapacidades reciban una educación adecuada y gratuita, incluida la educación especial y servicios relacionados a la misma. Esto significa que todos los niños reciben la educación que necesitan, independientemente de su capacidad.	https://fndusa.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/IDEA2_SP-copy.pdf
Plyler v. Doe (1982) Plyler contra Doe (1982)	La Corte Suprema determinó en <i>Plyler contra Doe</i> que los estados tienen la responsabilidad de brindar educación gratuita (de preescolar a 12 grado, K-12) a cualquier estudiante, independientemente de su estatus migratorio. ¡Esto significa que todos los estudiantes, incluyendo los estudiantes indocumentados, también tienen derecho a ir a la escuela!	https://www.americanimmigrationcouncil.org/research/plyler-v-doe-public-education-immigrant-students
Lau v. Nichols (1974) Lau contra Nichols (1974)	En este caso, la Corte Suprema dictaminó unánimemente que las escuelas tienen la responsabilidad de superar las barreras educativas que enfrentan los estudiantes que están aprendiendo inglés. ¡Esto significa que recibir educación en un idioma que el estudiante no comprende, no es suficiente! Las escuelas tienen la responsabilidad de ofrecer apoyo académico en el primer idioma del estudiante.	https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lau_v._Nichols

(continued)

Nombre	¿Qué significa para ti?	¡Aprende más!
<p>Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) (2015)</p> <p>Ley Cada Estudiante Triunfa (ESSA por sus siglas en inglés) (2015)</p>	<p>Esta ley rige cómo las escuelas públicas educan a los niños en los Estados Unidos. Esta ley significa que las escuelas tienen la responsabilidad de ser más flexibles en cómo evalúan a los estudiantes que están aprendiendo inglés. A su vez, las escuelas tienen también la responsabilidad de aplicar estándares más altos para garantizar que los estudiantes que están aprendiendo inglés tengan una educación de alta calidad.</p>	<p>https://www2.ed.gov/espanol/essa/index.html</p>
<p>Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA)</p> <p>Ley de Privacidad y Derechos Educativos de la Familia (FERPA, por sus siglas en inglés)</p>	<p>Esta ley protege la privacidad de todos los archivos y documentos educativos de los estudiantes. ¡Esto significa que la información de todos los estudiantes no está disponible para todos!</p>	<p>https://www.fbi.gov/file-repository/ferpa_spanish1.pdf</p>
<p>McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act</p> <p>Ley McKinney-Vento de asistencia a personas sin hogar</p>	<p>Esta ley garantiza la educación de los niños y jóvenes sin hogar. Esto significa que usted tiene derecho a la educación, al transporte desde y hacia la escuela, y recibir apoyo académico, todo gratis, incluso si no tiene hogar.</p>	<p>https://www.schools.nyc.gov/docs/default-source/default-document-library/mckinney-vento-homeless-assistance-act%2D%2Dspanish</p>
<p>Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA)</p> <p>Ley de Oportunidades y de Innovación de la Fuerza Laboral (WIOA, por sus siglas en inglés)</p>	<p>Esta ley, especialmente el Título II, orienta la educación para los adultos para que adquieran habilidades básicas, completen el doce grado (high school, en inglés) y puedan hacer la transición a la universidad. ¡Esta ley también garantiza clases de inglés para adultos!</p>	<p>https://edd.ca.gov/pdf/pub_ctr/de8714gs.pdf</p>

حقوق الطلاب في الولايات المتحدة الأمريكية (النسخة العربية) Appendix C:

الاسم	ماذا تعني بالنسبة لك؟	أكتشف المزيد
Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 الباب السادس من قانون الحقوق المدنية لعام ١٩٦٤	عند هذا القانون فالتفوق المدنية لعام ١٩٦٤ عند هذا القانون فالتفوق المدنية لعام ١٩٦٤	https://www.doi.gov/agencies/oasam/regulatory/statutes/title-vi-civil-rights-act-of-1964
Equal Educational Opportunities Act of 1974 (EEOA) قانون تكافؤ الفرص التعليمية لعام ١٩٦٤	عند هذا القانون فالتفوق المدنية لعام ١٩٦٤ عند هذا القانون فالتفوق المدنية لعام ١٩٦٤	https://www.history.com/this-day-in-history/equal-educational-opportunities-act-1974-signed-into-law-nixon
Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) قانون تعليم الأفراد ذوي الإحتياجات الخاصة	عند هذا القانون فالتفوق المدنية لعام ١٩٦٤ عند هذا القانون فالتفوق المدنية لعام ١٩٦٤	https://sites.ed.gov/idea/
Plyler v. Doe (1982) بلير ضد دو (١٩٨٢)	عند هذا القانون فالتفوق المدنية لعام ١٩٦٤ عند هذا القانون فالتفوق المدنية لعام ١٩٦٤	https://www.americanimmigrationcouncil.org/research/plyler-v-doe-public-education-immigrant-students
Lau v. Nichols (1974) لاو ضد نيكولز (١٩٧٤)	عند هذا القانون فالتفوق المدنية لعام ١٩٦٤ عند هذا القانون فالتفوق المدنية لعام ١٩٦٤	https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lau_v._Nichols
Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) (2015) قانون كل طالب ينجح (٢٠١٥)	عند هذا القانون فالتفوق المدنية لعام ١٩٦٤ عند هذا القانون فالتفوق المدنية لعام ١٩٦٤	https://www.ed.gov/essa?src=m
Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) قانون الخصوصية والحقوق التعليمية للأسرة	عند هذا القانون فالتفوق المدنية لعام ١٩٦٤ عند هذا القانون فالتفوق المدنية لعام ١٩٦٤	https://www2.ed.gov/policy/gen/guid/fpco/ferpa/index.html
McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act قانون مكينبي فينتو لمساعدة المشردين	عند هذا القانون فالتفوق المدنية لعام ١٩٦٤ عند هذا القانون فالتفوق المدنية لعام ١٩٦٤	https://nche.ed.gov/mckinney-vento/
Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) قانون الابتكار و الفرص في القوى العاملة	عند هذا القانون فالتفوق المدنية لعام ١٩٦٤ عند هذا القانون فالتفوق المدنية لعام ١٩٦٤	https://www.doi.gov/agencies/eta/wioa/

Appendix D: Quyền của học sinh Mỹ (Bản dịch Tiếng Việt)

Tên	Quyền này có ý nghĩa gì với bạn	Tìm hiểu thêm!!
Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 Dự luật IV của quyền công dân năm 1964	Đạo luật này cấm sự phân biệt ở trường học (và các nơi khác) không bất kể màu da hoặc bạn đến từ đâu. Điều này có nghĩa là bạn có quyền bình đẳng trong giáo dục như tất cả những người khác ở Mỹ!	https://www.dol.gov/agencies/oasam/regulatory/statutes/title-vi-civil-rights-act-of-1964
Equal Educational Opportunities Act of 1974 (EEOA) Luật Giáo dục bình đẳng năm 1974 (EEOA)	Đạo luật này mở rộng ra quyền công dân năm 1964 và cấm tiêu bang phân biệt học sinh dựa trên giới tính hoặc không nói tiếng Anh. Điều này có nghĩa là trường học phải giúp đỡ bạn hoàn toàn trong việc tham gia học tập ở trường không kể là bạn biết ít hay nhiều tiếng Anh.	https://www.history.com/this-day-in-history/equal-educational-opportunities-act-1974-signed-into-law-nixon
Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) Luật cho cá nhân bị khuyết tật trong giáo dục (IDEA)	Đạo luật này đảm bảo rằng những trẻ em bị khuyết tật nhận được giáo dục miễn phí, bao gồm giáo dục đặc biệt và những dịch vụ khác. Điều này có nghĩa là tất cả trẻ em nhận được giáo dục mà các em cần, không qua trọng là khả năng các em như thế nào.	https://sites.ed.gov/idea/
Plyler v. Doe (1982)	Tòa án tối cao quyết định trong trường hợp <i>Plyler v. Doe</i> rằng tiểu bang phải cho giáo dục miễn phí cho tất cả trẻ em (bao gồm từ mẫu giáo đến lớp 12), không phân biệt tình trạng di trú. Điều này có nghĩa là tất cả học sinh, bao gồm học sinh không có hồ sơ di trú, cũng có quyền đi học.	https://www.americanimmigrationcouncil.org/research/plyler-v-doe-public-education-immigrant-students
Lau v. Nichols (1974)	Trong trường hợp này, tòa án tối cao ra lệnh rằng trường học phải ra sức giúp học sinh học ngôn ngữ tiếng Anh vượt qua mọi khó khăn. Điều này có nghĩa là chỉ giáo dục học sinh trong ngôn ngữ mà các em không biết thì không bao giờ đủ.	https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lau_v._Nichols
Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) (2015) Luật mỗi học sinh đều thành công (ESSA) năm 2015	Luật này quản lý trường công giáo dục học sinh ở Mỹ như thế nào. Luật này cho phép sự uyển chuyển trong việc người học ngôn ngữ tiếng Anh được kiểm tra như thế nào, nhưng những tiêu chuẩn đảm bảo người học ngôn ngữ sẽ nhận được giáo dục chất lượng cao!	https://www.ed.gov/essa?src=rn

(continued)

Tên	Quyền này có ý nghĩa gì với bạn	Tìm hiểu thêm!!
Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) Luật về quyền riêng tư và gia đình trong giáo dục (FERPA)	Luật này bảo vệ quyền riêng tư của học sinh về học bạ. Có nghĩa là thông tin về học sinh sẽ không được tiết lộ cho bất kì ai.	https://www2.ed.gov/policy/gen/guid/fpco/ferpa/index.html
McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act Luật về hỗ trợ vô gia cư McKinney-Vento	Luật này đảm bảo giáo dục cho trẻ em cơ nhỡ và trẻ vị thành niên. Có nghĩa là các em có quyền đi học, quyền đến trường, và được hỗ trợ giáo dục ngay cả khi các em cơ nhỡ.	https://nche.ed.gov/mckinney-vento/
Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) Luật cơ hội việc làm và công sở (WIOA)	Luật này, đặc biệt là Dự Luật II, hướng dẫn cho người lớn những kĩ năng cơ bản, hoàn tất cấp 3, và chuyển giao vào cao đẳng. Luật này cũng đảm bảo có những lớp học tiếng Anh dành cho người lớn.	https://www.dol.gov/agencies/eta/wioa/

Appendix E: 美国学生的权利 (中文版)

法律	这对你来说意味着什么?	了解更多!
Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 1964年民权法案第六章	该法律禁止校内和其他任何地方的一切基于种族和地域的歧视。意味着你可以在美国和其他人一样享有教育权	https://www.dol.gov/agencies/oasam/regulatory/statutes/title-vi-civil-rights-act-of-1964
Equal Educational Opportunities Act of 1974 (EEOA) 1974年平等教育机会法	该法律是1964民权法案的一个拓展版本。它阻止各州以性别和英语水平对学生进行任何形式上的歧视。该法案意味着不管你英语水平如何, 学校必须帮助你融入进学校。	https://www.history.com/this-day-in-history/equal-educational-opportunities-act-1974-signed-into-law-nixon
Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) 残疾人教育法修正案	该法律确保每一个残疾学生都可以享有合适的免费教育, 包括特殊教育和相对应的服务。该法案意味着每个学生, 不论是否残疾, 都可以享有其所需的教育。	https://sites.ed.gov/idea/
Plyler v. Doe (1982) 普莱勒诉杜伊案 (1982)	最高法院在该案Plyler v. Doe中, 要求各州务必对公立学校K-12年级的学生给予免费教育, 不管他们的移民身份状态如何。这意味着所有学生不管身份如何都有权去学校享有教育!	https://www.americanimmigrationcouncil.org/research/plyler-v-doe-public-education-immigrant-students

(continued)

法律	这对你来说意味着什么?	了解更多!
Lau v. Nichols (1974) Lau诉Nichols案 (1974)	在Lau v. Nichols案例下,最高法院一致裁定,学校必须努力克服英语学习者面临的教育障碍。这意味着仅仅为非母语学生提供英语授课是不够的,学校必须为学生提供相应母语的支持!	https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lau_v._Nichols
Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) (2015) 每个学生成功法案 (ESSA) (2015)	该法律规定了美国公立学校该如何教育学生。该法律意味着在测试英语学习者方面具有更大的灵活性,但是在确保英语学习者获得高质量教育方面具有更高的标准!	https://www.ed.gov/essa?src=rn
Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) 家庭教育权利和隐私权法案	该法律保护学生教育记录的隐私。这意味着不是所有人都能获得你作为学生的任何信息!	https://www2.ed.gov/policy/gen/guid/fpco/ferpa/index.html
McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act 麦金尼凡托无家可归者援助法	该法律确保对无家可归的儿童和青少年的教育。这意味着即使你无家可归,你也拥有上学的权利,使用往返学校交通工具的权利以及学术支持!	https://nche.ed.gov/mckinney-vento/
Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) 劳动力创新与机会法案 (WIOA)	该法律,尤其是宪法第十二条修正案,指导成人接受基础技能教育,完成高中学业并过渡到大学。此法还确保对成人的英语课程!	https://www.dol.gov/agencies/eta/wioa/

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Chapter 6

Fear Not the Trauma Story: A Trauma-Informed Perspective to Supporting War-Affected Refugees in Schools and Classrooms



M. Kristiina Montero and Aphrodite Al Zouhourri

Abstract By the end of 2019, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) reported over 80 million displaced persons worldwide: 50% being children and youth below the age of 18 (2020). Of those displaced persons, 20.4 million fall under UNHCR’s mandate, which protects individuals who have well-founded fears of being persecuted in their country of origin. UNHCR refugees are eligible for permanent resettlement. When resettled, children and youth are quickly transitioned into schools where educators and school communities have the potential to stabilize their lives, provide them with safe spaces, and offer them rich learning opportunities. Pre-service and in-service teacher professional development, however, does not adequately address the psychosocial and social-emotional needs of refugee newcomers who have experienced mass violence. Creating spaces that support students’ sense of safety and belongingness in the school and classroom will support mental health and well-being. When war-affected students feel safe and a sense of belonging in their schools and classrooms, they are more likely to voluntarily share details of their lived experiences during pre-, trans-, and post-migration. This chapter discusses an educator’s role when faced with a student’s trauma story.

Keywords Trauma story · Trauma-informed teaching practices · War-affected refugees · SLIFE

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It was a typical fall morning in Mrs. Hadi's (pseudonym) English Literacy Development (ELD) Level D¹ class at Northland High School (pseudonym). The school bell rang, and the boisterous student hallway chatter began to roll into the classroom. Mrs. Hadi warmly greeted each student by name as they entered the room and reminded them to gather in their literature circle groups. The students were familiar with the routines and knew how to organize themselves into their small groups. Once the students had settled, Mrs. Hadi began her class as she did every day by telling them how happy she was to see them. She then presented some housekeeping items and instructed the students to continue discussing the text they had read the day before. She specifically asked them to practice using the comprehension strategy they had been learning about—making connections through text-to-text, text-to-self, and text-to-world connections (Keene & Zimmerman, 2007).

The students had been reading from a compilation of student-authored texts depicting experiences of exile, migration, and resettlement in preparation for writing their own migration narratives. In one of the literature circle groups, students chose to read and discuss a text titled "Will Never Forget," written by a 17-year-old Iraqi woman. In the narrative, the author recounted some of her childhood memories in Iraq, about the American military occupation that began in April 2003, and about the events that led to her family's exile to Syria and eventual resettlement to Canada. Responding to the narrative, Aisha (pseudonym), also originally from Iraq, began to recount her memories of the American soldiers in Iraq. She recalled a time when she was walking to school with her father. Aisha explained that after crossing a side street, she heard American soldiers yelling at them in English, but they continued walking because they did not understand what the soldiers were saying. As they turned the corner, Aisha said that she froze when she saw more than ten bound and dismembered bodies lying on the ground. She stopped speaking. Aisha was visibly shaken, wiping tears from her eyes, and said: "It was a lot, a lot."

Compassionately, the teacher acknowledged, validated the painful emotions, and reassured Aisha that she was safe. Speaking directly to Aisha and addressing other students in the group, the teacher said: "These are such shocking memories and experiences. That is why I am so happy to know that you are all here safe, and I feel with you for the experience you went through." Aisha continued to add details to her memory. The teacher continued to validate and support Aisha by saying: "I am very proud of you. You are able to be this brave ...having all [this] memory." Aisha responded, "When I remember, I feel like I would start to cry." Recognizing that the memory was painful and redirecting her thinking to the present, the teacher asked Aisha to talk about something that brings her happiness. Aisha started to talk about her memories of living in an Iraq without war, about a time when people could leave their front doors open, and about a place of kindness and safety. The teacher looked at Aisha and told her: "You are so special. You are a happy student. That light in you needs to shine." Aisha then fell into the teacher's arms and began to sob. The teacher held her, giving her space to grieve. While the other students looked on, Mrs. Hadi offered reassurance telling them that some memories are difficult to remember and listen to. As class time was almost over, she offered students directions to continue with their writing projects and prepared them for dismissal, all while holding Aisha. She asked one of Aisha's friends to stay behind to go with her to the next class.

¹In Ontario, Canada English Literacy Development (ELD) courses are designed for English language learners with limited prior schooling who have not had opportunities to develop age-appropriate literacy skills in any language. The courses acknowledge students who have experienced significant gaps in their education and require more intensive supports to catch up on language skills and knowledge. The five ELD courses (levels A through E) are based on students' literacy development and English proficiency and not on age. For more information on each level's specific learning outcomes, please consult the Ontario Curriculum Grades 9–12: English as a Second Language and English Literacy Development document (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007).

The end-of-class bell rang, and eager to be dismissed, the students left the class as boisterously as they came in. To transition Aisha from the traumatic memory to the happenings of the school day, Mrs. Hadi asked her if she wanted to continue talking. Aisha responded that she was OK. To bring Aisha's focus to the present, she asked her to talk about what she was learning in mathematics, her next class. Before Aisha left, the teacher reassured her once more with these words: "It is OK to feel sad. Remember, you are safe. You are here [in Canada]. Your family is safe. We love you. You are surrounded by love."

Following this event, Mrs. Hadi placed a quick phone call to Aisha's mathematics teacher to let her know that she might be feeling upset because of the memory. Mrs. Hadi reported the event to the student's guidance counselor, who then followed the school's established pathway of care plan, which included monitoring both Aisha and Mrs. Hadi. During the lunch break, Mrs. Hadi contacted Aisha's parents via an interpreter to let them know that she had experienced a vivid and troublesome memory at school. She asked her parents to watch for continued signs of psychological distress and communicate them to the school so that additional supports could be mobilized, if necessary. Mrs. Hadi also connected with the members of Aisha's literature circle to help them make sense of what they had observed.

We began this chapter with a scenario that occurred between a teacher, Mrs. Hadi, and her student, Aisha, who, after telling an excerpt of her trauma story of witnessed violence, began to show signs of psychological distress.² We want to underscore that a student might experience psychological distress at any time during the school day, and a teacher needs to be ready to respond in a compassionate and trauma-informed manner. The narrative represents 70 min of instructional time and presents concrete examples of how the teacher actively created a welcoming and safe classroom environment through student-centered, trauma-informed practices.

In the example, Mrs. Hadi intentionally greeted her students and welcomed them to the classroom. She established predictable routines and brought students' lives into the curriculum. In this example, we see evidence that Mrs. Hadi provided students with opportunities to explore others' resilience as they thought about their own narratives of resilience. In this way, she did not teach the curriculum; rather, she invited students into the curriculum and showed them how school knowledge would help them achieve personal goals and dreams. Mrs. Hadi took the necessary time to learn about her students' life stories, interests, passions, and fears; she used this knowledge to make the curriculum relevant to their lives. She sought curricular materials that spoke to her students; when she could not find appropriate learning materials, she developed them herself. Subscribing to a multi-tiered approach to care, Mrs. Hadi opened lines of communication with students' families and with the school's multidisciplinary trauma response team. By understanding her students' trauma backgrounds, Mrs. Hadi found ways to contribute to her students' resilience by helping them to be active in their learning and development.

Mrs. Hadi, however, had not received formal professional development to help her work with war-affected students. She was like many teachers who are left to their own devices to figure out how to be trauma informed. A persistent gap exists

²The observational data was collected as part of a larger research project that explored the print literacy development of students with limited or interrupted schooling in an English Literacy Development Program (Montero et al., 2014).

in pre-service and in-service teacher education; teachers do not yet have access to consistent and comprehensive general trauma training (Oehlberg, 2008; Phifer & Hull, 2016; Rodger et al., 2020) and war-related trauma training specifically (Mayor, 2019).

Learning About Trauma-Informed Teaching Through the Trauma Story

Every human culture makes sense of the world through stories. The art of storytelling dates to time immemorial. Humans, as storied beings, understand themselves and others through stories, learn through stories, and heal through stories. When school and classroom spaces are safe, and refugee newcomers develop trusting relationships with their teachers and other school staff, they may voluntarily begin to tell their trauma stories. The account may be fragmented or fully detailed, historically accurate or fictionalized. The story may be told with great emotion, with very little, or somewhere in between. As trauma stories are told and retold, they can be transformed into the energy necessary for self-healing through altruism, work, and spirituality (Mollica et al., 2015). As Mollica (2006) noted: “all human beings have the biological, psychological and social power of self-healing...no matter how severe the initial damage” (p. 4).

Rooted in humanizing pedagogies (Bartolomé, 1994; Freire, 1999/1970; Salazar, 2013) that value and privilege students’ background knowledge, language, culture, and life experiences, in this chapter we explore how teachers might support students who voluntarily share their trauma stories in the context of the school and classroom. Every war-affected person harbors trauma stories; some will choose to share them, and others will not. As educators, it is not our place to solicit trauma stories, but to be prepared to receive them when they arrive. When educators are open to receiving students’ trauma stories in the classroom, they contribute to the necessary conditions for students to engage with their self-healing processes as observed by prosocial behaviors, or the behaviors that intend to help others (e.g., volunteering, advocacy, charitable work) (Frazier et al., 2013). The opposite is also true. Should educators refuse to listen or dismiss the voluntarily told trauma story, they might contribute to traumatizing feelings such as shame or guilt.

As authors of this chapter, we view the knowledge presented herewith through the lenses of our personal and professional experiences working with children and youth with refugee backgrounds in contexts of exile and resettlement. Aphrodite brings to the chapter her perspective as a Syrian refugee who spent many years in exile in Lebanon and is now living in Canada. Aphrodite intimately understands the sense of loss due to war and mass violence. She has experienced the loss of family and friends, the right to live in her native country, childhood dreams, parts of her identity, and the loss of safety. She also brings the perspective of persistence and resilience. For example, in Lebanon she started a school for Syrian children fleeing war that quickly grew from 20 to 400 students. She went from having one

goal—survival—to having “hundreds and thousands of goals.” Her many losses are what drive her to empower others today. Kristiina brings to the chapter her experiences researching educational contexts in which educators have struggled to find ways to meet the academic as well as social-emotional and psychosocial needs of refugee newcomers who, because of war and mass violence, have significant gaps in their formal education. Together, we bring a mutual commitment to continue supporting students with refugee backgrounds living in exile or resettlement, and their teachers.

The Danger of a Single Story

In a TEDTalk titled “The danger of a single story” (viewed over 25 million times as of December 2020), Nigerian novelist Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie (2009) argued that we must work against believing and promoting a single, flat story of a people or risk critical misunderstandings. In this chapter, we write about the refugee with broad strokes, and in doing so, we may inadvertently perpetuate the stereotype of a war-affected refugee who, as a result, are at risk of developing psychological distress. The problem with stereotypes, as Adichie (2009) noted, is “not that they are untrue, but that they are incomplete.” We would like to emphasize that while this chapter approaches the topic from a bird’s-eye view, it is important to acknowledge that each person’s story has depth and complexity. A refugee newcomer is not simply defined by the aftermath of mass violence. As teachers work with students with refugee backgrounds, we strongly encourage that teachers move beyond the negative stories encapsulated by concepts such as war, trauma, psychological distress, and escape that conjure up feelings of pity. The trauma story does not only detail the adverse events, but embedded within are the stories of survival, resilience, hope, altruism, empathy, compassion, humor, advocacy, and spirituality. Next, we provide a brief overview of the United Nations High Commissioner of Refugees’s (UNHCR) role in contributing to a refugee’s trauma story.

A Humanitarian Background to a Refugee Story

More than 80 million people worldwide have experienced traumatic life events caused by war, mass violence, persecution, physical and psychological violence, or human rights violations. Since World War II, those who have been unable to return to their country of origin for a well-founded fear of persecution receive international protection from the United Nations by virtue of the 1951 Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol, the key legal documents that govern international standards for working with refugees. Of these globally displaced persons, a mere fraction ever achieves permanent resettlement. For example, in 2019, of the over 20 million refugees, only 107,800 or 0.005% were successfully resettled to 26 countries (United

Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), 2020), with the majority being resettled to the U.S., Canada, and Australia.³ Those who are not resettled continue to live in exile, often in refugee camps or other harsh living conditions, awaiting permanent resettlement or a time of peace when they can return to their homeland.

To be considered for permanent resettlement, the refugee must first prove to UNHCR officials that they meet the definition of a Convention refugee⁴ by demonstrating why they need protection based on the criteria of at least one of the six resettlement submission categories⁵ (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), 2011). In 2019, close to 70% of refugees originated from the Syrian Arab Republic, Venezuela, Afghanistan, South Sudan, and Myanmar (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), 2020), where there was a high prevalence of violence and torture. For example, 43% of Syrian refugees referred for resettlement in the last decade submitted applications under UNHCR's Survivor of Violence and/or Torture category.⁶ Torture is among the most traumatic of life experiences (Abu Suhaiban et al., 2019).

The trauma story plays an important part in the application and selection for resettlement. It is part of the documentation necessary to prove eligibility. During the application process, individuals and families must open and re-open their wounds to relay the details of violence that make them unable to return to their homeland. In this context, the trauma story is shared for survival, not for healing. Refugees in exile have traditionally received little mental health support under the assumption that once away from physical harm, they would "spring back to normal" (Mollica et al., 2015, p. 344).

³Over the last decade, approximately 86% of all resettled refugees were welcomed by the U.S., Canada, and Australia (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), 2020).

⁴According to the Convention, a refugee is someone who "owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion, is outside the country of his [sic] nationality and is unable, or owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself [sic] of the protection of the country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it" (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), n.d., p. 14).

⁵The six submission categories are: (a) legal and/or physical protection needs; (b) survivors of violence and/or torture; (c) medical needs; (d) women and girls at risk; (e) family reunification and; (f) children and adolescents at risk (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), 2011).

⁶A refugee who submitted an application for resettlement under the violence and/or torture category has experienced or may experience the following: (a) torture and/or violence either in the country of origin or the country of asylum; (b) lingering physical or psychological effects from the torture or violence, although there may be no apparent physical signs or symptoms; (c) further traumatization and/or heightened risk due to the conditions of asylum or repatriation; (d) require medical or psychological care, support or counseling not available in the country of asylum, or; (e) require resettlement to meet their specific needs (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), 2011).

Understanding Trauma and Recovery from Trauma

The word trauma originates from the Greek language meaning *wound*. From a psychological perspective, trauma is an emotional response to a terrible event (Little & Akin-Little, 2019). It is a response to powerlessness that overwhelms a person's capacity to cope, impacting them on every level of functioning: biological, psychological, social, and spiritual (Herman, 1992). Psychologically, trauma has the potential to distort a person's worldview, likened to viewing life through a shattered window with fractured sightlines, muddled colors, and altered depth perception.

The traumatic or wounding event in and of itself does not cause the psychological injury; instead, the injury is created when the person has difficulty making sense of the adverse event such that it causes a "breach in the mind's experience of time, self, and the world" (Caruth, 1996, p. 4). The unassimilated injury can manifest itself through psychological disorders such as anxiety, depression, or posttraumatic stress disorder.

Empowerment is the fundamental principle of trauma recovery; any intervention or support provided to survivors of trauma must "restore power and control to the survivor" (Herman, 1998, p. 2). Refugee children and youth are empowered when they become the authors and arbiters of their stories (Herman, 1998), when they control what they want to share, how to share, and to whom to share their stories. Simplistically speaking, recovery from trauma is conceptualized in three stages: establishing safety, retelling the story of the traumatic event, and reconnecting with others (Herman, 1998).

With good reason, trauma is associated with negative psychological, emotional, behavioral, and physical consequences. However, it is paramount to understand that refugees are neither helpless nor traumatized. In fact, complex psychological distress should not be assumed based on traumatic experiences (ter Heide et al., 2016). Various cultural, familial, and experiential factors may bolster resilience and contribute to improved psychological functioning following trauma (Montgomery, 2010). Evidence exists that positive school experiences offer protection against the negative effects of traumatic stress. Protective factors in the school context include the following: perceptions of acceptance within the host country; sense of safety at school; sense of school belonging and school connectedness; strong social support at school, and; achieved competence in the host country's language (Fazel et al., 2014b; Mohamed & Thomas, 2017).

Trauma can be a powerful catalyst for social and personal transformation (MacFarlane & van der Kolk, 1996). If one side of the trauma coin is stress, the other side is growth. Tedeschi and Calhoun's pioneering work on posttraumatic growth helped bring a new perspective on the effects of trauma. Posttraumatic growth describes how an individual has not only survived the traumatic event(s) but has experienced behavioral, relational, and spiritual changes that are often profound (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004). Specifically, Tedeschi and Calhoun (1996) documented posttraumatic growth across five domains: (a) new possibilities; (b) relating to others; (c) personal strength; (d) spiritual change and; (e) appreciation of life.

Insights into posttraumatic stress and growth can be gained by way of the trauma story. Educators can look for evidence of posttraumatic stress and growth in the stories they share and act accordingly.

The Centrality of the Trauma Story in Healing

The trauma story, which supports meaning-making, is at the heart of healing (Mollica, 2006; Mollica et al., 2015). The trauma story has four elements: (a) factual accounting of the events; (b) cultural meaning of trauma; (c) ‘looking behind the curtain’ or developing new understandings of culturally embedded beliefs or practices, and; (d) sharing the trauma story through a listener-storyteller relationship (Mollica, 2006). Trauma stories in a therapeutic setting are carefully brought to light in relationship with a trained therapist.

For decades, mental health professionals (e.g., psychologists, psychotherapists, psychiatrists) have used therapies that rely on the trauma story to support patients’ healing from trauma. Such therapies include narrative therapy (e.g., Madigan, 2019), narrative exposure therapy (e.g., Schauer et al., 2011), trauma-focused cognitive behavior therapy (e.g., Little & Akin-Little, 2019), and narrative art therapy (e.g., Gantt & Greenstone, 2016). In narrative therapies, a relationship forms between the storyteller and the listener. Healing from trauma, as Downey (2007) emphasized, occurs best in the context of a healing relationship.

Teachers, however, should never solicit students’ trauma stories. Teachers are not mental health practitioners and should never pathologize or psychologize any student. A teacher cannot control when a student shares details from their trauma story, which can appear at any time during the school day, in a private conversation, or during a class session. The educator must be able to recognize the trauma story and know how to respond to it. An educator should not discourage the student from sharing their experiences because it is an important part of their self-healing process; to reiterate, an educator should not go fishing for the trauma story. Educators need not fear the trauma story, but they do need to prepare for it in the school context.

School: A Hub for Healing

Schools are one of the most critical ecological systems for the refugee family (Stewart, 2011). They are one of the first places of community contact and connection for refugee newcomers and can be a vital part of the multidimensional and multitiered system of care (Crosby, 2015; Fazel & Betancourt, 2018; Fazel et al., 2016). Schools need to be understood as spaces that support students’ academic growth and as spaces that can support healing from traumatic experiences and promote mental health.

Consider that 50% of refugees under international protection are children and youth under 18 years of age (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), 2020) who, when resettled, are quickly transitioned to schools. Many have survived direct or indirect violence, harsh living conditions, deprivation of primary health care, separation from or loss of family members, and have experienced limited or severely interrupted formal schooling. While children and youth with refugee backgrounds have a higher prevalence for mental illness (e.g., post-traumatic stress disorder, anxiety, depression) than non-refugee populations, they also show incredible resilience to overcome the challenges of forced displacement (Blackmore et al., 2020). Refugee children and youth require mental health support to help them overcome the stressors they face or heal from the adverse psychological effects of trauma. If refugee mental health is not supported, refugees risk poor social integration into the host community and educational disadvantage (Blackmore et al., 2020).

The discourse of trauma-informed care has rapidly emerged in educational circles as proactive and responsive ways to bring together professionals that can effectively and efficiently provide the necessary psychological, social, and educational services to support the cognitive, social-emotional, and psychosocial needs of war-affected children and youth (Crosby, 2015; Thomas et al., 2019). Trauma is at the center of trauma-informed approaches in any program, organization, or system. The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (2014) noted that a trauma-informed approach

realizes the widespread impact of trauma and understands potential paths for recovery; recognizes the signs and symptoms of trauma in clients, families, staff, and others involved with the system; and responds by fully integrating knowledge about trauma into policies, procedures, and practices, and seeks to actively resist re-traumatization. (p. 9)

Adopting trauma-informed approaches in the school is an active process that involves members of the whole school community—teachers, teaching assistants, support staff, administrators, and volunteers—to build a climate of respect and generosity of spirit to ensure all students' physical and emotional safety while at school (Oehlberg, 2008).

A three-tier model of support provides an organizational framework for trauma-informed care and the delivery of mental health support through promotion and universal support for all (tier one), prevention through targeted support for some (tier two), and intervention and intensive support for a few (tier three) (Carney, 2015). Teachers can help students adjust to life in the host country by promoting positive mental health and well-being for their students at the foundational, tier one level. For example, educators can bolster students' coping strategies (Phifer & Hull, 2016) and create opportunities that foster healthy peer-to-peer relationships that can encourage a sense of school belonging community (Fazel & Betancourt, 2018). The second tier focuses on preventing mental illness for some students through targeted interventions often administered to small groups of students. The third tier focuses on providing intensive support for a few students through interventions

administered primarily at the individual level. Tier two and three supports are always administered by mental health professionals.

The multi-tiered model of support emphasizes the cooperation and collaboration of professionals to create a wrap-around community of care. Because refugee newcomers quickly transition into schools upon resettlement where they spend a considerable amount of time, tier two and three mental health interventions, such as cognitive behavior therapy or creative arts and drama therapy, can be efficiently and effectively delivered by mental health professionals (Fazel et al., 2014a, 2016; Murray et al., 2010; Sullivan & Simonson, 2015). Doing so can increase access to various services and help reduce the associated stigma of receiving such services (Fazel et al., 2016). Classroom teachers largely support school-based mental health programs by referring students who are experiencing difficulties adjusting for targeted small-group or individualized support.

Educators, when trained to do so, are well-positioned to identify signs of psychological distress because of their regular contact with students in schools. Broadly speaking, a teacher might observe signs of adjustment difficulties across three domains: physical, social-emotional, and cognitive (School Mental Health Ontario, 2020). Common physical signs might include headaches and nausea, lethargy, difficulty eating or sleeping, weak bowel or bladder control, and substance use and abuse. Social-emotional signs might include feelings of sadness, anger or irritability, emotional numbness, excessive worry when away from their family, exaggerated startle response, and constant discussion of war. Cognitive signs might include a child who plays repetitively, has difficulty engaging with classroom material, increased absenteeism, poor concentration, is easily frustrated, and has difficulty learning a new language. While all children may experience any one or a combination of these signs during development, a teacher needs to be concerned when the signs are severe, prolonged, and interfere with day-to-day functioning. When in doubt, it is always advised to consult with a mental health professional.

Healing in the Classroom

In the classroom, teachers can use their insights about observable signs of psychological distress to inform their trauma-informed practice based on empathy and compassion. It is critical that teachers do not take students' negative behavior personally; many of these negative behaviors are survival mechanisms. To be sure, it can be difficult not to take negative behavior personally, but a trauma-informed educator must make the effort. To shift the focus of the behavior away from the student and toward trauma, a teacher can change the kind of questions asked about the student, which in turn, will change the response to the behavior from one rooted in discipline to one rooted in empathy. When faced with negative behaviors from a war-affected student, rather than ask the question "what is wrong with you?" a teacher might try asking the question "what happened to you?" Consider the classroom scenario presented at the beginning of this chapter. Based on what Aisha

shared during the literature circle, we have some insight that she witnessed human-on-human violence. We also know that the prevalence of psychological disturbances increases when children and youth have been directly exposed to adverse events (Fazel et al., 2014b) such as experiencing or witnessing violence (Bronstein & Montgomery, 2010; Kia-Keating & Ellis, 2007).

Consider the following hypothetical scenario. Imagine that shortly after the literature circle, when Aisha shared the difficult memory, Mrs. Hadi (or any other teacher) notices that Aisha is becoming increasingly disengaged with classroom life. The teacher frequently observed Aisha laying her head on the desk and falling asleep. If the teacher asked Aisha what was wrong with her, Aisha might simply say, “I’m really tired.” The teacher might recommend that she get more sleep at night, or if the daytime lethargy persisted, the teacher might interpret the disengagement as a sign of disrespect and discipline her according to school policy, which could include detention or, for repeated violations, suspension. Disciplinary measures that isolate or shame the student will only disenfranchise them from the school community.

From a trauma-informed stance, the teacher would be aware that prolonged lethargy can be a sign of psychological distress. The teacher might learn more about “what was wrong with the student”—being really tired—by asking her about what was happening in her life that caused her to be so tired at school? The teacher might learn that Aisha was not sleeping at night because she was experiencing reoccurring nightmares that were waking her from her sleep and she was having difficulty returning to sleep, or that Aisha was staying awake texting with her friends at night because she was feeling anxious about being alone in the darkness of the night. This hypothetical example illustrates that when educators take a trauma-informed stance, negative behaviors could be viewed as signs of distress instead of defiance, thus eliciting a compassionate rather than disciplinary response.

Receiving the Trauma Story

When students with refugee backgrounds feel safe in school and classroom spaces and develop trusting relationships with their teachers, they might *voluntarily* share insights into their trauma stories, as Aisha did in the narrative at the beginning of this chapter. When given the opportunity, children and youth may share their trauma stories in words—written or spoken—in signs, images, sounds, or any multimodal combination. Receiving trauma stories in the context of school can support students’ self-healing processes when educators know how to receive and respond to them in a trauma-informed way (Montero, 2018). A teacher’s role in the trauma story is to be an active listener. Central to active listening is the relationship that is forged between the speaker and the listener. To listen in a relationship-building manner, the listener must give more than receive. The listening skills that support relationship building include those that cultivate empathy, are non-judgmental, and pay attention to verbal and non-verbal cues.

To be a trauma-informed listener, one must be fully present in the relationship being developed through dialogue. The Chinese character for the verb *to listen* is a combination of the characters for eyes, ears, mind, heart, and focus. The character reminds us that listening is an active and holistic action. First, we listen to the words expressed by the speaker with our ears. The other words that make up the symbol signal the listener's other responsibilities. For hearing-abled people, ears are an essential part of listening. Our ears allow us to perceive the sound that delivers the speaker's message. However, when we receive the message, we honor the speaker through deep listening that involves the heart, eyes, and mind and requires focus.

Responding to the Trauma Story

The trauma story is an integral part of a war-affected student's life history, and if they choose to share their story, they need to be heard and validated. By validating the story and the associated emotions, an educator can help normalize the student's negative feelings that emerge from the retelling, such as sadness, anger, and frustration. For example, after Aisha began sobbing after recounting her traumatic memory, Mrs. Hadi comforted Aisha by allowing her to fall in her arms in despair. Mrs. Hadi then normalized her feelings of sadness by saying, "It is OK to feel sad," and then reassured her by reminding her that she was safe. When a teacher recognizes that a trauma story, or part thereof, is emerging, teachers need to first listen to the student, followed by offering the student a sense of safety, comfort, and reassurance. If the student experiences distressing emotions, the teacher can help them refocus on the present, then continue to monitor and refer the student for additional supports as we saw Mrs. Hadi follow-up with Aisha's parents and the school's multidisciplinary trauma response team to monitor Aisha for any further signs of distress that might need referral for further support.

Furthermore, by listening to the trauma story, the teacher might recognize the prosocial behaviors that signal posttraumatic growth and support students to take action. For example, the students in Mrs. Hadi's class expressed a collective interest to help others by supporting the work of a charitable organization. They decided to support Ryan's Well Foundation, a foundation that was inspired by the passion and courage of Ryan Hreljac, a 6-year-old student who, when he learned that people became very sick when they did not have clean water, began to raise funds to build a water well in Uganda (Ryan's Well Foundation, 2020). The students called themselves the Water Ambassadors and started a fundraising campaign at the school and in the community. To raise funds, the students made and sold greeting cards, held bake sales, and painted henna designs on people's hands. Mrs. Hadi used the Water Ambassadors' project to teach students about financial literacy, communication, and persuasive writing. The teacher supported her students by contributing to their academic development and their self-healing by helping others.

Engaging in Self-Care

Being on the listening end of the trauma story, however, does not come without its challenges. Survivors of human-designed violence may recount events that violate humanity's fundamental principles—openness, love, compassion, wholeness, unity, peace, the human potential for healing and redemption, and forgiveness (Vanier, 1998). Listening to such stories can be difficult for the listener to hear. Being an active listener can cause the listener to experience distress, sometimes manifested as compassion fatigue or, as described by Figley (1995), as the cost of caring for others' pain. Should the distress become severe, prolonged, and interfere with day-to-day functioning, the listener may experience vicarious trauma, or a profound shift in worldview that occurs from hearing others' trauma stories (McCann & Pearlman, 1990). Compassion fatigue and vicarious trauma are considered normal reactions to working with people who have experienced trauma (McCann & Pearlman, 1990).

A listener must be aware that they may need to give considerable emotional energy to listening, which may leave them feeling depleted. To do this kind of work, the listener must develop mechanisms to protect themselves from potential harm while continuing to contribute to student well-being. Engaging in self-care is a protective mechanism against compassion fatigue and vicarious trauma. Self-care is a conscious act to promote one's physical, mental, and emotional health. Self-care strategies are personal and can include eating nutritious foods, getting adequate sleep and exercise, spending time with loved ones, and engaging in enjoyable activities.

Self-care can also mean setting up boundaries when supporting students. In this chapter, we encourage educators to take a proactive role in helping students make meaning of their traumatic experiences by receiving voluntarily told trauma stories. A teacher may need to set up boundaries on when and how they can open themselves up to receive the trauma stories without risking shutting down the student's self-healing processes. For example, a student may want to share many details in their retellings, and a teacher may not always be able to receive such stories. The teacher may also need to consider the other students in the class and how the trauma story might impact them while still validating the experience of the student who feels the need to share their trauma story.

A teacher can set the boundaries by first naming the limits of the boundaries and tuning into their feelings to identify when the established boundaries are being crossed. For example, suppose a teacher feels discomfort after listening to a student's trauma story containing disturbing details. In that case, a teacher will want to be direct with the student and tell them that they feel uncomfortable with the story. A teacher might use the "sandwich method" where the feedback (potentially perceived as negative) is sandwiched between two positives. For example, a teacher might say something like the following: "You are very important to me, as is knowing more about your experiences (positive). I would like to continue hearing about your experiences, but right now, I am finding it very difficult to hear about all the terrible things that you witnessed (feedback). I can only imagine what it was like to

live through them. You are very brave (positive). Could we continue the conversation at another time (provide the student with a specific time) when I will be ready to listen to your experiences?”

Caring Is Not Enough

While trauma-informed teaching practices promote teacher caring and compassion, we agree with Hos (2016) when she emphasized that caring is simply not enough to support war-affected students in resettlement. As noted earlier, developing competence in the host country’s language is a protective factor against the negative effects of trauma. Educators, therefore, must continue to develop appropriate pedagogies to help these students develop the critical language competencies of the host country, which for a large majority of refugee newcomers, is English. See Ledger and Montero, this book, Chap. 9 to learn more about an English as a Second Language (ESL) teacher’s journey transforming her pedagogies to meet the English language development needs of students with limited or interrupted formal education.

A Summary of Recommendations for Educators

Inevitably, children and youth who have experienced traumatic life events may relive or react to their past traumatic experiences at any time, including during the school day. Educators cannot predict what might trigger a student to have a negative reaction, but they can be prepared to respond in a caring and empathic manner when it does happen. Educators should not reject the knowledge of lived experience, including the lived experience rooted in traumatic events, because healing is never far away from the place of suffering.

Becoming a trauma-informed educator is not simply about applying a prescribed method; it is about embracing the undergirding philosophy of student-centered and humanizing pedagogy. To be a humanizing educator one must “respect and use the reality, history, and perspectives of students as an integral part of educational practice” (Bartolomé, 1994, p. 173), including their trauma. Through this chapter, we have presented how educators might learn to embrace one of the most difficult realities in the lives of war-affected children and youth—their trauma. In doing so, educators can create a space for students to make meaning of their life experiences and engage their self-healing processes.

Next, we offer a summary of the recommendations we shared throughout this chapter that will help educators who are working with war-affected children and youth become trauma-informed:

1. Be curious about the lives of your students. Learn about the general geopolitical contexts of your students' country of origin. Do not expect your students to do your homework.
2. Understand that refugees are not helpless. Learn to recognize signs of resilience and posttraumatic growth and provide them with opportunities to develop their ability to recover from difficulties.
3. Do not pathologize or psychologize students. Leave diagnosing and treating mental illness to mental health professionals. Meanwhile, continue to support students' by promoting mental health and well-being in your classroom.
4. The trauma story is at the heart of healing, and healing occurs in the context of a trusting relationship. Develop a trusting relationship with your students and be prepared to receive a student's trauma story. Do not, however, go fishing for a trauma story.
5. Learn to listen with understanding and deep appreciation. Show students that you care by actively listening to them.
6. Learn to recognize the signs of psychological distress and understand your school's pathway to a care plan. If your school does not have such a plan, advocate for one.
7. Do not take students' negative behavior personally. Learn to understand how trauma might be influencing their behavior and act accordingly.
8. Take care of your mental health. Develop self-care strategies as a protective mechanism to prevent compassion fatigue or vicarious trauma.

Reflection Questions

We conclude our chapter by offering a few reflection questions to help educators think critically about their role in promoting mental health and well-being in the context of the school and classroom for war-affected refugee newcomers.

1. What are the stereotypes of refugees in your narrative? What do you need to know to make your understanding of refugees more complex?
2. What might you say to a student like Aisha who is experiencing psychological distress? Practice using the response framework presented in this chapter: Listen, comfort, focus, and reassure.
3. What are your self-care strategies? If you are feeling difficult emotions, who might you talk to? What activity might you engage in? If you need additional support, what professional services might you consult?

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Part III
Pre- and In-service Teacher Preparation

Chapter 7

Preparing Pre-service and In-service Teachers to Work with Students with Limited or Interrupted Formal Education



Brenda Custodio and Judith O'Loughlin

Abstract In the United States, each individual state has the responsibility for developing and overseeing their own teacher preparation program requirements at the university level. Consequently, there is a great discrepancy across the country on what pre-service teachers are expected to know and are able to do with regards to second language learners in general, and students with limited or interrupted formal education in particular. This chapter will provide an overview of the state-level requirements for pre-service teachers, including some exemplar state requirements which could be used as the foundation for future regulations. The chapter also discusses the extent to which the new TESOL Pre-Service Standards for teacher preparation programs require knowledge of SLIFE for accreditation. Recommendations will be given for creating a more uniform knowledge base for educators across the country. Finally, we will conclude with suggestions for training current in-service teachers who have SLIFE in their classrooms.

Keywords Teacher preparation · Pre-service teachers · In-service teachers · State pre-service requirements

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Introduction

This chapter has a double focus. We will first look at what requirements already exist for preparing pre-service teachers in the United States to work with English language learners (ELLs)¹ in general and students with limited or interrupted formal education (SLIFE) in particular. And secondly, we will suggest topics to be addressed through professional development that would best train and equip those educators already serving in today's classrooms.

There have been two major studies conducted in the last twenty years which reviewed the state-by-state regulations for preparing pre-service teachers to work with second language learners. The first was published in 2008, conducted by Ballantyne, Sanderman, and Levy for the National Clearinghouse for English Language Acquisition (NCELA) and Language Instruction Education Program. The second was conducted by the Education Commission of the States in 2014 and will be addressed in detail later in this chapter. In the sections below, we discuss both studies and explore the implications for pre-service teacher preparation programs in the United States.

First Study: Ballantyne et al. (2008)

The first study, Ballantyne et al. (2008), placed the states in one of five categories based on the type of pre-service training required by their respective state departments of education:

Category 1

Five states had specific coursework required for any teacher who works with English learners (ELs), Arizona, California, Florida, New York, with Pennsylvania being added in 2011.

¹ Authors' note: We are aware that we are moving back and forth with the use of SIFE and SLIFE as well as ELL and EL throughout the chapter. We have a number of quotations that used one of these acronyms rather than the other, and we tried to match the accompanying text to the quotation usage. We understand this can be confusing at times, and we apologize in advance.

Category 2

Seventeen states had standards requiring candidates to be “experienced with, familiar with or competent in addressing the special needs of English Learners” (Ballantyne et al., 2008, p. 123). These states were Alabama, Colorado, Idaho, Illinois, Iowa, Louisiana, Maryland, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, Nevada, New Jersey, North Dakota, Rhode Island, Tennessee, Vermont, and Virginia.

Category 3

Seven states were using the National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) accreditation process and its standards to guide teacher preparation. NCATE’s standards required teacher education programs to include in their curriculum and field experience a “well-grounded framework for understanding diversity, including English Learners.” (NCATE, 2008, p. 34) These states were Alaska, Connecticut, Delaware, Georgia, Kansas, Mississippi, and South Carolina. However, with the transition from NCATE to the Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation (CAEP) in the last decade, this specific requirement has moved instead to a focus on lesson planning and delivery. It is not known if these seven states are now using the new CAEP standards.

Under the CAEP accreditation process, a different group of standards were developed to govern the ability of a teacher preparation program to be approved. Diversity is specifically mentioned only in Standard 3: *Assessing, Planning, and Designing Contexts for Learning*.

Candidates assess students, plan instruction and design classroom contexts for learning. Candidates use formative and summative assessment to monitor students’ learning and guide instruction. Candidates plan learning activities to promote a full range of competencies for each student. They differentiate instructional materials and activities to address learners’ diversity. Candidates foster engagement in learning by establishing and maintaining social norms for classrooms. They build interpersonal relationships with students that generate motivation and promote student’s social and emotional development (CAEP, 2018, p. 20).

Two components of this standard, 3d and 3f, directly refer to diversity and give examples of how this standard could be implemented. For Component 3d, they state that “Candidates differentiate instructional plans to meet the needs of diverse students in the classroom,” (CAEP, 2018, p. 24) and in Component 3f, “Candidates explicitly support motivation and engagement in learning through diverse evidence-based practices” (CAEP, 2018, p. 27). The example given for implementing Component 3d (which specifically refers to linguistic diversity) is: “For example: decorate with and provide access to materials that reflect student diversity” (CAEP, 2018, p. 25). While this is commendable, it is hardly sufficient to support a student’s linguistic and cultural academic needs.

Component 3f is much more specific and academically appropriate: Candidates differentiate engagement support for students who are at risk, including students from low income communities, special needs learners, language minority individuals, and culturally different peers. Candidates use language particularly suited for students at risk in the classroom. To optimize learner engagement, candidates scaffold the students' opportunities for choice, collaborative activities, uses of texts, and task goals to accommodate every child's language backgrounds, cognitive competencies, social experiences, and expertise in self-direction.

Category 4

Eight states “do not explicitly refer to ELLs or ELL pedagogy, but they do require that teachers have an appreciation of diversity in the classroom and demonstrate effective strategies to teach a diverse group of learners” (Ballantyne et al., 2008, p. 126). The eight states under this category are: Arkansas, Montana, New Mexico, North Carolina, Ohio, Oregon, West Virginia, and Wyoming. A general understanding of diversity may not be enough to be properly prepared for working with English learners, especially those with interrupted education. Ballantyne et al., in this 2008 study, have this to say about ELs diversity:

English language learners are diverse along the dimensions of race, class, and cultural background. Teachers must also be prepared to teach students from diverse educational backgrounds. This is particularly true of immigrant ELLs. The standards, teaching practices and expectations of schooling that students have previously been exposed to may be quite different in kind from those found in American schools. *Learning in school may be particularly challenging for those students whose formal education has been interrupted due to natural disaster, war, or other violent upheaval in their home country. Such students must not only adjust to new cultural conventions regarding teaching and learning, but they may also have significant traumatic experiences in their past to deal with* [Italics added by authors] (p. 16).

Category 5

Thirteen states and the federal District of Columbia (Washington, D.C.), as of 2008, had no mention of English learners in their teacher preparation requirements. These states are: Hawaii, Indiana, Kentucky, Maine, Missouri, Nebraska, New Hampshire, Oklahoma, South Dakota, Texas, Utah, Washington, and Wisconsin.

Second Study: Education Commission of the States (2014)

A more current study conducted by the Education Commission of the States in 2014 looked at each state's statutory requirements individually and found that 34 of the 50 states do not require specific training for working with English learners mentioned in state law. They admitted that it was possible that there are guidance documents requiring such training outside of state statutes. States who are listed in this later study as having state regulations that were indicated as not having such in the earlier study are Indiana, Missouri, Washington, and Texas. An important clarification is that, as of 2014, Texas required teachers renewing their license must have at least 25% of their professional development activities or courses focused on the instruction of diverse learners, including English learners.

According to this later review in 2014, the following states were included in the list of those who do not have specific requirements in state statutes. By removing those who are covered in one of the categories listed in the 2008 study, we are left with only 12 states who, according to these two studies, do not have any pre-service requirements for candidates to know how to best support second language learners: Hawaii, Kentucky, Maine, Montana, Nebraska, Oklahoma, Oregon, South Dakota, Utah, Vermont, West Virginia, and Wisconsin. It is certainly possible that these states have added a requirement since these two studies were conducted or that they have guidance not discovered by the reviewers in the two studies. The fact that these two nationwide studies were not able to develop correlating lists show how confusing and complex these state regulations are.

Although it appears that most states have some English learner guidelines for teacher preparation programs as of 2020, neither of these studies mentioned the term students with interrupted formal education (SIFE) or SLIFE in any of their regulations. We know these are relatively recent terms, and that it is possible guidance may have been added in the years since these two studies were conducted. A review of the websites of the departments of education for the states with largest numbers of English learners shows only four have specific guidance for school districts on supporting SLIFE, specifically New York, New Jersey, and Massachusetts, and the Houston Independent School District (HISD) in Texas. It is hopeful these guidance suggestions will eventually make it into the standards guiding pre-service educator preparation programs in those states and that they will serve as examples to other states in the nation.

What Is the Current State of English Learner Preparation Guidance in School Districts?

The National Education Association (NEA), one of the major professional associations for teachers in the United States, published a policy brief in 2011 in which they state there must be an "explicit effort to make sure that general education teachers

and other school professionals who teach ELLs are equipped with the necessary skills and knowledge” (NEA, 2011, p. 1) to ensure opportunities for academic success among all ELL students. The NEA continued by stating general education teachers must meet both the instructional and the linguistic needs of ELLs, but that the rapid growth of the ELL population—which had doubled in 23 states during the ten years prior to the brief—is presenting challenges for teacher preparation and in-service professional development to keep up with this unprecedented growth. The NEA is concerned that appropriate professional development for the education of the English learner population “continues to lag behind the needs of the educators” (NEA, 2011, p. 1).

Why Is Specific Training for Working English Learners in General, and SLIFE in Particular, Necessary and What Is Driving This Push?

According to a 2008 report by the Pew Hispanic Center, the number of English learners by 2020 was estimated to reach 25% of the P-12 population (Fry & Gonzalez, 2008). That future date is now upon us! NEA was concerned almost a decade ago that the training of educators was not keeping pace of the increased EL population. This organization was also concerned because “research on teacher preparation suggests that general education teachers who do not hold bilingual or ESL [English as a second language] certification are not well prepared to meet the needs of ELL students” (NEA, 2011, p. 2).

The Ballantyne et al. (2008) study on teacher preparation emphasizes the critical value of teacher preparation candidates interacting with English learners, especially given the strong likelihood that they will be working with diverse learners in their careers. They state that “Candidates should have the chance both to practice pedagogical content knowledge techniques, and also for a great number of teachers, to interact with students whose cultural backgrounds and experiences differ from their own” (Ballantyne et al., 2008, p. 15).

In 2013, a study conducted by Lopez, Scanlan, and Gundrum which was published in the *Education Policy Analysis Archives* looked at how teacher preparation was affecting student achievement. Their study showed that states that require specific ESL or bilingual certification to work with English learners were having the most academic success. States that require all teachers to have some knowledge of working with ELLs is not sufficient, and in some cases the students were actually regressing. Lopez et al. (2013) postulated this regression is caused by the lack of focus on the unique needs of second language learners as they were being treated exactly as their non-ELL counterparts. Based on their findings, Lopez et al. (2013) concluded that while it is important that all teachers have a knowledge base for serving English learners, “state policies must be more stringent in what they deem as

‘highly qualified’ to teach ELLs. One course simply is not sufficient to meet the needs of *all* ELLs” (p. 19).

Another recent study highlights the critical nature of training educators to work with our second language population. In 2018, Stephanie Potochnick reviewed the data from a National Educational Longitudinal Study which began collecting information in 2002 on students in the tenth grade across the U.S. and followed up with additional groups of students in 2004, 2006, and 2012. The data collected in this study by the National Center for Education Statistics clearly showed the academic gap between students with interrupted schooling and those immigrants who came to the U.S. on grade level. SLIFE scores on standardized tests were 11% lower in reading and 16% lower in math than immigrant students with continuous schooling before arrival. Even more concerning is the fact that SLIFE were 74% more likely to drop out of school than any other subgroup.

Potochnick (2018) also found that two thirds of SLIFE arrived as adolescents where school expectations create the greatest gap, and that SLIFE were the most likely of all subgroups (30%) to have parents without a high school education, meaning they were unlikely to have support at home with academic schoolwork. On the plus side, SLIFE were the most likely to be engaged in school, desiring to do well even with limited resources, and they were the most likely to live with both biological parents. In addition, teachers reported that SLIFE were the least likely to be disruptive and cause behavior issues (Potochnick, 2018). This implies that the reason for the high dropout rate is academic, not behavioral.

For secondary-grade-age arrivals, the results suggest that the challenges are greater and often extend to continuously schooled youth, thus highlighting the unique challenges of later-arrival English language learners... These students are highly motivated but heavily influenced by a tangle of premigration and postmigration challenges that they are often unable to overcome within the shortened time period they have in US schools (Potochnick, 2018, p. 885).

How do these challenges impact the need for better training for SLIFE? With the proper preparation, teachers could more quickly discover how to meet the students at the level which would best match their skills. Similar to a physical problem, if the learning level and educational gaps could be properly diagnosed, an educational plan could be designed and implemented. For students who need to build native literacy skills, bilingual personnel and material could be provided. If math is the major issue, instruction could begin at the current level of the student’s math proficiency. For content subjects, adapted texts or sheltered classes could help SLIFE work to fill in the gap between what the student already knows and what they are expected to be able to do at their peers’ grade level. With more targeted intervention, students would feel less frustrated, more confident and successful, and less likely to give up and dropout. Unfortunately, there are too few schools with appropriate instructional programs, and too few educators trained to provide this type of intervention, especially at the secondary level (Custodio & O’Loughlin, 2017).

The National Education Association states in their policy brief that schools serving English language learners need three things: “qualified ELL instructors, appropriate materials and learning tools, and a thoughtful assessment system that

measures not only student progress, but also the impact of programs and approaches on students.” (NEA, 2011, p. 3). They are concerned that too many schools are not able to meet these three goals.

It is the first of these components—schools serving ELs need access to qualified ELL instructors—that is the focus of this chapter. Even if all teacher preparation programs immediately implemented changes to their curriculum and field experience components, it would not affect the teachers already in the classrooms. For those millions of teachers, only an extensive and comprehensive nationwide professional development program would sufficiently prepare them to provide best practices for the ELs already in our schools. NEA recommends focusing on the following topics to help fill in the knowledge gap:

- A process for establishing high standards for English language acquisition, English language development, and academic content in lesson planning and instruction
- A process for integrating teachers’ understanding of academic content and English-language proficiency standards with instruction in teaching methods and assessments
- Knowledge and use of effective pedagogy
- Methods for implementing instructional strategies that ensure that academic instruction in English is meaningful and comprehensible
- Exposure to a demonstration showing how to implement strategies that simultaneously integrate language acquisition, language development, and academic achievement
- Exposure to a demonstration showing why increasing academic achievement of ELLs is dependent upon multiple instructional approaches or methodologies
- Providing a “strategies toolkit” for teachers, which offers ways to enhance and improve instruction for struggling students, based on assessment results
- Knowledge of the cultural backgrounds of their students

The NEA was mainly concerned about the lack of training for mainstream teachers of English learners because these teachers provide the bulk of content instruction for all students. The Elementary and Secondary Education Act prohibits English learners from being pulled out of core subjects for language instruction, leaving the mainstream teacher with the responsibility to provide “effective, comprehensible instruction to English learners” (NEA, 2011, p. 1).

Although the NEA Brief is calling for more training of all pre-service teachers to work with English learners, there is no direct connection to students with interrupted schooling. One of the few teacher-preparation studies that specifically references the needs of SLIFE comes from a literacy journal: *Reading Horizons*. In an article titled “Who educates teacher educators about English language learners?” the author states that when creating lessons for literacy development, knowledge of a student’s “educational background is a crucial factor, as some students have had schooling in their home country, commensurate with their age, while others may have had interrupted or minimal formal schooling” (Roy-Campbell, 2013, p. 258). Roy-Campbell (2013) says that it is this latter category—students with limited or

interrupted formal education—who present particular challenges for teachers because these students may need additional support and instruction in basic English language skills, and classroom teachers often do not know how to provide this necessary support (DeCapua et al., 2009; Freeman et al., 2002).

In this *Reading Horizons* study, the author surveyed 50 teacher educators across the U.S. to find out if and/or how they were preparing their pre-service candidates in their teacher preparation programs to teach literacy skills to English learners. Less than 25% stated that their universities require all education majors to enroll in any course that provides information on working with English learners. About 40% indicated that they have a portion of one or more courses in which English learner issues and methodology is presented (some as little as one or two days). Others said that some of the required textbooks provided information on English learner strategies. A few stated that working with English learners is actually infused in most of their teacher preparation courses, to a varying degree (Roy-Campbell, 2013).

The majority of the teacher educators who responded to the survey admitted that they were limited in their own skill base on preparing pre-service teachers to help develop literacy for ELs. These professors were not familiar enough with the unique issues of English learners in general, and certainly not with those of SLIFE in particular, to be able to adequately prepare their teacher education candidates to work with this population. The main implication of this study is a confirmation that there is a need for more formal preparation of teacher educators to meet the needs of future teachers to support ELs.

This study was particularly disturbing because of the critical nature of literacy in secondary schooling. One of the major criteria for determining who is categorized as SLIFE is their limited literacy background, both in their first language and in English. After the primary grades, much of class time consists of reading and responding to fiction and non-fiction texts, both independently and as a group. For students who are below grade level in reading, completing coursework becomes a major challenge. Every year the linguistic load increases and the gap widens. When teachers are not trained to even be aware of this difficulty, or how to help students build literacy while building language skills, the chances of closing the gap decreases.

Are There Exemplar State Requirements Which Could Be Used as the Foundation for Future Regulations Across the US and in Other Countries?

By far, the most extensive compilation of resources for SIFE/SLIFE students can be found on the website for the New York State Education Department, last updated 2019 (New York State Department of Education, 2019; also see Advocates for Children of New York, 2010). By searching for the keyword SIFE, a plethora of resources and links can be found, including:

- Placement and identification tools
- A SIFE ID Flow Chart
- A Multilingual Literacy SIFE Screener
- A Multilingual SIFE Math Screener
- A Writing Screener in 17 languages
- A SIFE Oral Interview Questionnaire
- A SIFE English language arts (ELA) and Foundational Low Literacy Curriculum
- Links to multiple articles and videos about SIFE, including an interview with Andrea DeCapua about SLIFE

Another state with exemplary SLIFE resources for its school districts is Massachusetts. In a guidance document provided for download on the Massachusetts Department of Education website, topics such as identification of SLIFE, planning and instructional considerations, and reclassification requirements are laid out in a very clear and thoughtful way, with accompanying flowcharts. The document is based on a set of guiding principles which begins with the statement: *Educators should consider the educational gaps in SLIFE students' academic background to best meet their linguistic needs.*

Massachusetts SLIFE guiding principles:

- Build foundational skills necessary to develop English language acquisition
- Bridge students' background experiences to academic educational experiences and content in the Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks
- Acknowledge and incorporate students' existing skills and knowledge to facilitate connections to learning the necessary skills and academics to be successful twenty-first century learners
- Design equitable, intentional, responsive, and strategic academic programming
- Consider research-based instructional elements necessary for SLIFE academic success, such as thematic units, culturally responsive teaching, and project-based learning
- Provide socio-academic and socio-cultural supports through the school-based team

What Does TESOL International Association Say About Teacher Preparation for English Learners and Students with Interrupted Schooling?

In 2016, in honor of the 50th anniversary of TESOL International Association, the organization commissioned a review of the research covering the past fifty years on best practices for educating English learners. These practices were compiled into a book titled *The 6 Principles for Exemplary Teaching of English Learners: Grades K-12* (Short et al., 2018). These six principles were meant to serve as a foundation of what both pre-service and in-service teachers should know about second

language learning and teaching. The book details these six principles and gives examples of what they look like in classroom settings.

The six principles listed in this ground-breaking book focus on the practice of exemplary teachers and how they address each principle in their instructional setting:

Principle 1. Know Your Learner Prepare targeted lessons and deliver them effectively when they gather information about students' families, native languages, culture, and educational backgrounds. Student background information becomes a resource, helping teachers adapt instruction to student needs.

Principle 2. Create Conditions for Language Learning Create a safe, comfortable classroom environment that includes the physical set up of the classroom, appropriate materials, and careful planning for social integration to promote language learning both in and beyond the ESL/ELD classroom.

Principle 3. Design High-Quality Lessons for Language Development Plan and implement meaningful lessons that promote language learning, evolve from language and content learning objectives, engage in a variety of techniques and modalities, and practice authentic language. The lessons include modeling and practicing learning strategies and critical thinking skills, as well as include visuals, gestures, demonstrations, and the use of native language support.

Principle 4. Adapt Lesson Delivery as Needed Assess lesson effectiveness by observing individual responses and actions, noting learner progress toward achieving content and language lesson objectives. Lessons are adjusted when it is noted that students are struggling or when the lesson is not challenging enough.

Principle 5. Monitor and Assess Student Language Development Provide timely feedback, model and encourage students to self-repair, and provide explicit correction of errors when necessary. Design and implement a variety of classroom assessments, observation checklists, rubrics, and running records to inform instruction.

Principle 6. Engage and Collaborate with a Community of Practice Co-plan and collaborate, reflect on instruction, and advocate for the learner with other educators. This includes both instructional staff as well as school personnel in leadership roles within the school and school district. Develop leadership skills, becoming a resource at the school level to interpret assessment results, offer professional development workshops, and/or act as a peer coach for others.

Along with guidance on how to implement these six principles, Short et al. (2018) add four factors that educators need to bear in mind when preparing lessons. These four factors merit special considerations that may potentially impede second language learning. The factors focus on what is needed to enhance language learning beyond the six principles and each of these factors can be minimized with specialized instruction and appropriate interventions. These four factors are:

Factor 1: Students Who Come Overage Age affects older learners' ability to acquire and learn both social and academic language, particularly in secondary settings where there is significantly more to learn in less time. Students who enter schools as older learners may benefit from specialized newcomer programs that simultaneously develop the basics of literacy and numeracy skills as well as work toward academic content proficiency. Such newcomer programs require an intensive commitment of time and personnel (Custodio, 2011; Short & Boyson, 2004).

Factor 2: Students with Special Socioemotional and/or Academic Needs Students exhibiting trauma, post-traumatic stress anxiety, depression, and social and/or emotional issues that impact academic learning require screening and monitoring, as well as involving the support of specialists to work along with the ESL educator. We, Custodio & O'Loughlin, have focused on these learning concerns in our work with a chapter which focuses on strategies, activities, classroom and school practices to help learners become resilient in *Students with interrupted education: Where they are and what they need* (Custodio & O'Loughlin, 2017), and are going even deeper to directly address social and emotional issues, especially related to trauma, from classroom and whole school practices in our upcoming book, *Supporting the journey of English learners after trauma* (Custodio & O'Loughlin, 2020).

Factor 3: Students with Interrupted Education These students have been identified as SIFE and/or SLIFE, the "L" indicating "limited" as well as interrupted education, due to time spent out of an instructional setting whether in home country/culture or the U.S. In most cases these students require a specialized program in English language learning that is intensive and accelerated, along with supplemental instruction both in English and native language, where possible. The design of instruction includes basic language learning in reading and mathematics, as mentioned in factor one, as well as developmental/age-grade appropriate content and language instruction (Custodio & O'Loughlin, 2017; DeCapua et al., 2020).

Factor 4. Long-Term English Learners English learners who fail to achieve a level of language proficiency to exit English language development programs, and in some schools fail to achieve reading proficiency at or beyond the 50 percentile in reading assessments, are labeled long-term English learners (LTELs). Many factors are reviewed and/or considered when looking at causes such as poor and/or inconsistent English instruction, transiency, limited or no first language literacy in the home, and adjustment difficulties or other home and family conditions. Laurie Olsen (2004, 2014) addressed these issues and suggested a plan to develop consistent English language instruction in her publications for California and for the NEA. Additionally, Olsen, former President of Californians Together, a California statewide advocacy coalition of organizations throughout the state of California, together with Kenji Hakuta, has developed three English Learner Roadmaps—elementary, middle, and secondary school toolkits to help teachers reflect on and plan for practice to meet the needs of all English learners in the state, with applications to other states and programs throughout the U.S. (EL Roadmap Brief, 2017).

What Are the National Pre-service Standards for TESOL Candidates?

While it is important for both preservice and in-service classroom teachers to know how best to support students with interrupted education, it is even more critical for bilingual and TESOL professionals to understand the causes of interrupted schooling and know how best to help students make up for the gaps in their education. These teachers will be on the front lines in working with SLIFE and often are the only educators in the buildings who represent their students with and for their colleagues: front office staff, counselors, nurses, administrators, among others. The new TESOL/CAEP standards, adopted in 2019 for preparing teachers to work in second language classrooms, have only one component that relates to students with interrupted education. Under Standard 2: English language learners in the sociocultural context:

Candidates demonstrate and apply knowledge of the impact of dynamic academic, personal, familial, cultural, social, and sociopolitical contexts on the education and language acquisition of ELLs as supported by research and theories. Candidates investigate the academic and personal characteristics of each ELL, as well as family circumstances and literacy practices, to develop individualized, effective instructional and assessment for their ELLs. Candidates recognize how educator identity, role, culture, and biases impact the interpretation of ELLs' strengths and needs.

Component 2c. Candidates devise and implement methods to understand each ELL's academic characteristics, including background knowledge, *educational history*, and current performance data, to develop effective instructional and assessment practices for their ELLs (TESOL, 2019, p. 8).

Without specifically referring to the term SIFE or SLIFE, this component of Standard 2 does expect new teachers to consider the educational experiences of a student when making instructional decisions. This is the first time that the standards for pre-service TESOL teachers have included this expectation in the United States.

What Is the Role of Newcomer Programs for SLIFE?

One common proposal for supporting SLIFE learners when they first arrive is through a Newcomer Program. The first comprehensive study of Newcomer Programs in the United States was conducted by Deborah Short and Beverly Boyson through the Center for Applied Linguistics (CAL) in 2004 and a follow-up study was published in 2012 (Short & Boyson, 2004, 2012). The second study (Short & Boyson, 2012) is available for free download from the CAL website. Both studies looked at what constitutes a newcomer program, common characteristics of newcomer programs, and provided case studies of programs across the country. In addition, they also looked at newcomer programs which were as simple as one class a day for new arrivals or as complex as an entire school designed specifically for newcomers. Both studies pointed out the critical role of literacy development for the

many students who enter newcomer programs with limited first language literacy. Furthermore, they found many programs that offered literacy development in both the native language and English and others that focused primarily on English language arts. The second configuration occurred most often when the students were an extremely mixed group by language and culture, when the students came from language backgrounds in which material and trained teachers were difficult to find, or when the state required English-only instruction.

In 2011, *How to Design and Implement a Newcomer Program* had a chapter dedicated to students with limited formal schooling. The first sentence of the chapter reads, “One of the reasons for the dramatic increase in newcomer programs in the past decade is the high percentage of immigrants who are coming with little or no previous education and often extremely limited literacy in the home language” (Custodio, 2011, p. 35). Later in the chapter, a rationale for the use of newcomer programs for SLIFE is provided. It is the belief of the author that often SLIFE benefit from a newcomer program because it “simultaneously develops the basics of literacy and numeracy skills, exposes them [SLIFE] to the foundation of science and social studies concepts, and provides a general orientation to the school environment, all of which involves an intensive commitment of time and personnel” (Custodio, 2011, p. 37).

The need for special programming for students with gaps in their prior schooling is also mentioned in the United States Department of Education English learner Tool Kit, updated in 2015. The U.S. Department of Education states in their toolkit that in order to achieve integration into the American culture and society—and into American schools in particular—newcomer students and their families need myriad forms of support from multiple sources. Newcomers and their families have four basic needs, each of which are discussed in this toolkit in the following chapters:

1. A welcoming environment (Chap. 3)
2. High-quality academic programs designed to meet the academic and language development needs of newcomer students (Chap. 4)
3. Social-emotional support and skills development to be successful in school and beyond (Chap. 5)
4. Encouragement and support to engage in the education process (Chap. 6)

By recognizing these four needs and developing strategies to meet them, schools can help newcomers build the necessary foundation to thrive both socially and emotionally and to achieve academic success.

The toolkit suggests that newcomer programs are one method for supporting new arrivals. The toolkit recommends that a school or school district include in their newcomer programming a specific course or courses for students with interrupted formal education. For example, they mention that a school could develop a separate literacy course for students with interrupted educational backgrounds if the program has both preliterate and literate newcomers (page 11 of Chap. 3). Many SLIFE students will also need sheltered courses in the content areas such as Algebra, U.S. History, or Chemistry. A sheltered class is one in which the teacher is specially trained to support English learners and in which the lesson is delivered with the

unique needs of ELs in mind, such as front-loading new vocabulary, a heavy use of visuals, and hands-on activities. There are a number of newcomer schools across the United States who have joined together to create the Internationals Network for Public Schools. Information about this Network can be found at international-snps.org.

What Common Information Should Be Covered in Pre-service Teacher Preparation Coursework?

An informal survey of public-school teachers conducted by one of the authors of this chapter, Custodio, contributed to the creation of a list of five recommendations for what they think pre-service teachers should know about working with English learners upon graduation from their teacher preparation programs.

Recommendation 1: Basic second language acquisition

- Familiarity with Jim Cummins' studies on how long it takes to develop proficiency in a new language, including the idea of basic interpersonal communication skills (BICS) which comes within about two years and cognitive academic language proficiency (CALP) which can take seven years or more
- The idea that students come with knowledge of how language works, including the value of cognates
- Understanding the stages of language proficiency progression and how to adjust instruction for students at each level

Recommendation 2: Lesson preparation and delivery strategies and skills

- Benefits and drawbacks of use of first language (L1) in classrooms and for accessing academic information
- Tips for teaching reading to English learners
- The importance of visuals and repetition
- Knowledge on how to differentiate instruction and assessment
- Basic training in the sheltered instruction observation protocol (SIOP) method (a lesson delivery model developed by Short, Echevarria, and Vogt, first published in 2000)
- How to use scaffolding with students in various stages of second language (L2) development
- The value of front-loading vocabulary

Recommendation 3: Culture and its role in language development and how to incorporate culture in lessons

Recommendation 4: Family engagement and how to best involve parents, including the problems of cultural dissonance with parents

Recommendation 5: Specific knowledge of how best to work with SLIFE learners

- Knowledge of which students are most likely to have interrupted education
- Knowledge of how trauma affects ELs and how best to support students with trauma-backgrounds
- Knowledge of how to develop basic literacy and numeracy skills for SLIFE
- Knowledge of how to build background knowledge and content knowledge simultaneously

How Can Local and State Education Agencies Adapt to Better Support Students with Interrupted Education?

Since it is obvious from the studies conducted on teacher preparation and from the limited information coming from state education agencies, it is up to the local school districts to find ways to support SLIFE. So, what can the local schools and school districts do? Where do they start? The NEA Brief on SIFE (NEA, 2011) mentioned above lists the following six recommendations for states and school districts to increase support for students with academic gaps:

1. Request states to add questions about type and amount of previous schooling on intake documents/home language surveys
2. Request states to add preparation to work with students who have limited prior schooling to pre-service coursework and teacher preparation standards
3. Encourage (or demand!) state and local education agencies to provide the necessary professional development for current educators to know the best practices for working with students with interrupted education
4. Request states to make provisions for exemptions or accommodations for SLIFE students in state-mandated assessments
5. Push textbook companies to create more resources for helping SLIFE students close the gap in content and literacy courses
6. Encourage members of the communities who are the most likely to have students with interrupted education to become teachers, increasing the diversity of the teaching force and allowing students from all languages and cultures to see their faces mirrored in the faces of their teachers. This can be done by some form of “Grow Your Own” programming within school districts in partnerships with state agencies or local universities, or with the assistance of federal grants.

Another comprehensive list of suggestions for supporting SLIFE was compiled by Kristina Robertson and Susan Lafond (n.d.) in an article “How to support students with interrupted formal education (SIFEs)” published on the colorincolorado.org website. Many of their ideas have already been mentioned earlier in this chapter, but they also included some ideas that have not yet been discussed. For example, Robertson and Lafond (n.d.) discuss why it is important that schools build supportive environments that respond to the immediate social, cultural, and linguistic needs of immigrant adolescents with limited schooling. The critical nature of this aspect

of SLIFE support is covered in a recently published book by the authors of this chapter (Custodio & O’Loughlin, 2020).

Robertson and Lafond (n.d.) also suggest creating collaboration models across high school academic departments to support simultaneous linguistic and academic development and allow flexible scheduling for students who must work or have childcare issues, allowing them to come later or leave earlier than typical students. We must change the mindset that students must conform to how high school has always been configured and find more ways to make school fit the needs of the students, not the staff. Because two-thirds of all SLIFE are found at the secondary level, these provisions are especially important (Potochnick, 2018).

Since academic gaps are one of the defining characteristics of SLIFE, it is important that schools and school districts consider how standards and the curriculum can be adapted so that students with interrupted schooling can learn critical material in a way that is effective, accessible, and age-appropriate. As an important note, the authors of this chapter would like to recognize that organizations such as the Internationals Network of Public Schools mentioned above are advocating for extended graduation time for new arrivals, especially those with interrupted education, and also that consideration be given to schools with large numbers of new arrivals when rating a school based on mandated assessments. Advocating at both the state and national level is necessary for students to receive the extra time that they will require to make up for the interrupted schooling.

Finally, we, Custodio and O’Loughlin, believe that educators need to think beyond the walls of the school. Partnerships with local businesses, higher education and adult education programs can provide the funding, personnel, and political support necessary to allow creative and supportive environments SLIFE need.

For Teachers Already Serving in the Classroom, What Topics Should Be Included in Workshops and Other Professional Development Opportunities to Best Equip Them for Assisting Their SLIFE?

Robertson and Lafond (n.d.) continue in their article noted above with a list of what teachers need to know and be able to do as they work with SLIFE. This list covers what areas of second language acquisition and pedagogy should be covered when training in-service teachers in best practices for English learners with interrupted education.

- How to use either formal or informal assessments to determine what students already know and where to begin instruction in each subject
- Training in the use of visuals, adapted texts, hands-on activities, and other strategies that are not print heavy to introduce a new topic or to help students understand new concepts

- Vocabulary development strategies such as cognates, front-loading, word banks, multiple meaning words, and frequent repetition
- How to maximize the use of cooperative grouping for peer assistance, informal and formal language development, and practice in the four domains of language (speaking, listening, reading, and writing)
- The use of oral/body language comprehension checks (such as thumbs up) to determine the level of understanding
- When and how to best utilize the ELs' first language to allow students to be successful
- Rewarding success frequently to encourage students who feel frustrated and left behind

It is important to remember that working with SLIFE will often require creativity and perhaps extra work on the part of the teacher. Teachers cannot assume that the students have been exposed to the lesson topic of the day. In most classes, teachers will find some students with limited background on a subject, and other students with very little or no previous exposure to it. It may mean finding video clips, picture books, or the use of the student's first language to spark recognition or build a foundation for the topic. This "does not mean that successful SLIFE teachers 'dumb down' or 'water down' their lessons. It means that they utilize a broad repertoire of strategies and techniques to meet the myriad needs of SLIFE and to engage and motivate them in school learning" (DeCapua et al., 2020, p. 86).

The National Staff Development Council, now known as Learning Forward, recommends that creating learning communities of mainstream teachers is one way to increase knowledge of and empathy for English learners. (NSDC, 2001). Ballantyne, et al, suggest that these teacher teams include people with expertise in best practices for English learners, including university faculty who will in turn use this information to improve teacher preparation programs (Ballantyne et al., 2008). Professional development has been moving away from "one and done" workshops and focusing instead on long-term, practice-oriented models. One way to accomplish real change is through "repeated cycles of high-quality learning, opportunities for teachers to safely practice new strategies in a supportive environment, observations by and feedback from principals and colleagues, and ongoing professional reading and discussions about effective strategies for English learners" (Nelson, 2019, p. 3).

How Can We Prepare Educators to Support SLIFE with Trauma?

In addition to supporting SLIFE students with their academic development, educators must also be familiar with how best to meet the socio-emotional needs of their students with interrupted education. While the number of SLIFE students who come with traumatic backgrounds is not known, the reasons for their migration and the situations in which they find themselves upon arrival indicate that the percentage

must be high. In Potochnick (2018), she found that about 44% of SLIFE arriving in the United States come from Mexico and Central America (Potochnick, 2018). Many of the rest of the students in her study were from war-torn areas and may have spent several years in refugee camps.

It can be assumed that some arriving SLIFE are girls who have been denied equal access to education, since a study published by The United Nations Children's Fund stated that less than half of all girls in rural areas around the world attend secondary school (UNICEF, 2007). These traumatic early experiences continue to affect students after their enrollment in U.S. schools. For many students, their time in school provides calm and structure in an often-chaotic existence. Caring and supportive teachers may be crucial to their healing process. Preparing both preservice and in-service teachers to watch for symptoms of trauma and teaching them when to refer students for more intense intervention should also be part of the training of all TESOL/bilingual professionals (Birman, 2002; Custodio & O'Loughlin, 2020; Pentón Herrera, 2020).

Conclusion

As the population of English learners continues to grow, it is clear that educators, both preservice and in-service, must be trained to address the variety of needs of all English learners. This applies to those having strong native-language backgrounds as well as those with limited and/or interrupted educations, both in mainstream classrooms and/or in specially designed ESL programs. Creating the conditions for optimal language and content learning should include a common understanding of second language acquisition and learning, the ability to differentiate effective instruction and assessment, basic knowledge of program implementation tools, and how to find and utilize appropriate resources for this diverse population of learners. It is our desire that with time all future educators will complete their pre-service training with a full toolbelt and a heart for our English learners.

Reflection Questions

1. What are the minimum licensing requirements in your state or country for teaching English learners?
2. Are there any courses or course modules included in your licensing requirements for working with SLIFE? Describe.
3. What professional development has your school district provided for working with SLIFE? Do all teachers receive some professional development or only bilingual or ESL/ELD/EFL educators? What aspects of working with SLIFE do you feel needs more attention?

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Chapter 8

Making Space for Students with Limited or Interrupted Formal Education in Teacher Education



Andrea DeCapua and Helaine W. Marshall

Abstract Students with Limited or Interrupted Formal Education (SLIFE), like all ELs, need to learn the language of their host country. In addition, SLIFE must develop age-appropriate literacy and content knowledge. Equally important, and often overlooked, SLIFE have not formed an identity as a learner in a formal educational setting, and do not know how to “do school,” ranging from knowing where to put their name on a paper to how to behave and participate in class. A significant aspect of learning school culture is being able to engage in school-based tasks, which are, for the most part, decontextualized, and rely on a mastery of their associated ways of thinking or ‘academic ways of thinking.’ In the same way that ‘just good teaching’ for general population students is not enough for ELs because it does not recognize linguistic and cultural diversity (de Jong & Harper. *Teach Educ Q* 32(2):101–124, 2005), good teaching for ELs does not necessarily deliver the additional literacy, content, and school culture basics that SLIFE require. This poses a dilemma for teacher educators who rarely include such curriculum or strategies in their programs. This chapter explores how teacher educators can address the unique needs of SLIFE by targeting differences rooted in their prior learning experiences, and by teaching from a cultural dissonance, rather than from a deficiency perspective. As a result, teacher candidates will be better prepared to work with SLIFE.

Keywords Students with limited or interrupted formal education · SLIFE · TESOL · Teacher preparation · Pedagogy · Low-literacy · Low-educated

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Introduction

The number of refugees and migrants has been rapidly growing worldwide as a result of wars, civil strife, religious and political persecution, and natural disasters. By the end of 2020, approximately 82.4 million people were forcibly displaced (UNHCR, 2021), posing significant challenges in receiving countries having to serve a major surge of children and adolescents in their school systems. Among these challenges is the issue of how much and what type of prior education the new entrants had before arriving in their host country. Some may have had age-appropriate education and need to ‘merely’ learn a new language to participate actively in school. Many, however, arrive not having experienced sufficient schooling. In some cases, they never had opportunities to attend school at all. Others may have had their schooling interrupted over long periods, resulting in extensive gaps in learning. Still others may have attended schools consistently but in schools that did not offer the same type of instruction or curriculum as that of their host country, i.e., schools that provided relatively little in terms of promoting reading and writing abilities and academic knowledge. This population of migrants and refugees enters formal classrooms not only needing to learn the language of their host country but also, and even more importantly, without age-appropriate content knowledge and print literacy skills, and without having formed an identity as a learner in a formal educational setting (DeCapua et al., 2009).

Because of their prior learning experiences outside that of formal education, students with limited or interrupted formal education (SLIFE) have developed a different learning paradigm from that of formal education, causing them—and their teachers—to encounter *cultural dissonance*. This cultural dissonance is the sense of confusion, bewilderment, and anxiety experienced when people find themselves confronted by different, perhaps even conflicting, cultural ways of being and doing (DeCapua & Marshall, 2011; Marshall & DeCapua, 2013). SLIFE encounter cultural dissonance in that the nature, needs, and expectations of formal education are alien to them; the classroom, the school, the behaviors are bewildering and confusing. For teachers, there also is a sense of cultural dissonance because SLIFE have needs outside their usual area of expertise and often fail to respond to widely accepted best teaching practices. And yet, although SLIFE have significantly different and greater needs than other English learners (ELs), they are frequently unidentified, rarely disaggregated from other ELs, and expected to engage in school in the same way as their non-SLIFE counterparts. And, when SLIFE are not able to do so, they are judged from a deficit perspective, i.e., what they should be able to do, just like their peers (Bal & Arzubiaga, 2014; Li & Grineva, 2017).

This deficit perspective is reinforced by the fact that there has been little awareness of SLIFE either in teacher preparation programs or in teacher training materials, leaving current and future teachers ill-prepared to understand or serve their needs (Hilburn, 2014; Jowett, 2020; Levi, 2019; Lucas & Villegas, 2011). Therefore, SLIFE are often isolated in classrooms, working with texts and materials that are inappropriate and/or inadequate and are typically intended for remediation or are

not age-appropriate (Estrada, 2014; Marshall et al., 2010; Nykiel-Herbert, 2010; Pentón Herrera, 2018; Roy & Roxas, 2011). Moreover, SLIFE are more likely to be taught by uncertified teachers, or teachers assigned to teach in areas for which they are not certified (Hos et al., 2019), and many of whom, regardless of certification or licensure, are unprepared to work with ELs, particularly SLIFE (Boone, 2013; Njue & Retish, 2010).

The purpose of this chapter is to familiarize teacher educators with SLIFE and to illustrate how their unique needs are rooted in their prior learning experiences, thereby preparing teacher educators to avoid a deficit perspective of SLIFE. Further, this chapter will outline an alternative stance, applicable not only to SLIFE but to all marginalized groups of learners, of ‘*creating fertile spaces*’ for learning by establishing learning environments that build on their strengths to enable them to grow and develop intellectually (DeCapua & Marshall, 2015).

Understanding Learning Paradigms

SLIFE are a heterogeneous group of learners coming from all regions of the globe with diverse languages, religions, beliefs, and cultures. This group includes all ages as well; there are many adult migrants and refugees who fall into this category and are commonly referred to by the term LESLLA (Literacy Education and Second Language Learning for Adults) learners.¹ What all SLIFE share is that their experiences outside of formal classrooms have led to a different *learning paradigm* than that of those with age-appropriate formal education. We understand a learning paradigm as referring to how people prefer to receive, transmit, process, and organize information and knowledge (See e.g., DeCapua & Marshall, 2011; DeCapua et al., 2020; Marshall & DeCapua, 2013). A learning paradigm is the result of how learning is conceived of; in the case of formal education, learning takes place through the written word. Literacy is both central and essential to access and transmit knowledge and information, which are presented, practiced, and assessed through print, whether written or digital texts.

Literacy, beyond basic decoding skills, develops specific cognitive pathways (Ardila et al., 2010; Cole, 2005; Kosmidis, 2018). These cognitive pathways, or ‘academic ways of thinking’ are logical modes of thinking based on scientific conventions (Flynn, 2007) and formal syllogistic reasoning (Olson & Torrence, 1996), and disconnected from lived experiences (Abadzi, 2003; Luria, 1976). These academic ways of thinking include, to name a few, comparison and contrast, categorization, analysis, and defining. Learning and mastery of these ways of thinking are practiced and demonstrated through decontextualized, literacy-based tasks, such as filling in graphic organizers and charts or responding to multiple-choice questions and short answer questions (DeCapua, 2019; DeCapua et al., 2020). For example,

¹The term SLIFE as used in this chapter will be understood to include LESLLA learners.

completing a chart may demand classifying items based on abstract, shared characteristics; answering a short answer question may require analyzing a short text or word problem. This combination of decontextualized tasks and underlying ways of thinking form the majority of school-based learning activities. Without the skill set that includes them, SLIFE are unlikely to do well in school.

Another defining characteristic of the learning paradigm of formal education is the emphasis on independent learning and individual effort, merit, and achievement (Covarrubias et al., 2016; Dávila, 2012). As students advance through formal education, they acquire identities as learners who understand the routines, demands, and expectations of school. They become increasingly capable of engaging with content and materials independently. Regardless of how much collaborative or cooperative work may be encouraged in the classroom, students must still individually demonstrate their learning on assessments, whether they be teacher-created quizzes, exams, or mandated standardized tests. Group work is regarded as a support (or scaffold) for learning but neither as essential to learning nor as part of assessment. The learning paradigm of formal education is also very much future-oriented, that is, students learn in order to prepare for the next chapter, next week's test, the next course or level, or for life after school (DeCapua & Marshall, 2011; Marshall & DeCapua, 2013).

For SLIFE, this is an alien paradigm. They come from a world far removed from one dominated by print, and by the highly structured and organized system of learning and thought patterns pervasive in formal education. The learning experiences of SLIFE have been primarily situated in daily life within family and community in which learning is focused on basic physiological and safety needs and centered on immediately relevant, practical knowledge applied in real-world settings, such as the home, the farm, construction, or in the peddling of goods (Lancy et al., 2010; Paradise & Rogoff, 2009). Knowledge and skills are developed and demonstrated through taking part in pragmatic tasks that have concrete, visible results in these real-world settings, such as a meal, a crop, or money (Rogoff, 2014). Such learning is highly experiential, task-based, and communal; people contribute together to accomplish that which needs to be done and learning follows mentoring models (Maynard & Greenfield, 2005). Novice learners observe, imitate, and receive feedback, often in the form of further demonstration, from mentors in a cycle that repeats until tasks or skills have been mastered (DeCapua & Marshall, 2015).

Moreover, SLIFE generally come from cultures that are collectivistic, i.e., cultures in which the focus is less on the individual than on how each person is part of a whole, part of a group in which members act for the better good of everyone (Triandis, 1995). Cooperation and collaboration are essential to meeting the needs of the group, whether this group is an extended family unit, the community, religious organization, or another cluster of people in which members feel highly connected to each other (Lambrev, 2015; Markus et al., 1997). Effort, achievement, and accomplishment are viewed as group endeavors and contributions to the success or betterment of the group. Focus on an individual's achievements or accomplishments and self-aggrandizement are not the norm (Kusserow, 2009).

Literacy practices of any kind play little, if any, role in this paradigm of learning; oral transmission is the primary mode for information and knowledge exchange. Many SLIFE, particularly those with heavily interrupted schooling, have minimal literacy skills. Even when SLIFE do have some literacy skills, the written word is not a primary source of information. Turning to print for information and knowledge is not their first or second reaction. Instead, SLIFE will choose the oral mode, turning to someone they know and trust for explanation, direction, clarification, and counsel. Scaffolds considered the most basic of best practices, such as visuals, rest upon the assumption of literacy. Pictures, drawings, and figures are mysterious puzzles to those with no or minimal literacy, regardless of cultural background, because they require the ability to interpret abstract representations of the real world, a skill learned through the development of literacy (Arbuckle, 2004; Cornwall, 1992; Hvitfeldt, 1985). Even iconic and 'culturally neutral' visual representations may have no meaning to SLIFE. A drawing of a pen on a worksheet might be interpreted as a fish or insect, or as nothing at all (Altherr Flores, 2017; Dowse & Ehlers, 2003).

These radically different learning experiences have led to the development of different cognitive pathways and different ways of understanding and interpreting the world than those fostered through participation in formal education. In short, the learning paradigm of SLIFE is not that of formal education, so that when SLIFE are in our classrooms, the result is cultural dissonance. They are not used to the centrality of literacy, the reliance upon print, the emphasis on individual achievement and accountability, the distancing of self and the real-world from school knowledge, nor to the habits, the ways of thinking, or even the learning activities expected in formal education (DeCapua, 2019; DeCapua et al., 2020). Teachers evaluate SLIFE from the perspective of the paradigm of formal education, leading them to see SLIFE as 'lacking' or 'deficient' or 'incapable,' rather than realizing that these students are not the same as other ELs and that traditional pedagogies do not address their specific needs as learners (Bal & Arzubiaiga, 2014; Borrero et al., 2013). Many widely accepted best pedagogical practices are not appropriate for teaching SLIFE because they have been developed for learners who are ready to participate in literacy-based learning and can do so on an individual basis.

We propose that teacher educators themselves must become agents of change to foster equitable access to formal education for SLIFE. Doing so entails that teacher educators (1) realize that SLIFE are different from other ELs; (2) understand that SLIFE come with significantly different ways of learning; and (3) convey to the students in their programs how these factors will impact choices and implementation of pedagogical practices. In the same way that 'just good teaching' for general population students is not enough for ELs because it does not recognize linguistic and cultural diversity (de Jong & Harper, 2005), good teaching for ELs does not necessarily deliver the additional literacy, content, and school culture basics that SLIFE require (DeCapua & Marshall, 2011).

Equity for ELs is often viewed as a goal that educators must strive toward by promoting high quality, inclusive educational experiences that ensure access to and delivery of rigorous curricula with linguistic and cultural scaffolding. Although even this goal is sadly lacking in many schools, in those that allegedly do promote

equity, they too often ignore or only pay lip service to the fact that prevailing curricula, texts, and learning standards embody and convey what a society deems worth knowing and what is worthwhile (Goodwin, 2010), without necessarily including the knowledge, voices, and realities of culturally and linguistically marginalized learners (Fruja Amthor & Roxas, 2016; Paris & Alim, 2014). An understanding of the learning paradigm of SLIFE is critical. Otherwise, even the best pedagogical practices and/or instructional technology lead to mindless memorization, development of guessing skills rather than the acquisition of knowledge, learning misdirected as remediation, and ultimately, disengagement and a higher likelihood of eventually dropping out (DeCapua & Marshall, 2015; Vanek, 2017).

Thus, it behooves teacher educators to become cognizant of SLIFE, who they are, what makes them different from other ELs, and what pedagogy is appropriate to address their needs (DeCapua et al., 2020). Without this, teacher educators are doing a double disservice; first, they are not appropriately and adequately preparing the students in their teacher preparation programs for working successfully with SLIFE. And second, by not preparing their students, teacher educators perpetuate a deficit perspective when SLIFE do not respond to the ‘good teaching’ of classroom teachers trained in their programs.

Changing Mindsets

Teachers’ practices are influenced by their mindsets and beliefs, instrumental in affecting how they perceive and serve their students (Milner, 2010; Straubhaar et al., 2019); therefore, teacher educators must act as change agents to shift the mindsets of the students in their courses away from deficit perspectives. When teachers with growth mindsets rather than fixed mindsets encounter students who are different, they view them not as ‘less capable’ but rather as challenges to further develop and hone their own pedagogical skills (Dweck, 2015). By transcending conventional beliefs about learning and teaching, such teachers become capable of addressing the cultural dissonance SLIFE face.

The first step is for teacher educators to work with the students in their teacher preparation courses towards adopting a new stance vis-à-vis their role as classroom teachers. This entails a shift towards viewing the role of the teacher as one of *creating fertile spaces* for teaching and learning and moving away from primarily or exclusively focusing on the delivery of instruction, covering curriculum, or meeting standards, or as Hostetler (2010) expressed, “an obsession for method, technique, and progress” (p. 413).

These spaces allow SLIFE to negotiate and construct new, fluid ethnolinguistic identities that accept, value, and accommodate the new and the old (García & Wei, 2014). They are fertile spaces because they provide SLIFE with a sense of safety and encouragement where they are not looked down upon, where they feel valued as persons and as learners, and where they can draw on each other and their teachers for both academic and socioemotional support as they struggle with the demands

and expectations of formal education. These affirming fertile spaces lead to greater engagement, motivation, and success (Bigelow, 2011; Cooper, 2012). When teachers internalize the mindset of ‘SLIFE have potential’ rather than ‘SLIFE are deficient,’ they are positioned to help SLIFE develop the knowledge and skills to access the curriculum, instruction, and assessment essential for their ultimate school achievement. Cultivating fertile learning spaces builds on the funds of knowledge (González et al., 2005; Moll et al., 1992), the cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986, 1991), and the potential of SLIFE.

Given the need to meet the demands of high stakes testing, there has been a move toward serving ELs using commercially packaged programs or scripted curricula (Reeves, 2010; Sleeter & Carmona, 2017). Such curricula, or ‘toolkits,’ are generally not effective with SLIFE who require significantly different approaches. Educators need a pedagogical model that moves beyond current thinking about pedagogy for ELs and that is situated firmly upon the tenets of culturally responsive teaching (Gay, 2018).

Our culturally responsive instructional model, the Mutually Adaptive Learning Paradigm® or MALP®, has been intentionally designed to mitigate cultural dissonance and transition SLIFE to the demands and expectations of formal education (see, e.g., DeCapua & Marshall, 2011; DeCapua, 2016; DeCapua et al., 2020; Marshall, 1994, 1998; Marshall & DeCapua, 2013). With this model, teachers create fertile spaces that encourage growth and provide enriched learning so that SLIFE become self-empowered to reach their potential and can take ownership of their school experience.

In brief, MALP takes elements of the SLIFE learning paradigm and elements of the school learning paradigm to create a new one, resulting in a ‘mutually adaptive’ paradigm. The key lies in which elements are brought in from each of the two paradigms to create a successful blend. The first step in understanding the model is to break down a learning paradigm into three components: conditions for learning, processes for learning, and activities for learning.

Conditions for learning refer to those elements that must be present in order for students to feel that they truly belong in the classroom. For SLIFE, the two most essential conditions for learning are incorporating material immediately relevant to their lives and creating a sense of interconnectedness or classroom community. When implementing MALP, these two conditions are not only present, but prominent.

Processes for learning pertain to the ways in which people prefer to access and transmit information, knowledge, and skills. For SLIFE the preferred processes are oral transmission and group responsibility; in the learning paradigm of formal education, in contrast, they are the written word and individual accountability. To help transition SLIFE to formal education, teachers using MALP consistently and systematically combine the processes for learning from both paradigms.

Activities for learning are the tasks and their underlying ways of thinking that learners engage in to build and demonstrate mastery. In informal ways of learning, these are pragmatic tasks taking place within people’s lived sociocultural contexts. In formal education, these are decontextualized literacy-based school tasks with

associated academic ways of thinking. To transition SLIFE to these significantly different tasks and unfamiliar ways of thinking, teachers embed tasks and ways of thinking in known content and experiences and incorporate language familiar to the students. This familiar language consists of vocabulary and structures students have learned in the new language or can be an opportunity for students to engage in trans-languaging, i.e., using any language in their repertoire (García & Wei, 2014).

MALP is not only culturally responsive but also culturally sustaining in multiple ways. Teachers accept SLIFE conditions for learning—immediate relevance and interconnectedness. They intentionally incorporate and honor SLIFE cultural traditions of oral transmission and shared responsibility. And finally, by ensuring that the new schemata—school tasks and academic ways of thinking—are initially introduced and practiced through language and content familiar to SLIFE, teachers value the funds of knowledge, cultural capital, and linguistic resources that these students bring to the classroom. Thus, the potential of SLIFE is recognized and cultural dissonance reduced.

MALP is also transformative (DeCapua et al., 2018). By explicitly contrasting the learning paradigms of SLIFE and that of formal education, MALP encourages teachers to identify their implicit but fundamental assumptions about teaching and learning. Teachers build awareness of how their assumptions contrast with those of SLIFE, in turn reducing their *own* cultural dissonance when encountering learners with a radically different learning paradigm. Rather than simply accepting one's assumptions about how learning should take place, the focus now becomes how to enable learning for this population, shifting teachers' mindset from deficit thinking to academic potential. With an understanding of cultural dissonance, rather than an achievement gap as central, teachers see that *difference* rather than *lack* is key.

By implementing MALP, teachers can intentionally and systematically promote culturally responsive and sustaining education because this instructional model provides a framework for evaluating what pedagogical practices will or will not be effective with SLIFE and why. The next section provides a look at how teacher educators can bring MALP into their programs.

Implementing MALP in Teacher Education Programs

In one author's teacher education program, MALP is interwoven. All teacher education students must take a course in multicultural education. In this course, MALP is introduced and students in the course are required to analyze their final project submission, a multicultural lesson, through the lens of MALP. In the teaching English to speakers of other languages (TESOL) program specifically, MALP is included in the two methods courses. In the Literacy Methods course, one option for the final project is a mini-unit incorporating MALP. In the Content Area Methods course, the culminating activity is a collaborative project in which groups design discipline-specific mini-units aligned with MALP. In their last semester, TESOL student-teachers create an original project implementing MALP as part of their

student-teaching. They select a topic personally meaningful to them outside the curriculum that they believe will resonate with the class they are teaching. They plan a three-lesson sequence incorporating all the elements of MALP and their field advisor conducts an onsite visit coinciding with one of the lessons. Additionally, the student-teachers present the projects in their weekly seminar and discuss the results.

To guide teacher educators, teachers, and administrators in implementing MALP and assessing the success of its implementation, we have created the MALP Teacher Planning Checklist, available at www.malpeducation.com. Teacher educators use the Checklist as they introduce MALP into course work throughout the teacher preparation program; they also use the Checklist when observing student-teachers in the classroom. The Checklist mirrors the three components of MALP, so that users consider and reflect on instruction to ensure that all the elements of MALP are intentionally included. In their final project, student-teachers fill out the Checklist as part of their submission.

*Yanni's Dance Project*²

Here we look closely at a MALP project completed as part of student-teaching. The final project included: (1) three lesson plans, (2) an assessment of student work, (3) the MALP Checklist, and (4) a reflection paper. Yanni was a trained English language arts teacher, studying TESOL to add it to his teaching certification. He taught in a large urban high school where he had a 10th grade class of ELs, more than half of whom were SLIFE. As an avid ballroom dancer, Yanni wanted to share his passion for dance, as well as have his students share their traditional dances with each other. This project was a resounding success, and we share it here to illustrate how a topic not traditionally considered part of the high school English curriculum can nonetheless, through the use of MALP, be rigorous, be filled with critical thinking activities, and foster familiarity with the essentials of formal education.

The unit began with a student poll asking their opinion about dancing. The hand-out showed a picture of dancers and a number line with 1 through 5 marked and sentences aligned with the numbers that expressed the corresponding feeling about dancing, e.g., for #1, "I don't like it." Each student wrote a sentence explaining why they chose the rating using "because." Then they met in groups to read and talk about their responses to the poll, after which they completed a group word splash for "dance." As each group reported on their word splash, the other groups checked off the words they also had on theirs. Subsequently, the class watched two dance videos representing the cultures of the two largest groups of students in the class, the Bhangra, a Punjabi dance, and the Bachata, a Dominican dance. Because these two groups rarely intermingled, Yanni wanted to construct learning activities that encouraged their interaction. While watching the videos, Yanni paused to name

²Thanks to Yiannis (Yanni) Philippopoulos for permission to use this example.

dance movements, orally and in writing, e.g., *jump*, *turn*, *spin*. He had the students make notes of what they noticed about each of the dances, using words from the wall splashes, or other words they knew. Afterwards, students shared their notes orally, with Yanni providing assistance and clarification as needed.

Next, Yanni taught a mini-lesson on the comparative, starting with photos of different ice cream flavors and then moving to dance styles. When students were comfortable with the comparative, Yanni paired them, one who knew the Bhangra and one who knew the Bachata, to compare the two dances. To support their discussion, Yanni introduced new descriptive words, such as *romantic* and *energetic*. The partners identified the similarities and differences between the two dances, created a Venn Diagram, and wrote sentences using vocabulary and structures from the grammar mini-lesson and the dance vocabulary.

Yanni then introduced an unfamiliar Georgian folk dance. The students watched a video of the dance and read a short passage describing it. Following the video and the reading, the students answered written questions about the Georgian dance, with oral support from the teacher or fellow students as needed.

For the next step, students chose either the Bhangra or the Bachata and worked independently to list the movements and characteristics of that dance and the Georgian dance on a graphic organizer and to write sentences comparing them. After finishing, they shared their results with a partner.

On the last day of the project, the students formed groups, based on the dance they wanted to present to the class. The group worked together to plan their presentation, which included a demonstration, a narration about the dance movements and characteristics, along with an explanation of specific ways in which this dance was similar to or different from the other dances the class had studied together. The final activity was an individual paragraph in which each student selected two dances to compare and contrast following a set of criteria provided by Yanni.

Sample Student Paragraph

Bachata and Georgian dance both have spins but Georgian dance has more than Bachata does. Georgian dance is really aggressive. Otherwise Bachata is romantic Bachata has not arm waving. Georgian dance has arm waving but it doesn't have a lot. Georgian dance has more kicks than Bachata does.

In the MALP Checklist, Yanni showed how his dance unit aligned with the model:

- **Immediate Relevance:** *Dances selected for this project are those from the two major cultures represented in the class: Dominican and Punjabi.*
- **Interconnectedness:** *Students shared their feelings and opinions about dance in general and about the two cultural dances – deepening their non-school relationships.*
- **Shared responsibility with individual accountability:** *Students collaboratively filled out the graphic organizer on dance; each student had to contribute*

at least some terms to the organizer. Students shared the video experience of the two dances with each other, but each had to individually fill out the Venn Diagram.

- **Scaffolding the written word through oral interaction:** *Oral brainstorming preceded writing the terms on the word splash and the Venn Diagram; students listened to other students and groups and then checked, by reading, the terms they heard them use.*
- **Academic ways of thinking with familiar language and content:** *The topic for comparison and contrast was dance—something universal—and the specific dances used in the lesson were culturally familiar, each of them to half of the class.*
- **Decontextualized tasks to build and demonstrate mastery:** *Students used graphic organizers—word splash and Venn Diagram—to analyze and present ideas rather than simply listing them, showing concept development.*

As this sample MALP project illustrates, choosing a topic of high interest and planning and implementation aligned with the MALP model to produce a meaningful and worthwhile assignment for student-teachers as well as a valuable learning experience for SLIFE.

Conclusion

With the increase in this sub-population of ELs in programs around the globe, it is incumbent upon teacher educators to address the issues teachers face in meeting the cognitive and affective needs of SLIFE and to do this in a culturally responsive and sustaining manner. In this chapter, we have argued that teacher education programs must include SLIFE in their course work and have shown how this can be done. We have recommended that teacher educators accomplish this through a three-pronged approach, providing students with (1) background knowledge about SLIFE; (2) a model for effectively teaching SLIFE; and (3) an opportunity to create lessons or projects specifically designed for SLIFE. In this way, teacher education programs can be responsive to changing demographics and resourceful in preparing their teacher candidates for the students they are likely to see in their classrooms.

Reflection Questions

1. How have SLIFE been addressed in your teacher education program? If this population has not been included in the curriculum, how might this be done going forward? You can start, for instance, by reviewing your own course materials and identifying places in the syllabi where to include information and/or activities that directly target meeting the needs of SLIFE. After this step, consider

- what suggestions you could offer your colleagues who teach other TESOL courses.
2. In your observation of student-teachers in the field, have you noticed the presence of SLIFE as described here? Has your perspective on SLIFE shifted as a result of reading this chapter? If so, how? Based on your observations, what do you think should be included in teacher education programs, whether TESOL or other?
 3. What do student-teachers tell you about their experience of working with SLIFE in schools? What are the needs of these student-teachers?

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Chapter 9

Transforming ESL Pedagogies: A Teacher's Journey from Subject-Centered to Student-Centered Pedagogy When Teaching Print Literacy to SLIFE



Stephanie Ledger and M. Kristiina Montero

Abstract In recent years, there has been a large influx of refugees into resettlement countries worldwide. In Canada, this displaced population includes many adolescent students with limited or interrupted formal education (SLIFE). Consequently, secondary school teachers are challenged to meet the print literacy needs of SLIFE within traditional English as a second language (ESL) instructional settings. Despite evidence that suggests the benefits of modified early literacy instructional methods to advance SLIFE print literacy development, many ESL and English literacy development (ELD) secondary school teachers are reluctant to shift their practices from traditional ESL to early literacy pedagogies. Barriers include teachers' attitudes about traditional ESL instructional practices, teachers' attitudes about their preparedness to teach SLIFE, teachers' attitudes about SLIFE, and teachers' attitudes about their role as educators of SLIFE. Through narrative, this chapter follows a teacher's journey toward a student-centered professional knowledge base within an ELD program rooted in early literacy pedagogy. The teacher's journey highlights how background experiences influence learning, the importance of data-informed and student-centered instructional practices, and how print literacy can empower students to understand the complexities of their realities. These factors influenced the teacher's sense of self-efficacy and her conceptions of SLIFE leading her to shift from a curriculum-centered, traditional ESL pedagogy to one that embraced early literacy instructional practices and became more student-centered.

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As a young girl, Sara knew she was destined to become a teacher someday. She would set up a classroom in her grandmother's walk-in closet, complete with a chalkboard and easel, and proceed to instruct a compliant lineup of stuffed animals. "They were a diverse group of stuffed animals!" Sara, who now teaches adolescent English Learners (ELs) from a broad range of cultural, linguistic, and educational backgrounds, added jokingly. Sara enjoyed school as a child and described herself as a "conscientious and academically-minded student." She defined her elementary and secondary education as "traditional," because she learned mostly through teacher-directed instruction. She believed that this instructional style suited her as a student because she "learned easily" and did not require individualized instruction to succeed academically. This educational background later presented a challenge for Sara. She prided herself in being a goal-oriented teacher with a depth of knowledge in her content-area subjects, geography, history and English (ESL). When she started working with students with a refugee background who had experienced limited or interrupted formal education, she had difficulty understanding why the students would get "stuck in one spot," despite her meticulously planned lesson. She was not sure how to help them.

Sara's reflection on her entrée into the teaching profession and work with students with limited or interrupted formal education (SLIFE) may resonate with many middle and secondary school teachers. While most teachers have experience with a diversity of learners (e.g., learning preferences, abilities), they generally have limited experience teaching students who have gaps in their formal education. War, persecution, or other human rights violations forced SLIFE to flee from their homelands to search for safety; formal education was not a high priority during exile. Because many children and youth have not had access to formal education or received a low-quality education, for example, in a refugee camp, they have not had the opportunity to develop age-commensurate print literacy abilities in their dominant language.¹ Youth, who resettle in adolescence, *and* who are preliterate, nonliterate, or semiliterate (see Florez and Terrill (2003) for definitions) have an increased risk of school attrition (Beck et al., 2012; Gunderson, 2007). Beck et al. (2012) specifically noted that the "chances of being a high school dropout increase significantly each year for children who arrive after age eight" (p. 155). Critical to school success in senior grades (9th–12th) is the ability to *read to learn* across the disciplines.

The challenge is that secondary school English as Second Language (ESL) or content-area teachers have not typically received training in early literacy theory and practice (Montero et al., 2014). Teachers generally have limited knowledge

¹We use the term *dominant language* to refer to the language(s) that a person uses as their primary mode of communication in diverse contexts. The dominant language could be a person's mother tongue, an official language of the state, or both. For example, considering the Rohingya people living in Myanmar's Rakhine State, their dominant language is Rohingya although Burmese is the state's *lingua franca*.

about youth who are simultaneously learning English as an additional language and developing their print literacy skills; teacher education rarely addresses the learning needs of SLIFE (Vinogradov & Liden, 2009). In the absence of intentional professional development, pre-service or in-service educators who teach English learners with emergent literacy skills have been forced to develop their own methods, often based on trial and error (Dooley, 2009; MacNevin, 2012; Pentón Herrera, 2021; Woods, 2009).

The general absence of content related to preliterate, nonliterate, or semiliterate SLIFE in teacher preparation programs is compounded because historically, second language acquisition research primarily focuses on participants who are formally schooled and are able to read and write in at least one language (Bigelow & Tarone, 2004; Cohan & Honigsfeld, 2017). As the education of learners with refugee backgrounds garners greater social attention and interest in research communities, research that focuses on their literacy development begins to emerge (e.g., Bigelow et al., 2017; Brown et al., 2006; Franquiz & Salinas, 2011; Montero et al., 2014; Perry, 2007, 2008; Young-Scholten, 2015).

Furthermore, awareness of the global refugee crisis is increasing. More and more people understand the stark reality that in 2019, nearly 80 million people have been forcibly displaced from their homelands and are living in exile due to war, mass violence, conflict, persecution, and human rights violations (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), 2020). The number of refugees worldwide is at an all-time high, with over 50% being children and youth under the age of 18. School-aged children and youth are quickly transitioned to schools where teachers play an essential role in supporting their successful resettlement (Hos, 2016; Stewart, 2011). It is now more critical than ever to understand how to support educators who work with this group of children and youth.

At the beginning of the chapter, we introduced you to Sara, a mid-career secondary school teacher who began teaching mainstream students and students in traditional ESL programming. Sara then transitioned to work with refugee-background students within a sheltered English Literacy Development (ELD) program. The ELD program in Ontario School District (pseudonym) was developed under the framework defined by *Ontario's K-12 Policy for English Language Learners: ESL and ELD Programs and Services* (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007). This framework explicitly recognizes the disparity in educational opportunities of students with refugee backgrounds who, because of war and mass violence, may not be positioned for success in mainstream curriculum. The ELD program aims to provide preliterate, nonliterate, or semiliterate students with developmentally, age-appropriate, and culturally sustaining (Paris & Alim, 2017) literacy programming. Such programming would give the youth a solid foundation in English print literacy development to transition successfully to a pathway toward high school graduation via mainstream programming. For more information about the policy and an explanation of student placement in the program, see Montero (2019) and for more information about the ELD program rooted in early literacy instruction, see Montero et al. (2014).

In this chapter, we share an in-depth narrative inquiry (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) of Sara's reflections as she transitioned from being a curriculum-centered to a student-centered, literacy-focused educator teaching adolescents with refugee backgrounds whose print literacy abilities were emerging. The backdrop to Sara's transformational journey was the mass migration of Syrian refugees into Canada, beginning in November 2015, that, in just over two years, saw over 40,000 Syrian refugees resettle in the country. (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2017). These years presented rapid changes and many uncertainties for schools and educators. Teachers, especially, struggled to understand how to best serve students overcoming war into their classrooms. We were particularly interested in following Sara's journey because she was a mid-career ESL teacher who was new to teaching in an ELD program rooted in early-literacy instructional methods (e.g., running records (Clay, 2000)), guided reading (Fountas & Pinnell, 1996), and literacy centers (e.g., Swartz et al., 2003). We wanted to learn about Sara's experiences, insights, and professional knowledge development while "finding her legs" working with adolescent SLIFE whose literacy skills were still emerging.

We recognized that teachers working in the ELD program struggled with feelings of low self-efficacy (Klassen et al., 2013) when working to meet the complex learning needs of students in their ELD courses. Educators noted that their feelings of low self-efficacy were rooted in (a) feeling un- or under-prepared to work with students who had gaps in their formal learning experiences; (b) feeling that they did not have the skills or knowledge to support the social-emotional and psychosocial needs of students overcoming war and dealing with various levels of trauma, and, (c) feeling that they did not have the requisite early literacy skills to support the early literacy development needs of students who had limited or no dominant language literacy abilities (e.g., Dooley, 2009; MacNevin, 2012; Miller et al., 2005; Woods, 2009).

Data Collection and Analysis

To learn from Sara, we set up a qualitative case study (Stake, 1995; Yin, 2009), which "investigates a contemporary phenomenon...in its real-world context" (Yin, 2009, p. 2). Case studies are fitting to explore individual experiences and perspectives in a bounded system (Barone, 2011). We conducted three semi-structured interviews with Sara, using an empathetic approach (Fontana & Frey, 2005) and by listening to Sara with a "third ear" (Anderson & Jack, 1991, p. 19). As explained by Anderson and Jack, we felt it was important to listen not only to what Sara articulated in her responses, but also, using inductive reasoning, to infer her meanings by what she omitted from her responses. In this fashion, we listened to Sara's words, as well as her silences. Data obtained from three open-ended, in-depth interviews were analyzed using narrative (Riessman, 1993) and thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) to discover embedded themes of Sara's understandings of her experiences.

We share compiled narratives from Sara's interviews to illustrate her transformation from being a teacher rooted in traditional ESL pedagogy to a teacher who understood the nuanced needs of preliterate, nonliterate, or semiliterate adolescent ELs with refugee backgrounds. Additionally, her story demonstrates how she adapted her teaching theory and practice to support students' academic, social-emotional, and psychosocial needs. Following the narrative, we provide an analysis of Sara's insights about teaching adolescent ELs with emergent print literacy abilities. We then provide recommendations for pre-service and in-service teacher education programs so that educators may be better prepared to teach the increasing number of adolescent ELs with significant gaps in their formal education and print literacy skills.

Sara's Story

In the following section, we present Sara's story in an interpretive narrative weaving together her insights and learnings. The headings form the guideposts for the reader to follow Sara's transformation.

Pre-Service Education Did Not Prepare Me to Teach SLIFE

Sara's pre-service teacher education left her feeling unprepared to teach refugee-background students. She explained that the focus was predominantly on subject-specific curriculum and learning theories, followed by some discussion about ELs' background. Unfortunately, Sara only learned about ELs who had age-appropriate education and dominant language literacy abilities; information about SLIFE was neither presented nor discussed. Consequently, as a new teacher, Sara could not distinguish between ELs with varying educational backgrounds, including those without formal schooling, and ELs who were literate in their dominant language. She did not know that there was a difference between ESL and ELD programming. Sara recalled that it was a "bit of a shock" when she began teaching SLIFE because she knew very little about them. This gap in her teacher training led to a sense of low self-efficacy in her early years teaching SLIFE in a traditional ESL program. From her perspective as a new teacher, there was a lack of information and clarity regarding best instruction and assessment practices for SLIFE.

Developing a Sense of Empathy for Newcomers

Nevertheless, as a new teacher, Sara's frustration with the challenges of covering course content was tempered by her strong desire to learn about and make connections with her students. From an early age, she attended multicultural schools and had friends from diverse cultures and linguistic backgrounds. When recounting significant events from this part of her life, Sara recalled the traumatic experiences of a friend from Laos as having raised her awareness about refugee experiences. Later, during her years as a post-secondary student and preservice teacher, she developed a strong sense of empathy for newcomers and advocated for equity in education. As a result, although Sara acknowledged that her upbringing had been "sheltered" (i.e., living her entire life in the city where she was born), she was empathetic and open to learning from newcomers' experiences before settling in Canada. As a student and volunteer in ESL classrooms, the relationships that she cultivated with newcomers became touchstones of familiarity in a new profession that often felt ambiguous when teaching SLIFE in traditional ESL courses.

Struggling with a Sense of Low Self-Efficacy

In her early years of teaching SLIFE, Sara believed that her empathetic, asset-based attitude toward her students gave her a "broader vision." She admired her students for their positive attitude toward education, especially considering that many were attending school for the first time. She valued their "real-life experiences" and believed in their potential to become successful learners in a formal educational setting. But, Sara's feelings of frustration about SLIFE's slower rate of literacy development led her to have a low sense of self-efficacy; she was not seeing much progress in her students and blamed herself.

Sara also acknowledged that SLIFE were "a bit of a mystery" to her. While teaching within a traditional ESL program, Sara noticed that SLIFE, unaware of the multiple layers of literacy development, often had a different perspective of learning than she did. For example, when an early emergent reader progressed to a new reading level, they stated: "You know, Miss, now I know how to read!" Sometimes, such students would express impatience because "they were feeling that they should be moved to a higher [guided reading group or course] level". Initially, Sara believed that SLIFE's requests for promotion were the result of "overconfidence" due to a lack of experience with formal education. In time, however, she became acutely aware that SLIFE's unrealistic academic expectations also stemmed from their strong sense of urgency to graduate before they reached the age limit to attend secondary school. As a result, Sara felt a responsibility to expediate SLIFE's progression through the reading levels but questioned whether she was equipped to do so as an educator. Sara began to question her instructional strategies and effectiveness as

a literacy teacher of SLIFE: “I think in those early years I was a lot harder on myself than they were on me... I would think ‘Am I teaching this right?’”

Favoring Curriculum-Centered Pedagogy

Sara’s low sense of self-efficacy and feelings of frustration were compounded by her strong commitment to teaching the curriculum. At this time, she described herself as primarily a teacher of subject-specific content (i.e., secondary geography, history and English [ESL]) who favored a whole-class, teacher-directed approach to instruction. “I felt like curriculum... delivering curriculum... was my basis for the courses that I was teaching... and just getting through everything.” Additionally, when she began teaching SLIFE in an ELD, rather than an ESL course, her impression was that it should resemble the traditional ESL program model: “I thought of it as kind of one and the same... I felt like they [ESL and ELD courses] were structured in a similar way. You just had different students in front of you.” This incongruence between a singular program model and divergent student needs became the underpinning of Sara’s struggle to make a square peg fit in a round hole during her early years of teaching ELD. Despite attempting to accommodate SLIFE, Sara continued to be confined by a traditional program model and course expectations, which were unattainable for most of her students. The limiting pedagogical structure led her—and other teachers of SLIFE—to make subjective, rather than evidence-based decisions, that “automatically move[d] along” SLIFE to the next course, even though they had not reached curriculum expectations. As a result, “there was a feeling of [some] students being misplaced in the course levels... They may have progressed individually but not in terms of the course expectations.”

Letting Students Take the Lead—A Paradigm Shift in the Making

A problem-solver by nature, Sara began to reflect upon questions such as “Why is this student not progressing? What is missing? What are they missing? What am I missing? What could I do to help them?” Eventually, her sense of responsibility was to her students, which led Sara to gradually shift her instructional focus from meeting course requirements to meeting students’ needs. For Sara, this pedagogical shift began when she let her students take the lead. In response to asking them what they needed, her students expressed an interest in sharing about their lives prior to resettlement in their new country. When she listened to her students’ life stories about every day and traumatic events, Sara realized that she needed to find ways to make the curriculum more accessible and personally relevant for them. By connecting

lessons to her students' lived experiences, she was better able to respond to their academic needs and offer them emotional support.

Moving Toward a Student-Centered Approach

Sara's focus on students' needs also led her to probe deeper for comprehension during reading activities. She soon realized that many SLIFE were decoding text without understanding what they had read: "So, I remember a light bulb going on...and thinking...Alright, these students can speak [English] and 'read,' but they are not comprehending and able to give it back to me." This led her to reflect upon how her own academic background and cultural orientation contextualized her learning as a student. She also realized that ELs with age-commensurate formal education had a reference point for literacy development that SLIFE did not have. Gradually, Sara began to shift her focus toward student readiness. Instead of revisiting a teaching point multiple times with the hope of "making it stick," she began to "instinctually gage" what students were ready to learn. She was more selective about text levels, despite the curriculum requirements, and began to adapt reading lessons "on the fly." She realized that more time, explanation, and scaffolding of content did not always make new information more comprehensible for SLIFE.

The Power of Collegial Collaboration

Around the time that Sara began working with emergent print literacy SLIFE, Sara's school district launched a pilot ELD early literacy program at her secondary school to meet the needs of a large influx of SLIFE from Syria. Systemic support from government (in the form of grant monies) and school board administration was essential to the program's establishment, success, and sustainability. As a teacher in the ELD early literacy program, Sara now had the opportunity to collaborate regularly with a group of ELD teachers, including a department head, an ELD early literacy resource teacher, an additional language learning consultant, as well as a support team of educational assistants, peer tutors, and volunteers. The new professional structure contrasted significantly with the traditional ESL framework, which Sara described as "linear." In the conventional framework, Sara noted that teachers were assigned to ELD courses with little opportunity for meaningful collaboration about instructional strategies and assessments. The ELD early literacy program, by contrast, had overarching structures and goals for all courses and teachers regularly collaborated by co-assessing, co-planning, and co-teaching. As described by Sara: "I had the support of a team around me, and I liked not feeling like I was doing it on my own... It's easier to take a leap when someone is holding your hand."

Initially, Sara was a little overwhelmed by the steep learning curve because her professional development training and teaching began simultaneously. But, as she

began to apply her newly acquired early literacy practices, Sara started to “get a clearer picture of [her] students’ skills.” This clarity gave her a sense of focus and purpose that positively affected her self-efficacy as a teacher. Sara noted: “It made me feel the most confident I’ve ever been in teaching because I could explain [SLIFE’ literacy needs] to others.” As Sara experienced success using early literacy instructional strategies with students, she developed the confidence to begin collaborating with other ELD educators. Together, Sara noticed that the teachers shared a common goal to co-develop an early literacy program designed specifically for SLIFE: “There wasn’t one person directing everything but, instead, things were directed by our students’ needs and responses.” With greater knowledge of her students’ learning needs, she also began to advocate for literacy-focused programming in the content areas (e.g., geography, history, science, mathematics).

Identifying and Meeting Students Where They Are At

Sara believed that the confidence she developed within the ELD early literacy program enabled her to understand and make deeper connections with her students. In particular, she appreciated the sense of clarity that data from the running record assessments gave her when discussing reading goals and achievements with SLIFE. She noted:

What I like most is how it gives me more of an understanding of the students... and what amazes me is *how much* I now know about each student... in the traditional whole-class situation a student, who was a bit of a mystery to you, would slide under the radar.

Instead, Sara could now use the running record data to provide her students with individualized strategies to improve their literacy skills. She noticed that her students were motivated by this form of feedback because it was explicit, and the “next steps” were attainable.

Before using running records, Sara described her attempt to estimate her students’ reading abilities and levels as “imprecise” and “very limited.” However, knowing how to conduct and interpret running records was a pedagogical tipping point for Sara because they helped her identify “where SLIFE were at” in their reading development. This knowledge enabled Sara to target her instruction and build, incrementally, upon her students’ existing knowledge base. Through running record analysis, Sara developed an asset-based perspective of each student. She celebrated when they demonstrated a new skill, reading behavior, or when they advanced to the next reading level: “I knew they were capable of doing it, but I think what astonished me was how fast it could happen!” Sara could now add running record data to other information she gathered about her students. By analyzing running record data, Sara began to recognize that oral language proficiency, dominant language literacy, and background knowledge directly influenced her students’ literacy development.

Enhancing Student Engagement Through Small Group Instruction

As Sara's self-efficacy grew within the new ELD program, so did her students' confidence in their literacy and language abilities. A vital component of the ELD early literacy program was students' placement into small groups of four to six students, based on their instructional reading levels and behaviors. During small group guided reading instruction, Sara noticed that SLIFE were far more engaged in discussions about the books because they understood more fully what they were reading. By matching text to students' reading levels, Sara believed that there was a "twofold" effect. She noted: "It's amazing that, once you ... meet them [SLIFE] where they're at... they come out with all this understanding and then they get more confident because they are able to do that." SLIFE, who were previously quiet and withdrawn during whole-class instruction, actively interacted with their teachers and each other during small group discussions. As a result of this engagement, Sara noticed that her students' English oral language skills, including their academic vocabulary, improved significantly.

Contextualizing Curriculum by Connecting to Students' Personal Experiences

Sara also noticed that with SLIFE' increased understanding and confidence came the ability to better articulate their previously acquired knowledge. For example, she recalled that, when discussing a book about water sources during a guided reading lesson, students elicited meaningful connections to their life experiences. Sara noted:

Some of the young men from Burma talked about traveling during the rainy season to the mountain streams and collecting the freshwater, and another student from Somalia said that it was his job to... take the jerrycan to the well every morning.

When asked about the effect that personal connections had on these students, Sara explained that the text helped them contextualize their learning by "bringing it back to their experiences." When they encountered new vocabulary and concepts in a guided reading text, they could relate it to something familiar from their lives. Sara contrasted this to the isolated grammar lessons that she often taught in the traditional ESL program: "We weren't really learning the language...we were just learning the structure of the language." Sara believed that her students were more engaged when book topics were personally relevant and identity-affirming.

Elevating Student Voice Through Text Selection

The increased student engagement during small group, guided reading instruction led Sara to adopt more responsive teaching practices that addressed academic and social-emotional needs. Because her students were learning to read within their zone of proximal development (Vygotsky, 1978), new content vocabulary and conceptual information became more comprehensible. Sara related students' learning directly to the hand-picked selection of age-appropriate, culturally sustaining texts (e.g., non-fiction books that paralleled content-area topics and fiction books with more mature themes²) for students in the ELD program. When discussing the importance of book topics, Sara recalled SLIFE learning literacy skills and content information simultaneously. During guided reading lessons, Sara noted that she would help students make connections to their lived experiences. She would say to her students: "Alright, we now understand the vocabulary and... structure of the book. Let's use it to talk about our own experiences and how they connect to the content."

Sara explained that some book topics could also help SLIFE engage in discussions about their trauma-related experiences. She recalled a book about vehicles that led to a discussion amongst several Rohingya students about power imbalances between employees and employers while referring to an image of a chauffeur and passenger in a limousine. New vocabulary and concepts such as *discrimination* and *racism* emerged from the discussion. This new vocabulary was directly relevant to these students' experiences in Burma and why they fled from their home country, choosing exile over persecution and possible execution. While reading a book about a yard sale, students who had been forced to flee Syria without personal belongings linked the sale of a child's beloved teddy bear to "the things... and people that they left behind in their country." While reflecting upon these discussions, Sara stated: "...it's so interesting how they perceive...the book that you're reading or the things that you're discussing." When students interpreted book topics through their personal lenses, Sara suggested that it became much more than a simple reading lesson. These "deeper discussions" opened the door for students to bravely share their trauma and identity stories. In doing so, there was a flattening of the power dynamic between the teacher and students during small group instruction.

²In addition to using student-generated texts created using language experience approach methods, we curated levelled text sets from publishing houses such as National Geographic *Windows on Literacy*, Scholastic *Alpha World* and *Fast Track*, and Nelson *PM Libraries*. Note: When choosing levelled texts, it is important to ensure that the content and images consider the life experiences and maturity of students.

Developing Students' Self-Awareness of Abilities and Progress

Sara also noticed a direct connection between her students' self-efficacy and their increased awareness of their progress in English print literacy development. She explained how "...students are now able to articulate their strengths and weaknesses. They can recognize what things they're working on, what things they're struggling with and then hone in on what they need to improve on." Sara noticed that students' metacognition of their development and progress was a stark contrast to the sense of ambiguity that she observed and experienced when teaching within a traditional ESL framework.

In the beginning, Sara acknowledged that some students were confused with the instructional structure in the ELD program and wanted to go back to their "normal [ESL] class." But, once acclimated to the new programming, Sara observed that "[students] started to see their successes and their progression through the program and that we were meeting their needs." For students newer to Canada, who had not been in the traditional ESL program, Sara viewed the ELD early literacy program as "a good way for them to ease into school and to feel safe, and not as vulnerable, in the small groups." Overall, Sara believed that the ELD early literacy program gave SLIFE a sense of empowerment regarding their literacy development: "They can definitely drive their own learning because they know where and how to improve."

Students Becoming Invested in Their Learning

SLIFE' literacy development often exceeded Sara's expectations within the new ELD program. She was surprised when she saw how quickly they progressed through the reading levels after receiving targeted guided reading instruction. Sara also attributed this increase to the flexible approach to grouping students for guided reading lessons: "What's nice about the program is that [the students] can be moved, at any time, into a new group that meets their new needs." As a result, individual students progressed to reading more complex texts when they were ready, ensuring growth opportunities for all students. Sara explained that this component of the program was highly motivating: "the kids really appreciate being moved to a higher-level group, [when ready] because they want to show you what they're able to do...and they get so excited!" She believed that student motivation and engagement were crucial because it led students to take ownership and become more invested in their learning.

A Changed Pedagogical Dynamic

Using individual and group literacy profiles, Sara inverted her pedagogical practices to be driven by her students' instructional needs rather than by the traditional ESL course model. As Sara explained:

I think my teaching role has become more about understanding the whole student and discovering where they are at in terms of literacy and then building a program around them. We now fit the student into an achievement chart [based on] where they are at now...as opposed to where they are expected to be according to the curriculum.

Discussion

As you followed Sara's transformative journey in the preceding narratives, we hope that you could identify the initial influence of Sara's sense of empathy for her students on her pedagogical practice. Her belief in the importance of making connections between students' lived experiences and current learning placed Sara in a state of readiness to shift her pedagogy to meet the needs of SLIFE. However, as Hos (2016) noted, while caring should be at the core of education, it is not enough; a teacher must have the skills and knowledge required to support students' academic as well as social-emotional and psychosocial needs.

Sara did not let her feelings of low self-efficacy impede her ability to serve her students; instead, these feelings led her to question her practice, the imbalances in the education system, and forced her to look outside the curriculum for answers. As her confidence grew, she began to collaborate with other educators, forming a strong network to advance her professional development with the goal of improving her teaching practice to support student learning. She understood the power of teaching to students' strengths and the value of learning through data-informed practices to "meet students where they're at." As Sara's students began to assume greater control of their learning, she realized that she had unlearned curriculum-centered pedagogies. Sara had transformed her teaching practice.

Sara's pedagogical shift reached a tipping point when she realized the power of instruction driven by data. When Sara collected meaningful data on students' literacy development through running record assessments, she gained important insights into her students' instructional needs. This data, combined with her observations during guided reading lessons, helped her to more clearly understand each of her students' literacy strengths and what skills they needed to learn next. Sara described running record analysis as creating an "Ah Ha!" moment when her professional instincts were affirmed: "SLIFE have gaps in formal education and, therefore, must build upon what they know to progress academically." This sense of clarity led Sara to buy-in to the ELD early literacy program because it differed from the traditional ESL model that focused on content rather than student need.

For Sara, the ELD early literacy program's student-centered pedagogy created a holistic "big picture experience" for teachers and SLIFE. Running record data informed Sara's guided reading instruction and other small group literacy activities and allowed her to be responsive to individual and group learning needs. (See Appendix for a sample ELD guided reading group profile based on running record data highlighting students' print literacy skills and knowledge.) She observed SLIFE to be highly motivated and engaged in the learning process, which increased her self-efficacy as a teacher. Most notably, her students were rapidly becoming more proficient readers *with comprehension!*

Sara's adoption of student-centered pedagogy reinforced her desire to move away from a subject-focused, teacher-directed traditional approach to teaching English learners. Moving away from a conventional pedagogy required Sara to change her basic pedagogical assumptions from a "*What-How-Who* sequence" (*What* subject-specific content and accompanying learning strategies will the teacher teach? *How* will the content be taught? To *whom* will the teacher deliver the content?) to a "*Who-How-What* sequence" (*Who* are the students? *How* will the teacher determine and meet students' learning needs? *What* strategies and content will the teacher teach the students while meeting their learning needs?). Specifically, running record data and other diagnostic assessments and surveys, combined with students' insights, gave Sara an understanding of who the students were in her class. This information then enabled her to intentionally design and implement targeted, small-group, guided reading instruction.

Early on, Sara was prompted by her experiences teaching SLIFE to shift from teacher-directed to student-centered pedagogy. She solidified the pedagogical shift and expanded her instructional strategies when she transitioned into the early literacy ELD program. Her belief that the traditional ESL instructional model did not adequately address SLIFE' complex learning needs is echoed in the literature (e.g., Dooley, 2009; Kanu, 2008; Pentón Herrera, 2021; Woods, 2009). Sara realized that she needed to change her pedagogic repertoire to successfully support SLIFE learning. Just as Dooley (2009) observed, Sara saw the "lines demarcating the work of subject teachers from ESL teachers, and high school teachers from primary school teachers blur" (p. 16). Dooley (2009) further emphasized that every teacher of SLIFE "needs to be a teacher not only of language... but also of literacy" (p. 16). And we agree!

Recommendations for Pre-Service and In-Service Teacher Education

To survive and thrive in a society that highly values print literacy, educators have the responsibility to teach newcomers cultural and linguistic capital (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990) and about how to access the "culture of power" (Delpit, 1988, p. 282) that will facilitate their economic prosperity and social integration. The stark

reality for SLIFE is that print literacy in the host country's dominant language (English in the U.S., U.K., Australia, New Zealand, and in the majority of Canada) is vital. Many adolescent SLIFE need jobs to support themselves and their families living in the host or home country.

Language can be either a barrier or facilitator of future occupational engagement for immigrants; those who do not possess the host country's linguistic capital may experience barriers to socioeconomic integration (Huot et al., 2020). For example, newcomers who do not have sufficient print literacy skills likely will not be able to obtain essential certifications, such as a driver's license which may be necessary to secure some kinds of employment (Gupta & Sullivan, 2013). To secure entry-level positions in food or cleaning industries (e.g., dishwasher, custodian) many of the adolescent SLIFE with whom we have worked have had to obtain the Workplace Hazardous Materials Information System (WHMIS) certificate, which, in Canada, is legally required of employees exposed to hazardous materials in the workplace. To pass these types of exams, functional literacy, or the ability to use reading, writing, and calculation for personal and community development (UNESCO, 2020), is required. Without literacy abilities SLIFE are likely to experience barriers to employment, and other barriers impeding integration into the socioeconomic fabric of the host country.

While we advocate that education programming for SLIFE should explicitly teach dominant-culture print literacy, English in the U.S. and most of Canada, we do not support a subtractive model that may negate students' home language(s), oral literacy traditions, and cultural identities. We deeply value the linguistic diversity and multimodal forms of linguistic expressions and representations of refugee newcomers in resettlement. However, we advocate, as did Lisa Delpit (1988), that educators must teach non-dominant-culture students the codes or "the ways of talking, ways of writing, ... and ways of interacting" for participating in the "culture of power" (p. 283).

To this end, teachers working with SLIFE must have the declarative and procedural knowledge to attend to their academic, social-emotional, and psychosocial needs in educational contexts. Pre-service and in-service teachers must receive explicit instruction on how to prepare SLIFE to achieve success in both in-school and out-of-school contexts. Next is a list of learnings that need to be integrated into pre-service and in-service teacher education to ensure that teachers feel sufficiently prepared to empower SLIFE to enter into and participate in the socio-cultural and socioeconomic fabric in resettlement.

1. Develop an overview of the life histories (immigration, education, language and literacy development) of refugee newcomers.
2. Understand theory and practice related to the impact of dominant language literacy (or the absence thereof) on additional language literacy development.
3. Understanding early literacy theory and develop related instructional practices;
4. Develop an awareness of the impact trauma has on learning.

5. Develop a repertoire of practical strategies to support students experiencing psychological distress in the classroom (e.g., Smith et al., 2010) (See Montero & Al Zouhouri, this book, Chap. 6).
6. Develop a community of practice where educators working with SLIFE can share research and best practices to support professional development.

Each of these recommendations marks a starting point for supporting meaningful instruction for adolescent ELs who have experienced gaps in their formal schooling due to war, mass violence, persecution and other human right violations. We recognize, however, that implementing such recommendations does not come without appropriate structural and financial support. Therefore, as our last recommendation, all education need to continue to engage in continued advocacy to address the many systemic and institutional barriers that impede the development of robust educational programming for SLIFE.

Reflection Questions

We conclude our chapter by offering a few reflection questions to help educators to further develop and refine their pedagogies when working with students whose formal education has been limited or interrupted because of mass violence.

1. Identify some pedagogical practices and categorize them as being curriculum centered (prioritizing content) or student-centered (prioritizing abilities and needs). How might these practices impact the way students engage with their learning?
2. From an asset-based lens, how can educators use diagnostic assessments to determine the knowledge and skills that SLIFE have to inform instruction?
3. To respond to students' learning needs, what instructional strategies might build upon SLIFE' background knowledge and skills?

Appendix: Sample ELD Guided Reading Group Profile Based on Running Record Data

ELD group profile based on running record data															
Student	Fountas & Pinnell guided reading level	L1 Literacy: pre-literate; non-literate; semi-literate	Knowledge and skills			Reading cues			Fluency				Self-monitoring		Language related errors and reading behaviors
			Comprehension	Content vocabulary	Text feature	Meaning	Structure	Visual	Word-by-word	Phrases	Expression	Observes punctuation	Repeats reruns	Self-correction	
Student 1	11	Non-literate	High	Medium	Low	High	Low	High	Medium	Medium	Medium	Medium	Low	Medium	Excellent comprehension; transfers oral language speech patterns in English; needs work with structure (e.g., irreg. past tense verbs and contractions)
Student 2	8	Semi-literate	Medium	Low	Low	Medium	Low	High	High	Low	Low	Medium	Medium	Low	Difficulty with comprehension and unknown vocabulary; relies on visual cues (sounding out) for unknown words
Student 3	10	Semi-literate	Medium	Medium	Low	Medium	Low	High	High	Medium	Low	Medium	Low	Medium	Confuses visually and structurally similar words (e.g., this/these); relies on visual cues (sounding out) for unknown words; substitutes words that don't make sense.
Student 4	8	Pre-literate	Medium	Low	Low	Low	Low	High	Medium	Low	Low	Medium	Low	Medium	Defaults to visual decoding of unknown words (errors don't make sense); low comprehension and vocabulary knowledge

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Chapter 10

Best Practices in Meeting the Literacy and Postsecondary Needs of Adolescent Students with Limited or Interrupted Formal Education



Michelle Ivette Marrero Colón and Charlene Désir

Abstract Adolescent students with limited or interrupted formal education (SLIFE) are a unique subgroup of English learners (ELs) who arrive with rich cultural heritage and an abundance of assets that include real-world life experiences and skills. Their needs are challenging and complex as a result of limited or interrupted formal schooling opportunities in their native countries. Adolescent SLIFE are vulnerable and more likely to drop out of school as they are frequently misunderstood and lack access to high-quality, equitable educational opportunities. In the United States, Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 mandates schools to provide free education to ELs until age 21. For the most part, adolescent SLIFE are placed in general education English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) classes designed for ELs with formal educational experiences. Consequently, their literacy and language needs are not being met. This chapter will provide an insight of best practices for teaching adolescent SLIFE before they age out from public education, focusing on their personal background, histories, literacy, and language needs. Research findings indicate that high school ESOL teachers lack literacy training to support SLIFE. As such, in-service teachers who serve this population need specialized professional development focused on early reading instruction to meet the literacy needs of SLIFE. Additionally, teacher preparation programs must also consider preparing pre-service teachers to successfully support SLIFE. We also propose in this chapter that effective school programs must incorporate emergent literacy instruction and competency-based training as frameworks for the development of a meaningful curriculum.

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Keywords Adolescent SLIFE · Emergent literacy instruction · Competency-based training · Postsecondary · Teacher training

Introduction

This chapter will focus on the unique challenges that adolescent students with limited or interrupted formal education (SLIFE) encounter and instructional approaches to meet their needs. First, an overview of SLIFE as a subgroup of English Learners (ELs) will be provided, including the characteristics of adolescent SLIFE. Furthermore, suggestions for designing an effective SLIFE learning environment will be discussed. Additionally, emergent literacy instruction and structured and balanced literacy approaches will be presented. Moreover, a review of competency-based training will be shared incorporating an examination of a case study of an adolescent SLIFE who successfully completed a vocational training program at a Career Center. Lastly, challenges implementing effective adolescent SLIFE instruction will be addressed. The information presented in this chapter offers practical information ESOL teacher preparation programs should include in their curriculum as well for county-wide or school-based teacher training/professional development.

SLIFE as a Subgroup of English Learners

Adolescent SLIFE are a unique subgroup within the EL population with diverse cultural backgrounds and a variety of assets that include real-world life experiences and skills. Adolescent SLIFE' limited or informal educational background requires school programs to focus on simultaneously developing the English and essential literacy skills they need to be productive members of society (Montero et al., 2014). For the purpose of this chapter, adolescent SLIFE will refer to students within the 14–21 age group. Adolescent SLIFE encounter additional challenges compared to other ELs, especially when they begin attending schools (Hos, 2016). One of the many challenges that adolescent SLIFE encounter is placement in general education ESOL classes, which are designed for ELs who have adequate formal education (Custodio & O'Loughlin, 2017; DeCapua et al., 2018; Hopkins et al., 2015). Therefore, their unique socio-emotional, literacy, and academic needs cannot be met within this setting. Furthermore, their educational gap is such that the expectation of meeting high school graduation requirements within 4 years is unrealistic for many of them (Custodio & O'Loughlin, 2017; Herman Hill, 2017). Even though Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 mandates school districts in the United States to provide free education to ELs until the age of 21, this student population still lacks educational and employment opportunities (Custodio & O'Loughlin, 2017). Lastly, high stakes mandated standardized assessments cause additional

challenges in adolescent SLIFE' lives, hence are at a higher risk of dropping out compared to other ELs (DeCapua & Marshall, 2010; DeCapua et al., 2020; Montero et al., 2014).

Adolescent SLIFE need specialized interventions for developing the literacy skills needed to succeed academically (Kennedy & Lamina, 2016) and to fully navigate in society (Montero et al., 2014; Parrish, 2015). Therefore, school districts must evaluate and modify their current programs to meet the diverse needs of adolescent SLIFE before they age out of free public education. However, to integrate academic programs that meet adolescent SLIFE' needs, school districts must have knowledge of the characteristics of this student population and the factors that make them a vulnerable group of learners.

Characteristics of Adolescent SLIFE

Adolescent SLIFE come from various backgrounds, including Indigenous societies and from life situations that could have caused traumatic experiences. Educators must be mindful not only of the cultural and educational histories, but also the amount of time SLIFE lived in the United States before entering school. For instance, there are some adolescent SLIFE who enter the United States and begin working for a few years before enrolling in school. After working for a period of time, it becomes evident that high-paying employment opportunities in the United States are dependent on literacy and formal educational background; therefore, they decide to access public education (Kennedy & Lamina, 2016). As such, this particular group of SLIFE appear to have strong oral English communication skills (Kennedy & Lamina, 2016) when they first enter school. On the other hand, there are others who register in schools upon arrival and are at the early stages of developing English oral communication skills. Adolescent SLIFE must develop foundational literacy skills to fully access the curriculum and effectively function in school (Robertson & Lafond, 2008). Additionally, adolescent SLIFE must learn to read and write in English to efficiently address the challenges associated with the new cultural and economic environment (Montero et al., 2014). Consequently, it is fundamental for adolescent SLIFE to receive literacy instruction that meets their individual circumstances, strengths, and needs.

Adolescent SLIFE, who are not academically ready to meet the high demands of state requirements for graduation before aging out, require school districts to develop programs that focus on vocational education. These vocational education programs should continue implementing competency-based training as a framework for developing an effective curriculum. There are adolescent SLIFE who, despite their lack of formal educational experiences, demonstrate academic strengths and skills, make significant progress, graduate from high school, and attend a higher education institution.

A key factor that educators need to be aware of is that adolescent SLIFE may be pre-literate or lack literacy instruction in their native languages. Research findings

from a study conducted on SLIFE from Indigenous backgrounds found that participants lacked educational opportunities for the simultaneous development of the four language domains of listening, speaking, reading, and writing in their native language (Pentón Herrera, 2018). Consequently, many adolescent SLIFE arrive speaking two languages; however, they may lack print proficiency in one or both. Therefore, English may become the first language they will acquire through formal instruction in all four language domains (Pentón Herrera, 2018). Many adolescent SLIFE are learning to read and write for the first time in their lives (Custodio & O’Loughlin, 2017; Gunderson et al., 2014). As a result, they will need specialized emergent literacy instruction in a welcoming and supportive educational environment.

Designing an Effective SLIFE Learning Environment

Literacy development is the process of developing the skills needed for reading and writing (Fountas & Pinnell, 1996). In Western formal educational systems, literacy development emphasizes the processes of reading and writing. On the other hand, Gregory and Burkman (2012) refer to literacy development as functional literacy; the process for teaching reading and writing to a “basic level of functioning” (p. 10). According to Fountas and Pinnell (1996), reading and writing are “complementary processes” as they are interrelated (p. 13). Literacy development is fundamental for adolescent SLIFE. Most importantly, educators are aware of the need for literacy instruction for adolescent SLIFE (Marrero Colón, 2019). Equally important, students believe that in order to succeed and have better opportunities in society, they must learn how to read and write. For instance, findings of a study conducted in New Zealand with students from Indigenous backgrounds indicated that reading is crucial regardless of the profession or occupation they choose (Fletcher & Nicholas, 2016). Consequently, emergent literacy instruction is crucial for this unique student population. Emergent literacy instruction focuses on developing skills in reading, including directionality, initial consonant sounds, voice print match, and the use of pictures to gain meaning (Fountas & Pinnell, 1996). Adolescent SLIFE with limited or no literacy skills in their native language (L1) must be immersed in print at their proficiency level with a focus on vocabulary through developmentally-appropriate emergent literacy activities (Gunderson et al., 2014).

Despite the limited research on effective strategies and programs for adolescent SLIFE (Gahungu et al., 2011; Pentón Herrera, 2021), it is evident that many of the strategies utilized in the general education ESOL classes are not adequate for this group of students (Custodio & O’Loughlin, 2017; DeCapua et al., 2018; Hopkins et al., 2015). Consequently, educators need to approach emergent literacy instruction as a developmental reading and writing phase and not as remediation (Gunderson et al., 2014). The reason for this is that adolescent SLIFE lack formal educational opportunities for the development of literacy in L1 (DeCapua & Marshall, 2011).

As a result, adolescent SLIFE need to be given time to progress through the developmental phases of literacy development.

Educators of adolescent SLIFE should consider implementing literacy instruction approaches and strategies utilized at the elementary level to teach emergent literacy (Marrero Colón, 2019; Spaulding et al., 2004). Effective literacy instruction includes a balance of forms in instruction and authentic activities. This involves having the flexibility to move beyond the one-size-fits-all mentality (Molle, 2013). In addition, educators need to create lessons that provide students the opportunity to “play with words” through meaningful literacy lessons (Gregory & Burkman, 2012, p. 37). However, building relationships and creating an environment of trust are fundamental to the development of emergent literacy instruction (Gregory & Burkman, 2012). Figure 10.1 depicts the characteristics of creating an effective learning environment for SLIFE.

It is crucial for educators to create a stress-free learning environment where students feel safe, welcomed, valued, and are not afraid of making mistakes while taking risks (Gregory & Burkman, 2012; Hos, 2016; Salva & Matis, 2017). When students are comfortable taking risks, learning is accelerated (Gregory & Burkman, 2012). A meaningful and effective learning environment is created by embracing ethnic, cultural, and linguistic diversity. Educators can utilize the students’ L1 to welcome and greet them. A simple *hello* in the student’s L1 will lower anxiety, especially during the first days of school.

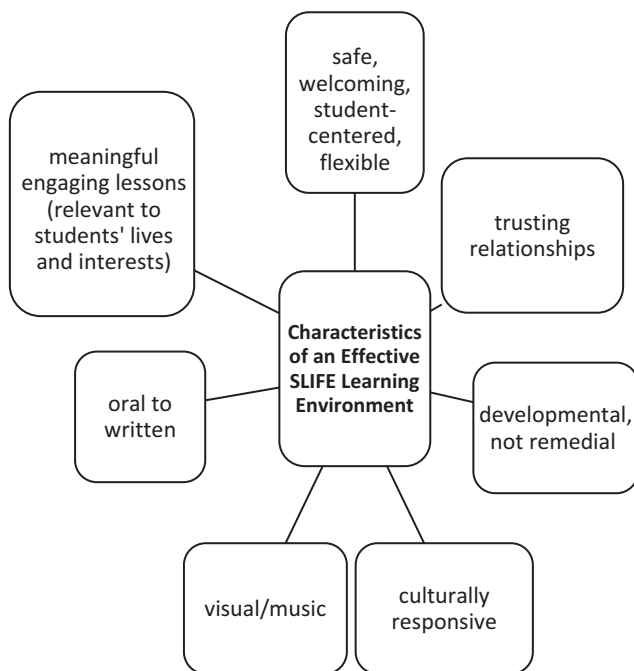


Fig. 10.1 Characteristics of an effective SLIFE learning environment

Findings from a study conducted by Marrero Colón (2019) found that teachers utilized students' L1 as a means for meeting adolescent SLIFE' socio-emotional and acculturation needs. During observations, this strategy promoted a positive student-centered learning environment as students were engaged and took risks to participate. Most importantly, students' linguistic heritage and identity were valued as adolescent SLIFE were eager to share simple vocabulary in their L1 (Marrero Colón, 2019). Additionally, global education perspectives in the classroom environment can be supported by utilizing students' L1 to clarify meaning and aid comprehension. It is important to note that this strategy does not require teachers to be fluent in other languages. Furthermore, as previously stated, this simple strategy helps lower anxiety, which ultimately assists in the increased production of the new language (Ochi, 2009).

Utilizing simple words in the students' L1 also assists educators in connecting with students, which is another means for creating a positive learning environment. Also, research tells us that building relationships and connecting with students increases learning (Fletcher & Nicholas, 2016). A strong teacher-student connection enhances students' ability to participate as they are comfortable during literacy-building activities, especially when having discussions and conversations related to the text read (Gregory & Burkman, 2012). The creation of a caring, trusting, and flexible learning environment where students progress at their pace is essential for adolescent SLIFE (Hos, 2016). Educators need to create a nurturing environment in which students can progress in their academic, literacy, and socio-emotional development (DeCapua et al., 2020).

Educators can also create a welcoming environment that promotes literacy by incorporating visual and graphic support in displays that showcase not only the new country, but also the students' cultural and linguistic heritages—for example, displaying flags including the United States', maps, posters/pictures of the students' countries, and realia (Salva & Matis, 2017). Another means to create a low-anxiety engaging classroom environment is through the use of music. Music has been utilized by foreign language teachers to help language learners lower anxiety (Yüce, 2018). Additionally, exposing students to music from around the world while they work collaboratively promotes a global classroom environment community. Furthermore, teachers can promote a student-centered classroom environment by incorporating engaging lessons that are relevant to the students' life experiences and interests.

Emergent Literacy Instruction, Structured Literacy Approach, and Balanced Literacy Approach

This section will provide an overview of emergent literacy instruction and the approaches that may be utilized when teaching this literacy stage. Teachers can incorporate a combination of features from both the structured literacy and balanced

literacy approaches depending on students' needs. First, an overview of emergent literacy instruction and its components will be described, including examples of how teachers can create a language-rich learning environment. Next, the structured literacy approach will be briefly presented. Lastly, the balanced literacy approach will be discussed with examples of stations that may be created for the implementation of this approach.

Emergent Literacy Instruction

Emergent literacy instruction for adolescent SLIFE is dependent on the development of listening and oral language skills, which serve as the framework for reading and writing. Consequently, educators of adolescent SLIFE need to have knowledge not only of the language acquisition process and its characteristics, but also of the developmental process that occurs during the different stages of learning how to read and write (Windle & Miller, 2019). According to Gunderson et al. (2014), students must first learn basic vocabulary skills (functional vocabulary) before being immersed in emergent literacy programs as these programs are designed for native speakers of the targeted language. As such, for adolescent SLIFE who are at the beginning stages of learning the targeted language, emergent literacy instruction should not be introduced until they have developed basic vocabulary skills. In contrast, adolescent SLIFE who have developed some level of basic vocabulary and understanding of the targeted language before entering school should immediately receive emergent literacy instruction (Gunderson et al., 2014; Montero et al., 2014).

Adolescent SLIFE must be immersed in a language-rich environment that promotes the development of both language and literacy through appropriate instructional delivery models and resources. Labeling all classroom items and referring to them during class is a means to expose students to print literacy and basic vocabulary (Gunderson et al., 2014; Salva & Matis, 2017). Additionally, classroom procedures, rules, daily schedules, and charts with commonly used classroom commands and directional words should be posted with linguistic and graphic representation. Displaying student work and creating word walls organized by themes or topics with pictures also help promote vocabulary and literacy (Salva & Matis, 2017). A word wall that incorporates high-frequency words supports language and literacy development at the early stages. The selection of words cannot be randomly chosen and must be introduced within a meaningful context. Fountas and Pinnell (1996) identified a list of high frequently used words which are listed in Fig. 10.2.

Another resource that supports vocabulary and literacy development is picture dictionaries that promote the development of survival English skills with themes related to real-life contexts such as the *Basic Oxford Picture Dictionary, Second Edition*. Other picture dictionaries, including the *Scholastic Visual Dictionary* and the *Oxford Picture Dictionary for the Content Areas*, focus on academic content vocabulary. Gunderson et al. (2014) recommended the *Oxford-Duden Pictorial English Dictionary* and the *Stoddart Colour Visual Dictionary*. Students can also

Frequently Used Words				
a	day	if	old	this
after	did	in	on	there
all	do	into	one	to
am	don't	is	or	too
an	down	it	our	two
and	for	just	out	up
are	from	keep	over	us
as	get	kind	people	very
asked	go	know	play	was
at	going	like	put	we
away	good	little	ran	went
back	had	long	run	were
be	has	look	said	what
because	have	looked	saw	when
before	he	make	see	where
big	her	man	she	will
boy	here	me	so	with
but	him	mother	some	would
by	his	my	that	you
came	house	no	the	your
can	how	not	then	
come	I	now	there	
could	I'm	of	they	

Fig. 10.2 Frequently used words. (Source: Fountas & Pinnell, 1996, p. 172)

create personal picture dictionaries in their notebooks/binders, labeling pictures organized by themes and topics. Student-made picture dictionaries can be used as a reference for review at home or during writing activities.

Once adolescent SLIFE acquire some basic vocabulary, they must begin emergent literacy instruction (Gunderson et al., 2014) focusing on functional literacy (Gregory & Burkman, 2012). Functional literacy includes phonological and phonemic awareness, spelling, early writing, fluency, comprehension, and narrative and descriptive writings (Gregory & Burkman, 2012). This developmental literacy process is essential for acquiring decoding skills before moving on to the next phase (Windle & Miller, 2019). Montero et al. (2014) conducted a study on adolescent SLIFE ages 14–20 and the impact of emergent literacy instruction. The findings of the study indicated that students who received emergent literacy instruction incorporating guided reading, running records, and other emergent literacy strategies demonstrated significantly more progress in their literacy skills than students who did not receive literacy instruction. Students who received literacy instruction gained from “three to thirteen levels with an overall average reading level gain of 8.3 levels” (Montero et al., 2014, p. 65) compared to those students without literacy instruction who gained “1.2 levels with a range from zero to three levels over five months” (Montero et al., 2014, p. 65).

Structured Literacy Approach Structured literacy is an approach to teaching literacy, focusing on decoding words in a systematic way (The International Dyslexia Association, 2015). The structured literacy approach allows teachers to focus on the structure of words, including phonology, orthography, syntax, morphology, and semantics (Woods & Kleppe Graham, 2020). The structured literacy approach benefits students with dyslexia; however, there is research that supports that it is also beneficial for “all readers” (The International Dyslexia Association, 2015, p. 1). Structured literacy instruction is explicit as concepts are taught through oral and written interaction. Direct teacher instruction is utilized as the main strategy, and modeling provides support for mastery of the instructional task (Woods & Kleppe Graham, 2020). For literate-emergent or semi-literate adolescent SLIFE, this might mean that instruction will begin with the alphabet and initial consonant letter sounds. As students progress, they will advance through the literacy continuum with short vowels, long vowels, patterns, syllables, and affixes to derivational relations. Research findings by Marrero Colón (2019) indicated that some teachers of adolescent SLIFE integrate structured literacy within their lessons to address the emergent literacy needs of adolescent SLIFE. Importantly, when teaching literacy, a combination of approaches seems to be the most effective strategy for adolescent SLIFE (Gunderson et al., 2014).

Balanced Literacy Approach Balanced literacy is an approach to teaching reading and writing skills by incorporating stations where students can work either one on one with the teacher, in small groups, or independently (Fountas & Pinnell, 1996). The goal of this approach is to provide a balance in literacy instructional elements through a variety of whole language and phonics activities. Elementary schools utilize the balanced literacy approach to teach foundational literacy skills. However, because of the unique literacy needs of adolescent SLIFE, some school districts are beginning to realize the need to incorporate the balanced literacy approach to teach emergent literacy skills at the secondary level. For instance, Fairfax County Public Schools, in Virginia, United States, has trained secondary teachers on the various components of the balanced literacy approach to meet the literacy needs of adolescent SLIFE. This approach allows teachers to incorporate essential components of whole language and phonics instruction (Gunderson et al., 2014; Salva & Matis, 2017), which is fundamental for the literacy development and language acquisition process of adolescent SLIFE.

The balanced literacy approach has four distinct aspects that benefit the development of literacy and language of ELs (O’Day, 2009). First, this approach focuses on meaning through “active interaction with written text” (O’Day, 2009, p. 99) and being able to communicate about what has been read. In addition, the balanced literacy approach includes teacher modeling strategies for the development of word recognition and comprehension skills and the proper use of these skills (O’Day, 2009). The balanced literacy approach includes a third aspect that is also beneficial for adolescent SLIFE, which is differentiated instruction.

Differentiated instruction within the balanced literacy approach includes grouping students according to literacy stages and/or reading level to ultimately move them from one literacy stage to another. Teacher strategies include flexible grouping, modeling, knowledge of student progress, and documentation of students' areas of strengths and growth (O'Day, 2009). Through differentiation, a teacher can create a well-rounded literacy profile. Information should include tasks the student can complete independently or with varying levels of assistance (Frey et al., 2005; O'Day, 2009).

Lastly, the balanced literacy approach promotes oral communication skills (O'Day, 2009) and allows students to be engaged by working in literacy activities stations (Fountas & Pinnell, 2012; Frey et al., 2005; O'Day, 2009). The balanced literacy approach enhances students' development in reading and writing through various levels of teacher support as they progress towards higher reading level text (Fountas & Pinnell, 1996). Strategies utilized by teachers when incorporating the balanced literacy approach emphasize reading comprehension; as such, grouping students according to their literacy stage, modeling, and coaching are common practices (O'Day, 2009).

The balanced literacy approach can be implemented with adolescent SLIFE after a structured literacy lesson to strengthen the skills learned. It is important that teachers of adolescent SLIFE maintain high expectations through clear classroom routines (Fountas & Pinnell, 2012). Educators need to modify lessons incorporating strategies to meet the needs of all learners (Gregory & Burkman, 2012). The balanced literacy approach provides students with a variety of engaging instructional experiences as they work independently, in small groups, or with the teacher. The balanced literacy approach also provides hands-on, engaging activities while students are held accountable for their own learning, which is essential for adolescent SLIFE. The following are steps (see more in [Appendix A](#)) to consider when implementing the balanced literacy approach:

First Step: Assessment

Before implementing the balanced literacy approach or any other type of early literacy instruction, it is crucial to assess students' reading level and phonemic awareness. It is necessary for teachers to administer a spelling inventory and complete a running record to determine the student's independent reading level. The Fountas & Pinnell Benchmark Assessment System (FPBAS) is a tool that may be used to assess students' reading and comprehension levels (Fountas & Pinnell, 2010). FPBAS includes materials designed for K-2nd and 3rd-8th grade; however, some school districts utilize it with adolescent SLIFE. Teachers of adolescent SLIFE depend on elementary assessment tools and materials because developmentally-appropriate resources designed for emergent literacy instruction are limited (Custodio & O'Loughlin, 2017; Marrero Colón, 2019). More information about appropriate instructional materials will be shared in the challenges section of this chapter.

A reading inventory or running record is also essential to determine the independent, instructional, and frustration reading level to accurately match students with appropriate reading materials (Gunderson et al., 2014). Utilizing running records has shown beneficial in accelerating the literacy skills of adolescent SLIFE (Montero et al., 2014) as it also provides information on where to begin guided reading instruction (Fountas & Pinnell, 2012). It is important to remember that it is beneficial to assess students at least three times a year to obtain more accurate data to continue creating lesson plans that target the literacy needs of each individual student. The data collected guides teachers in making ongoing decisions while maintaining high expectations for all learners.

Second Step: Goal-Setting Conference

A goal-setting conference between the ESOL teacher and student should take place after assessments. If there is a collaboration between the ESOL teacher and a reading specialist, he/she should also be present during the conference. Goal-setting is essential for academic success (Gregory & Burkman, 2012). This is especially true for students with traumatic pasts as they have developed resiliency, which empowers them to develop goals to have a better life (Apfel & Simon, 1996). Establishing goals will also assist in providing a sense of order in their lives (Apfel & Simon, 1996). During this meeting, teachers must explain what a goal-setting meeting is and share the results of all assessments. Moreover, the student, with the guidance of the teacher, will identify strengths and areas of growth. This practice has been proven effective in promoting student success among adolescent students (Gregory & Burkman, 2012). This literacy profile will determine the goals that can be documented on a graphic organizer with teacher support as needed.

Third Step: Introduction to Balanced Literacy Stations

Depending on students' strengths, needs, learning styles, English Language Proficiency (ELP) level, and ongoing modeling, it could take approximately a month for them to work through balanced literacy stations independently. Based on assessment results, the teacher will create a plan to determine which stations need to be developed. Additionally, students will be assigned to different stations based on needs. Ongoing assessments (formal or informal) and teacher observations will guide the creation of new stations over time. Stations may include the following:

Guided Reading Guided reading is an instructional process that allows a teacher to carry out observations focusing on reading strategies with a small group of students as others work independently at other stations (Fletcher & Nicholas, 2016; Fountas & Pinnell, 1996). Guided reading is effective for students at different levels of literacy and ELP as it incorporates teacher modeling, observing, and providing various degrees of support (Montero et al., 2014). Additionally, the small group

instructional setting facilitates the teacher's ability to meet the individual needs of students (Fountas & Pinnell, 2012). While in this station, students read aloud as the teacher observes, takes notes, and provides support focusing on the use of the student's reading strategies and skills. The selection of guided reading books is determined by the students' independent reading level (Fountas & Pinnell, 2012).

Independent Reading In this station, students read self-selected books at their reading level. After reading the book, students may complete a reading log activity appropriate for their instructional needs or interest. The teacher will model and create reading logs according to students' ELP levels and abilities. Teachers can create beginner, intermediate, and advanced reading logs. Figures 10.3, 10.4, and 10.5 are examples of reading logs at different levels.

This station requires a classroom library with a variety of high interest-books at various reading levels (Fountas & Pinnell, 1996). Additionally, the school library can also serve as a resource for students to check out books to read independently. Students may also utilize eBooks while working in this station. Please refer to Appendix B for a list of potential resources for adolescent SLIFE.

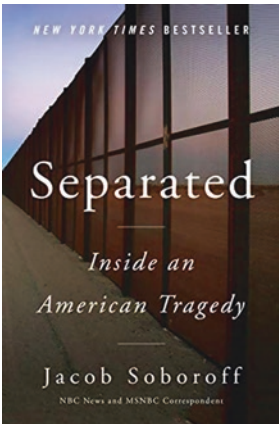
Guided Writing The teacher works with a small group of students focusing on developing writing strategies and skills (Salva & Matis, 2017). Teachers may begin with a mini-lesson, then the students proceed to work on a task assigned while the teacher has individual conferences (Fountas & Pinnell, 1996).

Independent Writing This station provides students the opportunity to write independently on topics of personal interest (Salva & Matis, 2017). Writing activities include journals, letters, stories, and paragraphs (Fountas & Pinnell, 1996). An independent writing activity for adolescent SLIFE with emergent literacy can be writing cinquains after a vocabulary lesson. However, before the actual application of students writing the cinquain independently, the teacher must conduct a lesson explaining cinquains to students (Pentón Herrera, 2020). The teacher can also include an example of a cinquain as a reference. In addition, students can have the option of illustrating the final product (see Pentón Herrera, 2020) to obtain meaning.

For an intermediate learner, an independent writing activity after a vocabulary focused lesson may require students to personified words using Instagram. For this activity, students will create Instagram posts for the words learned. In a small poster/paper, students will: (a) write the word, (b) copy the teacher provided definition, (c) write the definition in their own words, (d) utilize the word in a sentence, and (e) illustrate the term. In addition, students have the choice to write the word in their language as a reference. Figure 10.6 depicts a student's final product of a personified word activity. The teacher should display a sample in the station as a reference. This is a popular activity; therefore, it may also be used with advanced learners by following the previous steps in addition to including a synonym and antonym for the word.

Reading Log

Name: _____ Date: _____





Title of book: _____

Author: _____

Pages read: _____

Favorite character:

Draw a picture of the character.

Fig. 10.3 Example of reading log for beginner learner

Another independent activity for an advanced student is having them write a friendly letter sharing at least two words learned, the definitions in their own words, and an example of the words in a complete sentence. Before this activity, the teacher must have exposed students to the parts of a friendly letter. Figure 10.7 provides an example of a student who completed work in this station.

It is essential to note that when evaluating at this level of English development, teachers should encourage students to take risks in utilizing language without over-correcting their work. Additionally, when analyzing the students' finished product,



Reading Log

Name: _____ Date: _____

Title of book: _____

Author: _____

Pages read: _____

Genre: Fiction _____  Non-fiction _____ 

Who is your favorite character? Why?

What is the setting? (when and where the story takes place?)

List two facts that you learned.

1.

2.

Fig. 10.4 Example of reading log for intermediate learner

teachers should focus on meaning and how students applied content knowledge. Drawing, sketching, labeling, and exploring writing are pre-writing activities that promote early print development.

Beginning Print Alphabetic print literacy is needed to promote the development of students' target language (L2) (Tarone, 2010). Some adolescent SLIFE lack the basic skills of print, including holding a pencil or writing their name (Custodio & O'Loughlin, 2017). Exposure to the Roman alphabet might be a new experience for a number of students within this group (Montero et al., 2014). Activities for this station may include capital and lowercase letter formation, identification, matching, sorting letters, and tracing for the development of fine motor skills.

Date	Title of Book	Author	Genre (Fiction or Non-fiction)	Pages Read	<p>Fiction (Choose two)</p> <p>Who is your favorite character? Why?</p> <p>What is the setting? (when and where the story takes place?)</p> <p>What is the problem? How was the problem solved?</p> <p>What is the climax of the story?</p>
					<p>Non-fiction (choose 2)</p> <p>What was the most interesting fact you learned?</p> <p>What were two content vocabulary words you learned? Write a complete sentence with each.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. 2. <p>What is the main idea of this selection?</p>

Fig. 10.5 Example of reading log for advance learner

Vocabulary Reading improvement depends on vocabulary development (Fletcher & Nicholas, 2016). Fountas and Pinnell (1996) also stressed that vocabulary is crucial for reading comprehension. The vocabulary station’s primary goal is to reinforce the vocabulary learned during instruction. Graphic organizers for this station can vary in formats depending on students’ needs. Activities can also include working on personal picture dictionaries, games, and technology programs that support vocabulary development.

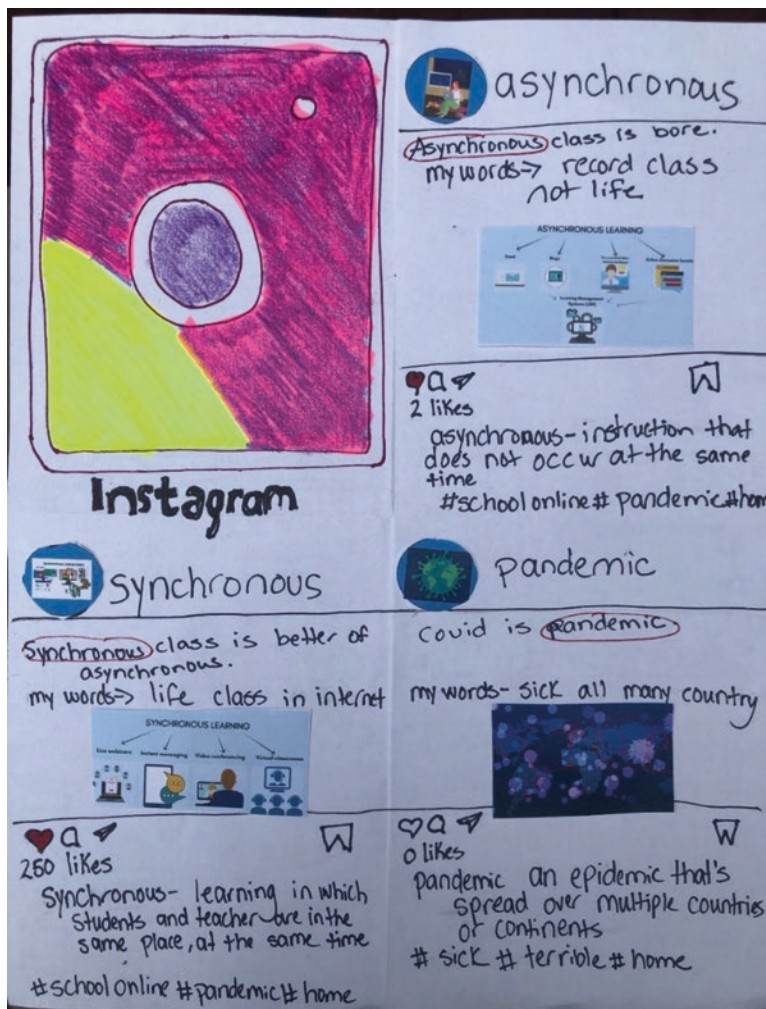


Fig. 10.6 Personified words using Instagram

Word Study A word study station provides students with the opportunity to work with letter identification and sounds presented during the structured literacy lesson. Activities in this station include matching, sorting letters and words, making words, and creating and labeling categories (Fountas & Pinnell, 1996).

Student Reading Aloud Having students read aloud is a common practice utilized by teachers. However, it is not effective or adequate for adolescent SLIFE. Research findings in a study conducted in New Zealand with adolescent SLIFE from Indigenous backgrounds indicated that students did not like to participate in reading aloud as they were embarrassed by what their peers would think of them because of

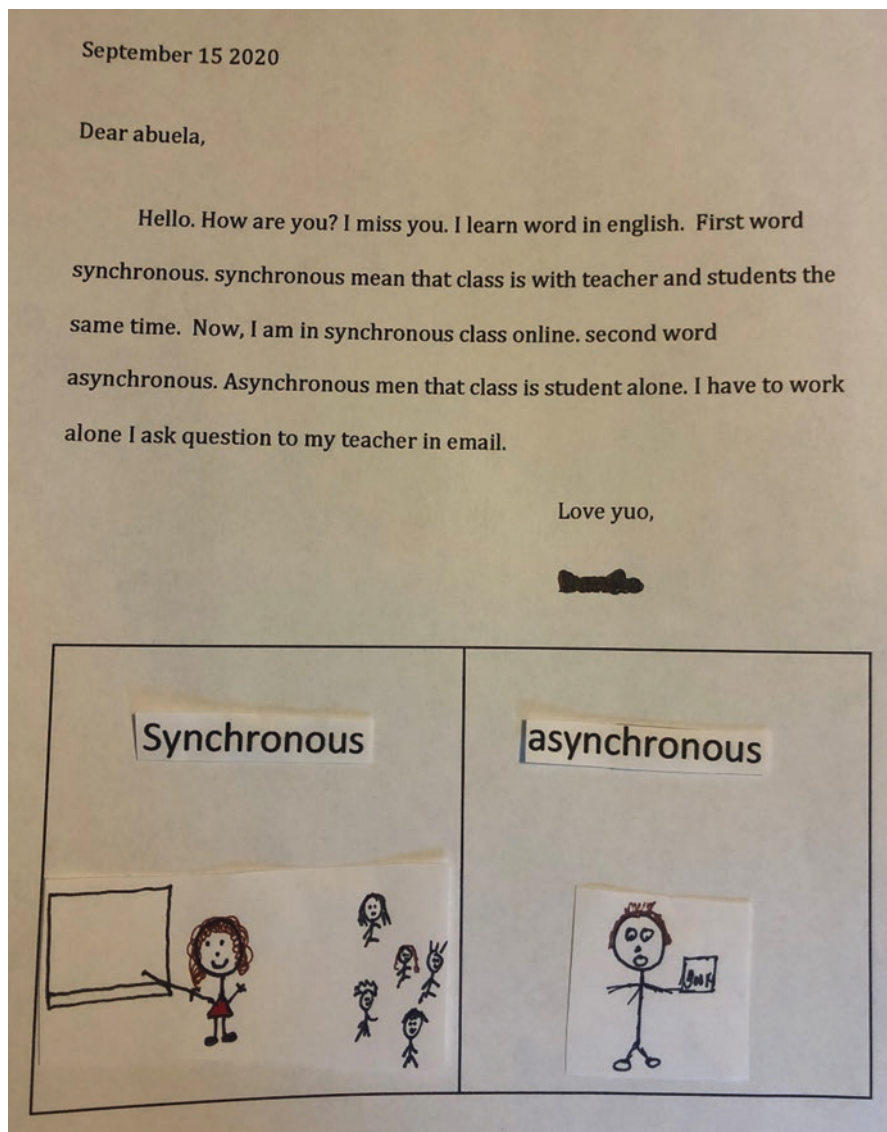


Fig. 10.7 Friendly letter example

their lack of reading skills (Fletcher & Nicholas, 2016). In addition, students indicated that they were being bullied by their peers because of their literacy needs. Consequently, they often disobeyed teachers' requests for reading aloud (Fletcher & Nicholas, 2016). Moreover, educators need to remember that adolescent SLIFE who are emergent readers are learning how to decode and will spend time focusing on the decoding aspect of the process. Therefore, the comprehension aspect of read-

ing may be hindered when reading aloud. Teachers' read aloud is an effective strategy for supporting the emergent reading needs of adolescent SLIFE. In addition to emergent literacy instruction, some adolescent SLIFE will also benefit from competency-based training.

Competency-Based Training

Competency-based training (CBT) is an approach to teaching that focuses on the mastery of skills and tasks needed to be successful in a specific job (Malik et al., 2018). The variety of skills and life experiences SLIFE bring are assets for the societies they live in. Unfortunately, the identification of being SLIFE is automatically perceived negatively by some individuals (DeCapua & Marshall, 2011). Educators can identify areas of strength of adolescent SLIFE by creating *Getting to Know You* activities that include sharing of cultures, language(s), family, and personal interests. Figure 10.8 shows an example of a *Getting to Know You* activity that may be utilized with adolescent SLIFE. The activity includes linguistic and non-linguistic representation that supports language development, comprehension, and literacy development. The activity includes simple sentence frames, word choices, and graphic representations.

Getting to Know You activities are beneficial because teachers can gather additional information that goes beyond the students' proficiency level to better meet instructional and socio-emotional needs. With visual, graphic, and interactive support, students can share information about their native country, language(s), and interests. For instance, in the case study below, the teacher collected information about Ronaldo's (pseudonym) interests and experience working with cars. After the activity, the teacher met with each student to gather additional information. The teacher learned that Ronaldo had a variety of life experiences in his country that included working with his grandfather in an auto shop. The district's Career Center was consulted, and through collaboration, advocacy, and the auto technical teacher's bilingual support, the student was able to register for the course the following school year.

Factors that contributed to Ronaldo's success story were proper identification of the student's strengths, interests, needs, and the multidisciplinary collaboration among school programs with the focus on the student. He received an auto tech certification, which allowed him to become an independent and productive citizen in society. The vocational education Ronaldo received at the CC utilizes competency-based training, which is utilized by high school vocational programs. CBT in vocational training programs supports success through the development and mastery of skills and tasks needed for specific technical job training (Ahmad & Rofiq, 2020; Malik et al., 2018; Watson, 1991). CBT has four characteristics (Watson, 1991):

Case Study

Ronaldo, a 16-year-old, arrived in the United States performing at the beginning stages of learning English as a new language. He was born in Guatemala, and Mam is his L1. Ronaldo speaks Spanish; however, when he entered the Language Center, Spanish assessments demonstrated that he had not developed age-appropriate reading and writing literacy skills. Ronaldo had limited access to formal education in Guatemala due to lack of transportation to his school, which was over an hour distance from his home. In addition, Ronaldo often had to assist his grandfather in repairing cars as a means to earn income for the sustainment of his family. Despite the inconsistent school attendance, he was able to complete fifth grade, and when he arrived in the United States, he was placed in ninth grade. He was placed in general education ESOL, and his ESOL teacher focused on beginning-level language instruction. There were 20 students in the Newcomer class, in which five were SLIFE. The teacher, who was trained in emergent literacy, grouped the SLIFE students accordingly to receive structured literacy instruction.

After learning that Ronaldo was working three jobs while attending high school and had worked with his grandfather in an auto shop in his native country, the teacher advocated on his behalf with the Career Center (CC). The next school year, Ronaldo joined the CC under the auto tech program. The first year at CC was challenging because Ronaldo was at the beginning stages in the four domains of learning English; however, in the practical assessments of auto tech instruction, Ronaldo always scored the highest of the class. As a result, the auto tech teacher consulted with the ESOL teacher for advice on how to best support Ronaldo with written assessments. Ronaldo's receptive language was stronger, so the best accommodation to meet his needs was for the teacher to read aloud the text. This accommodation proved to be effective, and after 3 years (normally, it takes two) of ongoing collaboration and consultation among the teachers, Ronaldo received his auto technician certification. However, it took him 6 years to complete high school requirements.

Currently, Ronaldo is working in an auto dealership and is taking additional auto tech classes with the goal of obtaining a higher position within the company. According to Ronaldo, this is the first time he has been able to enjoy the benefits of working in a reputable company, in which his work schedule allows him to spend quality time with his family.

1. Identification of competencies and standards according to the specific job
2. Specification of competencies to students before the lesson
3. Assessment tools to ensure mastery of specific competencies
4. Documentation of student achievement of competencies










<p>Part 1</p> <p>I was born in _____.</p>  <p>Draw an arrow pointing to your country.</p>	<p>Part 2</p> <p>I speak _____ (write language or languages you speak).</p> <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-around;"> <div data-bbox="595 301 753 442">  <p>Spanish</p> </div> <div data-bbox="794 331 1010 442">  <p>Arabic</p> </div> </div>
<p>Part 3</p> <p>In my country, I used to _____ (cook, fix cars, work in the farm, take care of animals).</p> <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-around;"> <div data-bbox="154 710 279 790">  <p>cook</p> </div> <div data-bbox="306 710 432 790">  <p>fix cars</p> </div> <div data-bbox="456 710 568 790">  <p>work in the farm</p> </div> </div>	<p>Part 4</p> <p>I like to _____ (read, dance, fish, sing, draw, walk, exercise, cook, etc.).</p> 
<p>Part 5</p> <p>In my country, I lived with my _____ (parents, grandmother, grandfather, aunt, uncle).</p> 	<p>Part 6</p> <p>My favorite food is _____ (hamburgers, chicken, tacos, noodles, rice and beans, kabob).</p> 

Fig. 10.8 Getting to Know You activity

CBT also provides the opportunity for individualized instruction and self-paced learning (Watson, 1991), which is ideal for adolescent SLIFE. Students are immersed in engaging hands-on instruction that leads to a certification, certificate, or diploma in a specific technical specialty. Some examples of specialty training on vocational education include: auto tech, auto body and collision, barber, cosmetology, culinary arts, HVAC/R (electrician, heating, ventilation, air conditioning, and refrigeration),

landscaping, medical assistant, plumbing, and welding. School districts should explore the implementation of CBT through vocational education for adolescent SLIFE who might not be able to complete high school graduation requirements before aging out. Attending CBT through vocational education will provide adolescent SLIFE the opportunity to acquire a skill that will be beneficial for future employment.

Challenges with SLIFE Instruction and Results

While the suggestions presented above have proved effective for teachers supporting adolescent SLIFE, the authors of this chapter understand that secondary ESOL teachers may encounter challenges with providing effective emergent literacy instruction as they are not trained in teaching foundational literacy skills (Custodio & O'Loughlin, 2017; DeCapua & Marshall, 2011; Lewis & Reiter, 2014; Marrero Colón, 2019; Montero et al., 2014; Pentón Herrera, 2021; Silva & Kucer, 2016). According to the Education Commission of the States [ECS] (2018), most states in the United States do not require teachers to take professional development or education, specifically targeting this unique student population. Similarly, research findings from studies conducted in Canada (Montero et al., 2014), Australia (Dooley, 2009), and Luxembourg (Choi & Ziegler, 2015) indicated that educators serving adolescent SLIFE are not adequately equipped to teach emergent literacy as teacher preparation programs do not include such training. Consequently, it is imperative for school districts to train teachers on emergent literacy instruction. In addition, the curriculum of ESOL teacher preparation programs at the university level must include courses that focus on emergent literacy instruction at the secondary level (Marrero Colón, 2019).

Moreover, there is a lack of in-depth research on strategies that work for the adolescent SLIFE population (Pentón Herrera, 2021; Young-Scholten, 2015). Most importantly, current reading programs are designed for students who are fluent in English (Gunderson et al., 2014). However, some of these programs may be effective with adolescent SLIFE who have basic English vocabulary. The group of adolescent SLIFE who have not been in their host country for long and are in the early stages of learning English should receive basic vocabulary instruction first and then be immersed in an emergent reading program (Gunderson et al., 2014).

Another challenge for implementing emergent literacy instruction is that materials at this literacy stage are not developmentally appropriate for adolescent SLIFE (Marrero Colón, 2019; Wong Fillmore, 2014). For instance, secondary teachers utilizing the Fountas and Pinnell Benchmark assessment books, select books within the kit that are more appropriate for this age group of students. Other teachers have become their own *publishing house* or material developers as they create emergent reading materials that are developmentally adequate and are also of high interest for adolescent SLIFE (Marrero Colón, 2019).

An additional challenge for effective literacy instruction is class size. According to (Fountas & Pinnell, 2012), classroom size plays a critical role because of the amount of record-keeping teachers must obtain on each student. It is essential for teachers to record student progress on an ongoing basis (Fountas & Pinnell, 2012; O'Day, 2009); therefore, a small group setting will facilitate this. For this reason, schools should offer small-size sheltered programs similar to reading programs. This instructional setting benefits students as teachers are able to provide individualized support addressing adolescent SLIFE' literacy needs.

Lastly, stronger skills in L1 will accelerate the acquisition process of L2 (Collier, 1987; Cummins, 2000). Consequently, the literacy development of adolescent SLIFE' L1 is fundamental in the development of L2 (Baecher et al., 2016; Lewis & Reiter, 2014). Therefore, students' L1 literacy should be supported whenever possible (Lewis & Reiter, 2014). Another approach to help support and develop students' L1 literacy needs is reaching out to the community for individuals who speak the students' language(s) (Lewis & Reiter, 2014). Research also supports the continued development of L1 and L2 for academic literacy development in order to succeed in all content areas (Menken et al., 2012).

Conclusion

Adolescent SLIFE arrive with a variety of life experiences that strengthen our society. However, because of their limited or interrupted formal education, they encounter numerous challenges when entering formal school settings. First, to succeed in any aspect of life, adolescent SLIFE must learn how to read and write. Therefore, emergent literacy instruction will address their specific needs in this area. However, teachers of adolescent SLIFE must be trained on how to effectively teach emergent literacy. As such, a combination of the structured literacy and balanced literacy approaches will be beneficial for addressing the emergent literacy needs of adolescent SLIFE. It is crucial for school districts to develop professional development focusing on the different stages and characteristics of literacy development, administering and interpreting reading assessment results, emergent literacy instruction, and the different approaches that may be utilized. Most importantly, teacher preparation programs at the university level must develop courses within the required curriculum to address the literacy, academic needs, and socio-emotional needs of adolescent SLIFE.

The competency-based approach will also benefit adolescent SLIFE, whose personal interests and special skills lean towards technical careers. This approach will provide adolescent SLIFE with a certification, certificate, or diploma in a technical profession. In the event that the student is not able to meet high school graduation requirements by age 22, vocational education still allows SLIFE to be productive citizens in their community. Career Center teachers must also have some basic

knowledge of language acquisition, its stages and characteristics, student literacy profiles, and ESOL methodology for differentiating instruction. For this reason, school districts should provide CC teachers professional development on the areas previously mentioned, so adolescent SLIFE can fully access vocational educational training programs. Most importantly, shared accountability and responsibility through professional collaboration and consultation among the CC and ESOL educators is essential for addressing the unique needs of this student population. A research study that focuses on adolescent SLIFE participating in a sheltered ESOL program in combination with a vocational program would provide an insight into the benefits of this type of instructional approach.

Success occurs when teachers get to know their students. It is accomplished by building relationships focusing on students' strengths, life experiences, and needs. Lessons must be relevant and designed, taking into consideration students' past experiences and needs. There are many challenges in meeting the literacy needs of adolescent SLIFE, including lack of research, lack of teacher preparation and training, and age appropriate reading materials. School districts must coordinate to provide appropriate support and resources for adolescent SLIFE by collaborating and consulting within the school community.

Reflection Questions

1. What are the benefits of having specific technical specialty programs as an alternative for some adolescent SLIFE? What are the benefits of placing ESOL teachers in Career Centers?
2. Should the U.S. Department of Education create other high school graduation diploma options that can be accessible to adolescent SLIFE who are not ready to meet the standardized test requirements? Explain.
3. After reading this chapter, what courses should be included in curriculums for teacher preparation programs? What type of professional development should school districts provide to address the emergent literacy needs of adolescent SLIFE?

Appendices

Appendix A: Suggested Steps to Implement Structured and Balanced Literacy Approaches

Steps	Materials/notes	Rationale
1 Assessment	Fountas & Pinnell Benchmark Assessment System (FPBAS) spelling inventory running inventory/ record Spelling inventory Note: If using FPBAS with adolescent SLIFE, try to avoid fiction books as they are not developmentally appropriate for this age group.	Identify reading level (independent, instructional, frustration) Identify phoneme awareness level Provides information on where to begin reading instruction (Fountas & Pinnell, 2012) Provides information for selecting appropriate reading materials
2 Goal- Setting Conference	Goal-setting graphic organizer Student's work samples	Empowers students to develop goals Assists students in providing a sense of order in their lives Provides information about the strengths and areas of growth
3 Pre-Teach Vocabulary	PowerPoint presentation with slides on each vocabulary word. Slides must include definitions in students' level, graphic support, and the word in a sentence. Vocabulary cards with pictures Vocabulary notebooks Word walls	Emergent literacy programs are designed for native speakers of English and rely on students knowing what each picture is for sound identification. Vocabulary facilitates oral language, reading comprehension, and writing development.
4 Structured literacy lesson	PowerPoint of sounds to be taught during the specific lesson. For example: Lesson on short and long "a" Flashcards <i>Words Their Way</i> Word walls Pictures of words	Focuses on decoding words in a systematic way. Decoding is the foundation that guides reading instruction. Develops phonemic awareness. Students learn how to decode words they are not familiar with. Studies the structure of words, including phonology, orthography, syntax, morphology, and semantics. Note: Not all adolescent SLIFE will need this instructional approach to reading.

(continued)

Steps	Materials/notes	Rationale
5 Selection of Literacy Stations	Note: Stations are selected based on students' needs and lessons. Teachers can select from the following stations: Guided reading Independent reading Guided writing Independent writing Beginning print Vocabulary Word study	Supports differentiated instruction Provides teachers the opportunity to create engaging and meaningful activities
6 Grouping Students for Stations	Assessment results Classroom observations	Grouping based on student needs Promotes students' social skills and oral language development Supports differentiated instruction Provides teachers the opportunity to support students individually or in small groups
7 Selection of Materials for Literacy Stations	Clear step-by-step instructions for each station with graphics Sample of the final product as a reference for students	Supports differentiated instruction Provides teachers the opportunity to create engaging and meaningful activities
8 Balanced Literacy Stations	Note: Ensure that stations have the materials needed. In addition, before breaking out to their stations, the teacher needs to provide clear instruction of each station.	Promotes students' independence and social skills Supports differentiated instruction Provides teachers the opportunity to support students individually or in small groups Allows students to interact in purposeful and meaningful activities
9 Students Rotate Literacy Stations	Note: Rotation may depend on students' abilities to follow directions, maturity level, ability to work independently, and class schedule. Each rotation might take several class periods.	Provides students with a variety of literacy encounters
Change Literacy Stations as Needed Repeat steps 3–8		

Appendix B: Reading Resources for Adolescent SLIFE

Sources	Website
The Heinle Reading Library Mini Books (National Geography) Cengage by National Geography	https://ngl.cengage.com/us/en_us/pdf/HRLbrochure_LR.pdf K-12 Readers https://ngl.cengage.com/assets/downloads/lbf/mlt_bro_readers_2017.pdf
Wordless Books for Adolescent/Adults	The Arrival https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/920607 Speechless; Sans Paroles = Sin Palabras: World History Without Words https://seattle.bibliocommons.com/item/show/2623344030_speechless The Color of Home https://www.scholastic.com/teachers/books/the-color-of-home-by-mary-hoffman/
Emergent Books	I See the Sun in Nepal https://www.amazon.com/See-Sun-Nepal-Dedie-King/dp/0981872093 Very Easy Stories https://www.amazon.com/Very-Easy-True-Stories-Picture-Based/dp/0201343134
News Articles in Students' Reading Level	http://www.newsinlevels.com https://newsela.com/
Saddleback Hi-Lo Books Saddleback Teen Emergent Reader Libraries	https://www.sdlback.com/solutions-for-tweens-grades-4-8/hi-lo-books https://www.sdlback.com/teen-emergent-reader-libraries-emerge-1-boxed-set-3-each-of-20-titles-tg/saddleback-educational-publishing-hi-lo-books
High Noon Books	https://www.highnoonbooks.com/index-hnb.tpl
Lean and Low Books	https://www.leeandlow.com/collections/high-low-books-for-teens-middle-and-high-school
Orca Book Publishers	https://us.orcabook.com/Orca-Currents-C2009.aspx?s=Name%20ASC&c=2009&ps=12&p=0
EPIC Press	https://abdoobooks.com/our-products/epic-press

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Part IV
Effective Support for Students with
Limited or Interrupted Formal Education
in K-12 Learning Environments

Chapter 11

Fostering the Resilience and Cultural Wealth of Students with Limited or Interrupted Formal Education



Saskias Casanova and Alicia Alvarez

Abstract In this chapter, we discuss how educators can promote strengths-based, culturally sustaining pedagogies in their classrooms to effectively support students with limited or interrupted formal education (SLIFE). In particular, we focus on K-12 SLIFE who immigrate from Latin America to the U.S. First, we examine how the culture of U.S. schooling does not match SLIFE' cultural backgrounds. Second, we suggest educators must take into account the existing mismatch between students' cultural backgrounds and K-12 U.S. institutions, as well as how to take an asset-based, instead of deficit-based, approach to foster SLIFE' resilience. Then, we introduce a community cultural wealth lens, which suggests underprivileged students, such as SLIFE, possess cultural knowledge, strengths, and skills that are valuable in the classroom. We make practical recommendations for how educators can promote the cultural knowledge that these students have and integrate them into the classroom setting to ensure better academic outcomes and the overall well-being of these learners. We encourage educators to focus on the students' strengths to create inclusive classrooms that will support SLIFE academically, emotionally, and culturally.

Keywords SLIFE · Immigrant Latinx students · Resilience · Community cultural wealth

Introduction

There has been a growing call by immigration scholars to make the U.S. education system more inclusive of immigrant and refugee students' needs and accepting of the different experiences they bring to the classroom (Casanova, 2019; Pentón

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Herrera, 2021; Suárez-Orozco et al., 2018a). Attention must be brought to the educational background of newcomer immigrant students, including refugees, especially those who have experienced limited or interrupted formal education before enrolling in U.S. schools (Custodio & O’Loughlin, 2017; DeCapua & Marshall, 2015; Hos, 2016). Interruptions in schooling are greatest for secondary-grade-age arrivals. Students with limited or interrupted formal education (SLIFE) accounts for 10–20% of English Learners (ELs) in the United States (Potochnick, 2018). It is essential to increase our attention on SLIFE since there is a disparity in their academic achievement compared to other students, including non-SLIFE immigrant-origin youth (Custodio & O’Loughlin, 2017). This disparity can be largely attributed to systemic inequality in the schooling experiences of these students, such as facing poverty and often attending low-resourced schools, as well as not receiving the proper academic and socio-emotional support (Hos, 2016; Olivares-Orellana, 2020).

SLIFE have unique needs and require additional support that goes beyond academics (Hos, 2016). When supporting these students, teachers must take into account how there is a mismatch between students’ cultural backgrounds and the institution of U.S. formal education (DeCapua & Marshall, 2015; Watts, 2019). In this chapter, we examine cultural mismatch, with a particular focus on Latinx students. We emphasize taking an asset-based, instead of deficit-based, approach to foster SLIFE’ resilience. Accordingly, we introduce a community cultural wealth (CCW) lens (Yosso, 2005), which suggests minoritized students, such as SLIFE, possess cultural knowledge, strengths, and skills from their life experiences and communities that are translatable to learning in formal classroom spaces. Lastly, we recommend how educators can promote this cultural knowledge to ensure academic excellence and the overall socio-emotional well-being of these learners.

Latinx SLIFE

Latinx newcomer immigrants and refugees make up the majority of SLIFE in the United States (Custodio & O’Loughlin, 2017). Many Latinx SLIFE are unaccompanied minors, meaning they migrate alone without parents/caretakers (Paris et al., 2018; Suárez-Orozco et al., 2018b). Recently, there has been a steady rise in the number of unaccompanied children migrating from Honduras, Guatemala, El Salvador, and Mexico (Olivares-Orellana, 2020). In 2017, 41,435 unaccompanied children were detained at the U.S.-Mexico border in comparison to 15,949 children detained in 2011 (Paris et al., 2018). Although not all of the unaccompanied children have experienced limited or interrupted formal education, and not all SLIFE are unaccompanied children, most SLIFE in the U.S. are from Mexico, Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador (Custodio & O’Loughlin, 2017).

Latinx youth with limited or interrupted formal education are newcomer immigrants, often having been enrolled in U.S. schools for less than a year (Suárez-Orozco et al., 2018b). They are placed in English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) programs that are not equipped to support students with limited or

interrupted formal education (Linares, 2020; Olivares-Orellana, 2020). Many of these programs are designed with the assumption that ELs will have the academic foundations, skills, and print literacy proficiency equivalent to the grade-level placement in their home country. However, due to their interrupted formal education, SLIFE often have limited academic skills, low literacy and home language proficiency (Custodio & O'Loughlin, 2017).

Latinx SLIFE' pre- and post-migration experiences can be traumatic and impact their social and emotional well-being, making it more difficult for them to adapt to U.S. schooling (Barajas-Gonzalez et al., 2018; Linares, 2020; Paris et al., 2018). The great majority of unaccompanied minors that may have interrupted formal education are from the countries that make up the Northern Triangle (Honduras, Guatemala, and El Salvador). This region has a long history of instability due to civil wars and chronic poverty, in part perpetuated by interventionist U.S. policies and practices toward the Northern Triangle countries. For example, these policies and practices include the U.S. Cold War political interventions, U.S. deportations of a large number of Central American gang members in the 1990s and 2000s, and the U.S. being one of the largest illegal drug markets-trade in Central America, all of which have contributed to increased violence and lawlessness of the Northern Triangle (Paris et al., 2018).

SLIFE from this region are forced to leave their countries for survival as they encounter the stressors and challenges of familial abuse or abandonment, historical civil wars and unrest, poverty, gang violence, and gender violence (Paris et al., 2018). In particular, Indigenous communities in these regions (e.g., Mam and Ixil of Guatemala, Zapotec of Mexico, etc.) have disproportionately been marginalized, impacted by poverty and violence, and consistently been persecuted (Casanova, 2012; Pentón Herrera, 2021). The youths' pre-migration experiences can be detrimental to their formal education and traumatizing for their mental health and social well-being. During the migration journey to the U.S., the youth can also encounter stress and anxiety as they may face danger during their 'crossing,' including violence (Paris et al., 2018; Suárez-Orozco et al., 2018b).

Post-migration experiences for Latinx SLIFE include encountering increased immigration enforcement and limited pathways to establishing legality in the United States. Limits on refugee and asylum applications as well as family separation policies have made it even more difficult for unaccompanied children immigrating to the U.S. (Hassan et al., 2021). For example, unaccompanied children must often represent themselves in the legal system to establish legal status in the U.S. (Paris et al., 2018). Newcomer immigrant Latinx SLIFE who are undocumented or have undocumented family members may also face suddenly being forced to separate from their families (Barajas-Gonzalez et al., 2018; Suárez-Orozco et al., 2018b). These experiences in the U.S. can contribute to continued trauma SLIFE may endure post-migration. Furthermore, Latinx SLIFE have to navigate not only a new language, but different cultural expectations from the context of reception, increasing their acculturative stress (Hos, 2016). Newcomer immigrants must navigate their familial home culture and the unfamiliar host culture while also trying to belong within their new schools (Casanova, 2012; Suárez-Orozco et al., 2018b). Recently,

increased xenophobic anti-immigrant rhetoric and attitudes have negatively impacted newcomer immigrant students, augmenting their experiences with discrimination and racism inside and out of U.S. schools (Hassan et al., 2021; Olivares-Orellana, 2020). SLIFE may also face increased competing familial obligations and responsibilities as they become the cultural and linguistic brokers helping their families navigate American culture (Buriel, 2012).

The immigration process and adjustment to U.S. society and schooling for Latinx SLIFE can be psychologically taxing. The prolonged traumatic exposure resulting from chronic anxiety and fear can impact students' socio-emotional behavior, cognitive control, learning, and school performance (Barajas-Gonzalez et al., 2018; Suárez-Orozco et al., 2018b).

It is important to identify the challenges Latinx SLIFE face since racial and ethnic minorities, in general, have been found to have more personal concerns than their white counterparts due to environmental and situational stressors associated with having a marginalized identity (Gloria et al., 2005). These risks impact their adaptation to the U.S. and how they will adjust to ESOL programs that may not address their specific needs. However, although we must pay attention to these risks and challenges, there are also numerous cultural-based strengths that can be fostered in order for Latinx SLIFE to overcome adversity.

Cultural Mismatch and Culturally Sustaining Pedagogies

To gain a better understanding of ways we can support students with limited or interrupted formal education, we must first examine how the culture of U.S. schooling does not match immigrant students' cultural backgrounds. We must analyze our own biases and create effective and culturally responsive ways of teaching that will support students academically, emotionally, and culturally. In K-12 education and post-secondary education, the ecological systems in place are rooted in low context, independent, Eurocentric ways of learning while the majority of SLIFE come from high context backgrounds and have pragmatic, interdependent orientations to learning (DeCapua & Marshall, 2010; Stephens et al., 2012). This leaves the students feeling confused and alienated in addition to adapting to life in the U.S. (Casanova, 2012; DeCapua & Marshall, 2015). SLIFE, in addition to learning English and the academic content like other ELs, have to make-up for missing formal schooling and catch up on their home language and literacy proficiency, all while adapting to every-day classroom practice of raising your hand or navigating school facilities such as lockers (Casanova, 2012; Hos, 2016). A common misconception is that helping immigrant students assimilate¹ will help them thrive in their new environment (Gonzales et al., 2009; Schwartz et al., 2010). This assimilation strategy

¹*Assimilation* refers to an acculturation strategy in which the person does not place value on maintaining their heritage culture and completely acquires the values from the dominant host culture (Berry, 2003).

actually hurts students by stripping them of their language, cultural practices and values, identity, and rendering them into a spectacle of ‘otherness’ (Watts, 2019). While these remain significant barriers for SLIFE, educators can adjust their methods of teaching to be more culturally responsive.

By continually working on learning better ways to support SLIFE, educators will help these students through this difficult transition and improve academic achievement rates. Culturally responsive teaching is characterized by five aspects: (1) understanding the cultural beliefs, values, and norms that influence the ways students approach the world; (2) continually evolving cultural understanding to develop and refine curriculum; (3) creating a supportive space for students; (4) recognizing differences in learning and thinking and accommodating these differences; and finally, (5) combining all four previously-mentioned aspects to foster effective classroom instruction (DeCapua, 2016). A specific Culturally Responsive Teaching approach that can be used in the classroom is the Mutually Adaptive Learning Paradigm® (MALP®), which allows both students and teachers to adapt during the transition process to formal education (DeCapua & Marshall, 2015). This ideal model of instruction combats the cultural mismatch that students face while in school. It also allows students to have a strong sense of belonging and connectedness that can translate into academic success (DeCapua, 2016).

We suggest that educators not only engage in culturally responsive teaching, but move even more towards equitable instruction by following culturally sustaining pedagogies. Culturally sustaining pedagogies (CSP) democratize education, promoting just and transformative schooling for a multicultural society (Alim & Paris, 2017). CSP not only encourages valuing students’ culture and responding with curricular inclusion of their background, but it also aims to transform systemic school practices to sustain linguistic, literate, and multicultural schooling for educational equity (Alim & Paris, 2017). Culturally sustaining pedagogies continue in the tradition of culturally responsive MALP® approaches in *acknowledging, adapting, and accommodating* to SLIFE cultural differences. Moreover, CSP *advocates* for minoritized learners by centering on these students’ perspectives, histories, and knowledge systems (Alim & Paris, 2017). CSP positions the cultural and linguistic differences of minoritized students as strengths that are welcomed, humanized, and cultivated in schools. CSP also resists unequal power relations by engaging in critical analysis of the systemic oppression and erasure of sociohistorical narratives of minoritized students (Kidwell & Pentón Herrera, 2019; Kinloch, 2017). It is through these critical analyses and implementation of lessons honoring the agency and power of minoritized students such as SLIFE that CSP aims to transform schools and society. In accordance with culturally responsive teaching, in particular MALP® and CSP, educators should understand, include, and more importantly center the sociohistorical, socio-emotional, and sociocultural learning of SLIFE. Students with limited or interrupted formal education have important cultural knowledge and life experiences that they bring into the classroom. Educators must promote the strengths that SLIFE have and integrate them into the classroom setting to ensure better academic outcomes and their overall well-being.

Resilience and Community Cultural Wealth

While there are many risks that SLIFE face, there are equally as many or more strengths that make them resilient in the classroom. It is important that educators focus their attention on these assets to truly promote a successful learning environment (Casanova, 2019). If educators are solely focusing on the barriers that these students face, there is little room to promote empowerment. Educators must not only understand the risks and challenges that SLIFE face, but also the rich cultural knowledges that they bring to the classroom, which can be sustained and cultivated. Educators must also acknowledge the sociohistorical and systemic inequities that have and continue to impact SLIFE in their educational trajectories. SLIFE face adverse circumstances perpetuated by inadequate resources coupled with a misunderstanding of their cultural and immigrant backgrounds, which must be acknowledged. Focusing on these inequities as the sources of the educational injustice faced by SLIFE is the first step to avoiding deficit-based frameworks that continue to place the onus of such disparities on these students and their communities. The second step is to not allow these disparities and risks to define the students, but instead to center on the many assets that SLIFE can draw upon, which can be both personal characteristics and environmental support systems to foster resilience.

Resilience is a normative process or behavioral pattern in which a person can positively adapt and overcome risks (e.g., traumatic migration experiences) within a context of adverse or negative circumstances (e.g., adapting to U.S. schools as a student with limited or interrupted formal education) (Casanova, 2019; Perez et al., 2009). Risk factors lead to a higher probability of a negative life outcome, while assets or protective factors offset these risks and lead to positive outcomes (Borrero et al., 2013). Assets or protective factors used by the person to counter risks can be personal (e.g., cultural and social competence, persistence, motivation, positive identity, self-confidence) and environmental (e.g., family, peer, and/or social support, sources of empowerment) (Casanova, 2019). Scholars have problematized resilience due to its individualistic nature, many times unevenly focusing on the individual's persistence and motivation, and not acknowledging the contexts of systemic inequalities enough (Casanova, 2019). More recently, immigration researchers have recommended ways to incorporate more interdependent contexts and acknowledge the culture-specific practices, interactions, and relationships of immigrant youth in their collective resilience processes (Suárez-Orozco et al., 2018a).

Educators have an important role in creating an environment that promotes academic resilience, where students are achieving good educational outcomes despite adversity. External assets such as quality of relationships at school and familial and community support play a crucial role in the academic resilience of Latinx immigrants. Latinx immigrant students may believe that school is their chance to excel and “better themselves,” so educators play an important role in supporting their academic goals (Casanova, 2019, p. 58). There are many ways to incorporate resilience in the classroom, including *fostering sources of resilience* and *community cultural wealth*.

Fostering Sources of Resilience

The more resources and support students have, the more likely they will be academically resilient. Educators should remain aware of the personal and environmental protective factors to ensure SLIFE are resilient. When creating course material, these factors should always be incorporated in order to foster sources of empowerment for the students.

Personal protective factors are characteristics that students have within themselves that counteract risk factors. Self-efficacy and cultural involvement are some factors that can be useful in promoting resilience in students with limited or interrupted formal education. Self-efficacy can be helpful for SLIFE in school because the more you believe in your ability to do academic work, the more likely you will do well (Perez et al., 2009). SLIFE come from many different cultural backgrounds. Cultural involvement is crucial for resilience because it is a characteristic that is important for their sense of identity. Cultural involvement can range from activities such as consuming media in their native language or speaking their native language with others (Smokowski et al., 2009).

Environmental protective factors are dependent on a student's social networks and resources. Volunteering or civic-engagement can be another type of protective factor that helps the student by giving them a sense of belonging and feeling part of a community in the U.S. (Perez et al., 2009). Similar to volunteering, extracurricular activities function in the same way, giving the student a chance to build a community and foster resilience (Borrero et al., 2013). Teachers of SLIFE should encourage involvement in these types of activities at school, such as migrant association clubs and Latinx clubs, to name a couple, or in their local community organizations (see Aker et al., this book, Chap. 14; and Lypka, this book, Chap. 17, for examples).

Family, peers, and mentors can all be support networks for students (Perez et al., 2009). Social support from families and teachers has even been found to be related to school engagement (Garcia-Reid et al., 2015). For immigrant students, it is especially important to have the social support that values their cultural background and identity (Casanova, 2019). Caregivers of immigrant youth value the importance of passing down knowledge and stories, so finding a way to incorporate their cultural values with school learning will enhance their academic experiences and promote resilience. Taking a community cultural wealth perspective, which focuses on cultural assets or strengths of minoritized students of color, educators can better understand how to foster the often-overlooked knowledge and expertise SLIFE bring to the classroom.

Community Cultural Wealth

Community cultural wealth uses critical race theory (CRT) to challenge traditional interpretations of cultural capital. CRT critically examines the “ways race and racism implicitly and explicitly impact social structures, practices and discourses” (Yosso, 2005, p. 70). CRT confronts the impact of race and racism on social institutions (e.g., schools) by challenging dominant ideologies of equality and meritocracy, and instead centering on the expertise and experiences of minoritized people of color. CRT contests the Bourdieuan argument that white, upper and middle-class people hold knowledge that is more valuable than that of lower and working-class communities of color (Yosso, 2005). CCW rejects the deficit-based perspective that minoritized students, like immigrant newcomers, lack cultural wealth just because their types of capital are different from the social (e.g., education), cultural (e.g., social networks), and economic (e.g., money) capital of white upper and middle-class students.

Yosso (2005) argues that minoritized students of color, such as Latinx SLIFE, have an array of cultural knowledge, skills, abilities, and contacts that make up different types of cultural capital that are unrecognized and unacknowledged in formal school contexts. There are six forms of cultural capital that Latinx SLIFE may possess: (1) aspirational (i.e., resiliency in confronting barriers), (2) linguistic (i.e., social, cognitive and cultural skills due to being multilingual), (3) familial (i.e., cultural knowledge and close kin, both family and friends, that inform values, beliefs, and practices, and create a sense of community), (4) social (i.e., networks of people and community resources), (5) navigational (i.e., skill of navigating through institutions that are not inclusive or supportive of minoritized communities), (6) resistant (i.e., knowledge and skills gained through resisting inequality) (Yosso, 2005). These forms of cultural capital that the CCW lens highlights align well with the asset-based resilience that educators should foster in the classroom for SLIFE by incorporating culturally responsive and sustaining pedagogies. In the next section, we outline specific strategies that can help educators foster the cultural wealth and capital of SLIFE in the classroom.

Discussion: Promoting Cultural Wealth and Knowledge for Latinx SLIFE

General Recommendations for Fostering Cultural Wealth and Knowledge

As highlighted in the above sections of this chapter, when teaching Latinx SLIFE, educators should center on the students’ perspectives and engage in culturally sustaining practices. Figure 11.1 highlights the reciprocal, strengths-focused relationship a teacher should have, in particular with SLIFE. The interactions between

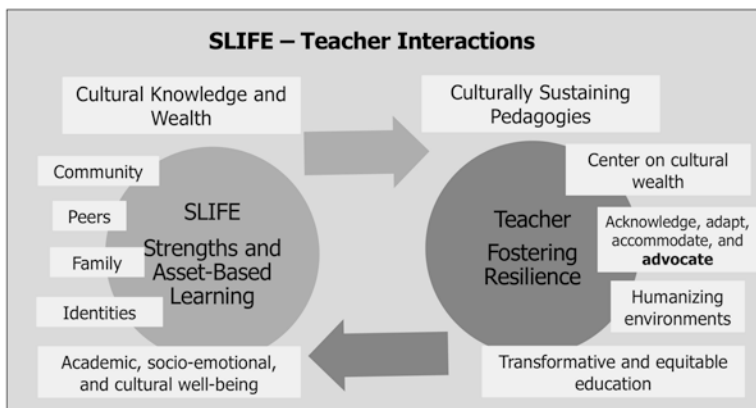


Fig. 11.1 Interactions between SLIFE and teachers

SLIFE and their teachers to build this type of relationship must be grounded in culturally sustaining pedagogies and community cultural wealth. Both student and teacher can learn from each other. SLIFE can bring expertise from their community, peers, family, and multiple identities they possess (e.g., immigrant, ethnic, gender, etc.). In addition to teaching academic content and language proficiency, teachers can foster resilience by centering on the students’ strengths. This requires teachers to acknowledge SLIFE cultural wealth and expertise, adapt the curricula, accommodate the different student cultural backgrounds, and most importantly, advocate for a more just treatment of SLIFE students. By developing a more humanizing space in the classroom, teachers demonstrate to the SLIFE that they care about their well-being. Teachers must engage in transformative and equitable educational practices to address the academic, socio-emotional, and cultural well-being of these students.

Examples of Pedagogical Practices and Activities

Academic

In line with CSP and CCW, educators should focus activities on bettering SLIFE academic experiences and outcomes in which the students engage in sociocultural collaborative and reciprocal learning (John-Steiner & Mahn, 1996). Vygotsky’s sociocultural learning theory centers on the notions that children’s learning and development occur in culturally-shaped contexts and are based on social interactions. Taking a sociocultural approach to classroom activities is especially important for SLIFE because it considers the cultural contexts of the students and emphasizes the interactions with teachers as crucial for their learning. Therefore, teachers should engage in student-centered collaborative learning activities where

SLIFE interact with non-SLIFE English learners of different language proficiencies and backgrounds to work on meaningful and challenging tasks. The classroom activities should include discussion-based learning where instructors facilitate dialogue that promotes deeper learning and help students work together (John-Steiner & Mahn, 1996). With these types of activities, SLIFE can participate in reciprocal learning, facilitated by the teacher, where they and non-SLIFE teach each other and learn from one another. The activities would provide opportunities for SLIFE to share the expertise and cultural wealth that they bring to the classroom.

A student-centered practice that uses CSP and CCW has students share how their backgrounds have shaped them. This can be done by asking them to share their own migration stories. SLIFE could journal, draw, or verbally share the stories in a low-stakes, low-tech space for students to feel comfortable sharing (Linares, 2020). Teachers should allow multiple ways for students to express themselves. This type of activity can be connected to a particular reading or video that focuses on stories of migration.

Socio-emotional

Teachers working with SLIFE should familiarize themselves with the experiences these children have encountered during their pre-migration, migration, and post-migration journeys in order to understand SLIFE' trauma-related classroom behaviors (e.g., disinterest, anxiety, and depression) (Barajas Gonzalez et al., 2018). Teachers should focus on developing caring relationships with students in order for SLIFE to trust them and feel a greater sense of belonging and comfort in the classroom (Hos, 2016). An example of an activity that would be helpful in addressing the socio-emotional needs of SLIFE is interviewing students about their educational histories. The interview should include questions about when and where they started school in general, and when they started school in the United States. Teachers can ask questions about the students' migration experiences specifically, and what they liked most about school before and after migrating (Suárez-Orozco et al., 2018b). This exercise could also be conducted with parents or caregivers to gain multiple perspectives about the SLIFE' schooling and migration experiences. The information can be used to develop or adapt lessons for SLIFE.

Teachers can build the socio-emotional well-being of SLIFE by not only supporting the learning of academic content and linguistic proficiency, but also showing that they care about SLIFE' mental health and the school experiences that may cause them distress. For example, to counter the racism and discrimination Latinx SLIFE may face in schools from other students, teachers should be prepared to have difficult conversations that challenge students to think about their SLIFE classmates' experiences and build empathy. One activity that can provide a space for students to be more empathetic is the *Three Whys*, which can be applied to many classroom topics. For the activity, the teacher asks the students to consider, "Why might the topic at hand matter to me? Why might it matter to people around me (family, classmates, etc.) and Why might it matter to the world?" (Re-Imagining

Migration, 2019). This activity can increase awareness of the shared connections that students have with each other in the classroom and with others beyond the classroom.

Cultural

Educators should help SLIFE navigate the mismatch that sometimes exists between the home culture and the school culture, which can foster youth's motivation, learning, and identity formation. Teachers should develop an open dialogue with SLIFE about how their lives in and out of school are (or are not) related. Some actions teachers can take to include SLIFE is to ask about all the languages they are exposed to at home and in their communities and what other forms of knowledge they have learned outside of school. In general, educators should pursue activities that incorporate the culture and history of students in the classroom.

We recommend activities that promote the ethnic identity development of Latinx SLIFE, since high levels of ethnic identity, for example, are linked to increased academic sense of belonging. Ethnic identity is defined as a person's pride, emotional attachment, self-identification, and engagement with practices, traditions, and attitudes particular to their ethnic group (Phinney, 1992). Ethnic identity is cultivated by the person's interpersonal interactions within their ethnic group, such as with their family and community (Phinney, 1992). Teachers can ask students to create narratives about their culture or ethnic identities that could include art, music, or even food. Students can be asked to complete an identity poem in which they write or verbally talk about familiar sights, sounds, smells of home, foods, sayings or advice heard growing up, and people they value and are important to them. They can also do a show and tell of an item they value and reflect on how it relates to their culture and how they feel about it.

Across the activities and practices that we have presented, which focus on supporting SLIFE academically, socio-emotionally, and culturally, teachers should make sure to demonstrate an ethic of care and respect toward the students. Teachers should also make sure students feel like they are invested in them and that they matter in and outside the classroom. We have included links to several websites that have helpful classroom resources and lesson ideas in the appendix.

Conclusion

We would like to conclude this chapter with the following take-home bullet points:

- Be critical of systemic inequalities and power dynamics within our school systems. One way to do so, is to be critical of deficit-based practices and policies and design lessons focus on the strengths and potential SLIFE have to optimize their academic, socio-emotional, and cultural development.

- Use a community cultural wealth (CCW) lens to foster the resilience of SLIFE. Learn about the different types of capital students bring to the classroom and center on this cultural wealth. Act on CCW perspectives by committing to culturally sustaining pedagogies (CSP) that adapt accessible curricula which acknowledge the backgrounds, knowledges, and histories of SLIFE. CSP can provide opportunities for self-empowerment, positive identity development, and better academic outcomes.
- Build reciprocal, caring relationships with students that center on the students' lived experiences within and outside of schooling. Create a space where SLIFE can feel like their perspectives matter, are encouraged to embrace their cultural identities, and increase their socio-emotional well-being.
- Advocate for more inclusive school policies and practices and an increase in resources specifically for SLIFE to counter the systemic and institutional challenges these students face in their schooling experiences (see Linville & Pentón Herrera, this book, Chap. 5).

Reflection Questions

1. Migration experiences: Think about *one* of the Latinx SLIFE in your classroom. Reflect on what you learned about Latinx SLIFE experiences in this chapter.
 - (a) Who are the student's direct sources of support outside of your school?
 - (b) What can you recall about the student's linguistic and cultural background? What the student's migration experiences?
 - (c) What community or home practices, beliefs, and values may shape the student's experiences at school?
2. Resilience and cultural wealth: (Can be done in pairs or groups). Using the definition of resilience presented in this chapter, develop a SLIFE program that would directly or indirectly aid students in their adaptation to United States schools. Devise a program that would develop their assets and foster at least two to three of the six types of cultural capital discussed in the chapter. Be creative. Develop a visual to describe the program. Describe:
 - (a) Who your program will target (e.g., the SLIFE, other teachers, parents, etc.)?
 - (b) The goal(s) of the program: Which types of cultural capital are you targeting to promote resilience and positive well-being for SLIFE? How can you incorporate practices in the classroom that will allow these students to foster resilience?
 - (c) Where and when will you implement your program (e.g., in the classroom, after-school, recreational, academic, etc.)? Give an example of an activity you would incorporate as part of your program.

Appendix: Useful Websites

- I'm Your Neighbor Books: Books about immigrant communities. <https://www.imyourneighborbooks.org/>
- Reimagining Migration: A site dedicated to the education and well-being of immigrant-origin youth which provides classroom resources, lessons, and teaching ideas for educators. <https://reimaginingmigration.org/>
- Colorín Colorado: A bilingual site for educators of Dual Language Learners. <https://www.colorincolorado.org/>
- Get to know your ELL: A site promoting socio-emotional learning. <https://www.colorincolorado.org/article/getting-know-your-ells-six-steps-success>
- Lesson Plans and Strategies: <https://www.colorincolorado.org/ell-strategies-best-practices>

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Chapter 12

Supporting Queer SLIFE Youth: Initial Queer Considerations



Ethan Trinh

Abstract Queerness is always on the move, in the making, in partiality, in contestation. Therefore, I cannot provide a fixed framework or techniques on *what works* with queer students with limited or interrupted formal education (SLIFE) because its rigidity will continue to perpetuate normative frames of thinking of/about queer students in the classroom. Rather, I offer a dialogic space for us (i.e., teachers, administrators, policymakers) to think queer and consider what would/could happen when sexuality and education meet. In this chapter, I argue that as sexuality and language education intersect, the affective domains and emotional aspects of the queer SLIFE youth population require special attention prior to, or in conjunction with the teaching of language and literacy. I will start by introducing the queer SLIFE youth population, the challenges this population has faced, and what actions adults might consider taking if we want to co-learn with them. I conclude by offering a few questions to discuss how to co-deconstruct the binary and essentialized thinking in our personal and professional spaces after we finish this chapter.

Keywords Queer SLIFE youth · Queer pedagogy · Queer research · English language classrooms

Introduction

In this edited volume, I [the editor] seek to bring the SLIFE [Student with Limited or Interrupted Formal Education] population front and center by collecting high-quality contributions that shed light, advance, and educate readers on how to best support SLIFE who are also ELs [English Learners] in their classrooms, learning settings (K-12 or adults), and organizations. For this reason, contributions must be theoretically sound and must also provide practical techniques, frameworks, approaches, practices, considerations, and/or useful insights that any stakeholder, at any level, can implement in their institution. Contributions may also be research studies that explore how to best support the SLIFE population (Pentón Herrera, Call for Proposal for this book).

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I thought about this Call for Proposals for a year or so before I began working on this project. I have been stuck in thinking about how the Call for Proposals aligns accordingly with my work related to the so-called *queer pedagogy*, *queer research*, or *queer youth*. As an educator teaching and working with queer youth in an after-school program in a Southern state of the United States of America, I was naive, unprepared, and perhaps uncritical in thinking about what queer pedagogy really meant. Even though I used circle activities in the past (Trinh, 2019) to encourage both queer and non-queer students to break the cycle of heteronormativity, homophobia, and sexism in the classroom, I was unsure whether or not my pedagogy queered the students' thinking. After conducting the circle activities, I asked myself, "To what extent did queer pedagogy work? Did I queer my students' thinking? Did they queer my thinking? What does queer pedagogy look like with different populations in different spaces in the future?"

Queer pedagogy does more than merely propose *good* instructional strategies, practices, and related themes to *fit in* or *normalize* the representation of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and questioning (LGBTQ+), or queer,¹ in the curriculum (Britzman, 1995; Luhmann, 1998; Talburt, 2000). Rather, queer pedagogy explores the "messy process of learning and teaching, reading and writing" (Luhmann, 1998, p. 128). As such, reflecting on the Call for Proposals for this edited book, I repeatedly asked myself what kind of "practical techniques or frameworks" could be suggested and implemented in this chapter without further marginalizing queer youth in schools, especially queer youth who are also SLIFE. Queerness is always on the move, in the making, in partiality, in contestation; therefore, I cannot offer something fixed, stable, totalized, or universal, to work with queer youth. Simply put, I cannot provide a framework or techniques because its rigidity will continue to perpetuate "normative frames of thinking" (Kumashiro, 2002, p. 8) of/about queer students in the classroom. I thus refuse to do so in this chapter. Instead, I would like to offer some queer considerations for adults (i.e., teachers, staff, administrators, policymakers) to support this population now and in the future. Specifically, I offer the readers a dialogic space to think queer with me and consider what would/could happen when sexuality and education meet (Talburt, 2000).

In this chapter, I argue that as sexuality and language education intersect, the affective domains and emotional aspects of the queer SLIFE youth population require special attention prior to, or in conjunction with the teaching of language and literacy. I will start by introducing the queer SLIFE youth population, the challenges this population has faced, and what actions adults might consider taking if we want to co-learn with them. I conclude by offering a few questions for us to discuss how to co-deconstruct the binary and essentialized thinking in our personal and professional spaces after we finish this chapter.

¹I use *queer* as an inclusive term in this chapter to challenge the normative frames of thinking about the LGBTQ+ community and against the oppressive history placed on queer people or bodies (see more in Kumashiro, 2002).

Queer SLIFE, Queer Youth, Queer Everywhere

There are a few terms that I want to clarify before we move forward. First, SLIFE is an umbrella term that describes students who arrive in the host country with limited schooling (Freeman et al., 2002). There are inconsistencies in the assessments and tools we use to identify SLIFE when we welcome them in our school districts and in the report shared with the states (DeCapua & Marshall, 2011; DeCapua et al., 2009; Browder et al., this book, Chap. 2). Further, SLIFE are perceived as having limited print literacy skills and academic gaps in both their native language (L1) and in the target language (L2) (DeCapua, 2016; DeCapua & Marshall, 2011). Some SLIFE arrive as refugees, not immigrant students, which means that the former (usually) flees their home country due to threats of persecution, while the latter chooses to resettle to another country and could return without feeling unsafe (Cortes, 2004). Salva and Matis (2017) used the term students with interrupted formal education (SIFE) to describe students who are migrants (i.e., students who have to work to support their family financially), asylees, or refugees (i.e., students who fled to the U.S. escaping persecution). For consistency, the term *SLIFE* is used in this chapter to refer to refugees, asylees, ELs, and immigrant students who are enrolled in the K-12 school system.

Second, *youth*, according to Lesko and Talburt (2012), is a universalized and categorized term that needs to be constantly rewritten because they are “neither this nor that, but always in-between, becoming” (p. 2). As youth grow up, they become exploitative tools destined to provide economic, social, and political services (Lesko, 2012) and, therefore, are denied being knowledgeable or creative. The knowledge of adults, or “those who are already made” (Lesko & Talburt, 2012, p. 2), continue to manipulate, govern, and control the development of youth, causing them to self-hate and to feel ashamed and doubtful when discussing topics that are considered taboo in their societies or communities, such as sexual desires and other gender/sexuality-related matters.

Youth may choose to self-identify as queer, a term used interchangeably, or oftentimes broadly, with the term LGBTQ+, to describe those who are not perceived as heterosexuals. The term queer, in addition to describing a person’s gender and sexuality, is also used as a verb to indicate critical pedagogical inquiry in the language classroom, demonstrate activism for marginalized non-heterosexual populations in schools, and show resistance against societal heteronormativity, ultimately leading to radical social critiques (Hunt & Holmes, 2015; Kumashiro, 2002; Nelson, 2006; Sadowski, 2013). For the purpose of this chapter, I introduce the term *queer SLIFE youth* to describe SLIFE who are in the process of exploring and becoming, or are in-between, their own gender and sexualities. Queer SLIFE youth endure multiple layers of tensions, resistance, and trauma when they arrive in our schools that typical ELs—or even non-queer SLIFE—do not face when they resettle in the host country. Some of these tensions include challenging social heterosexual norms, fleeing through physical and mental spaces, and struggling with Western formal

academic and social knowledge. Although I primarily focus on the queer SLIFE youth (i.e., middle and high school) in this chapter, I acknowledge that queer SLIFE can also be enrolled in elementary schools. Therefore, we need to pay attention to all of our students in K-12 to avoid double or triple exclusion and marginalization from the school curricula, policies, and public discourses, especially when youth and queer are situated *everywhere* (Haraway, 1988; Lesko & Talburt, 2012; Talburt, 2006).

Challenges Facing Queer SLIFE Youth

Publications and research show that the queer SLIFE youth population has encountered various challenges in their home countries, refugee camps, and the school systems in both the home and host countries. This section will describe some of these challenges from a global perspective first, and then more specific to the U.S. school system, including, but not limited to: (1) legislative, social, cultural, and familial prohibitions, (2) accommodation, (3) limited or interrupted schooling in the home countries, and (4) barriers in the school system in the United States.

Legislative, Social, Cultural and Familial Prohibitions

A global report by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) (2015) found that legislative hostility toward LGBTQ+ is still present, especially in countries in Africa, Asia-Pacific, the Middle East, and North Africa. The report states:

There is the existence of laws that *directly* criminalise same-sex sexual activity. An office in Asia-Pacific, for example, noted that “homosexual acts can be punished by whipping, imprisonment, or the death penalty,” while another respondent in Africa cited legislation that “criminalises every Muslim [man] who commits sodomy [with an individual of the same-sex] by death (stoning).” Although the severity of punishments and enforcement levels vary drastically between countries and regions, same-sex sexual activity is illegal in 75 countries globally as of May 2015 (p. 13, emphasis in original).

Queer youth, specifically, are at a “heightened risk of discrimination and violence by family members, peers, and the broader community” (UNHCR, 2015, p. 13). For example, the report states that queer youth may have been “sexually abused by relatives, confined to their homes, banished from their homes, or referred to ‘sorcerers’ to help them ‘fix’ their sexual orientation or gender identity” (UNHCR, 2015, p. 13). The same report shows additional examples, such as the high number of murders on transgender people and other acts of discrimination, which has taken away the fundamental human rights and dignity of queer youth in their home countries.

No Place Is Safe

Due to the fear of persecution, queer youth flee to different countries searching for safety and acceptance. However, once they arrive in the host country, this population continues to face other atrocities such as exploitation and abuse, lack of money and shelter, language barriers, and oftentimes sexual harassment (ICJ, 2016; Wimark, 2019). For them, there is no safe place, especially when they migrate from different detention centers to refugee camps and/or across countries and borders.

A 2016 report by the International Commission of Jurists (ICJ) (2016) shared that queer youth placed in immigration detention centers upon arrival are subjected to “considerable violence, especially sexual assault and rape, by fellow inmates and, at times, by prison guards” (p. 121). The report also acknowledged that the host countries were “unable or unwilling to provide effective protection” to queer youth (p. 216), causing them to continue to remain silent because exposing their queer identities could lead to further physical and sexual assaults. In addition, in his research, Wimark (2019) revealed that queer refugees from Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan, Morocco, among other countries, had to flee to a different country (i.e., Sweden) due to the family’s torture and rejection. In Sweden, they had to continuously hide their gender identities and conform to heteronormative norms to find safety and stability. Fleeing from social, cultural, and moral norms have detrimental effects on queer youth, often resulting in mental and physical suffering throughout their lives (ICJ, 2016; UNHCR, 2015). For this population, there is no fixed physical home; home is always on the run, in the making, in progress, and so are their queer identities.

Limited or Interrupted Schooling for Queer SLIFE Youth

ICJ (2016) reported that queer youth are oftentimes deprived of accessibility and rights to attend formal education in their home countries, in addition to other discriminatory acts. Even though the report does not show statistics of how many are denied access to formal education in their home countries due to their queer identities, queer youth are often subjected to discriminatory and unjust systems, which makes their educational needs an even more pressing matter. While writing this chapter, I searched for information about limited or interrupted schooling for this population; however, there is little research available specifically acknowledging queer SLIFE youth. It could be explained that due to queer SLIFE youth being included with refugees and asylees in general, it might be difficult to separate this population from other groups, especially as we look for statistics showing gender identities and formal education backgrounds. In addition, since queer SLIFE youth have to flee from country to country and keep their gender and sexuality hidden most of the time, they become invisible, or *ghosts*, in research, in formal schooling, and in educational policies. Thus, visibility remains an immediate topic of concern

and need for queer SLIFE youth. Future studies need to consider including this population to explore and understand their educational needs, hidden stories (Pentón Herrera & Trinh, 2021), and unique hardships they experience before, during, and after arriving in their host country. It is time for queer SLIFE youth's voices to be heard, listened to, recognized, and acknowledged.

Barriers in the U.S. School System

We now shift from a global perspective of the challenges this population faces to exploring the barriers that they have faced and continue to endure in the U.S. school system. In 2016, the Gay, Lesbian, Straight, and Education Network (GLSEN) surveyed teachers and students and found that queer students were still experiencing high levels of biased language, bullying, and harassment at schools. For example, queer youth were reported to be bullied due to their body size/appearance (36.2%), actual/perceived sexual orientation (19.2%), race/ethnicity (10.4%), academic ability (10.1%), and masculinity or femininity (9.2%), with only 20.8% of students reporting to be taught about the history or life events of LGBTQ+ people in the class (Greytak et al., 2016).

In 2018, GLSEN added questions related to religious-based factors, feelings of safety in school, English language proficiency and citizenship status, and other homophobic and racist languages related to the immigrant population into the survey (Kosciw et al., 2018). Immigrants or foreign-born queer students reported feeling unsafe at school due to their non-native English proficiency, immigration status, and race/ethnicity. In addition, queer immigrants also reported they experienced higher rates of victimization and discrimination compared to their U.S.-born queer peers (i.e., 8.5% versus 4.7%). The report suggests teachers and researchers should be aware of the needs and the experiences of LGBTQ+ immigrant students and their relationships with the family. As an important note, this report did not mention queer SLIFE youth.

Due to the high levels of victimization and bullying in the U.S. school system and from previous traumas endured in their lives, this population often experiences depression, anxiety, and is inclined to committing suicide (Alessi et al., 2016; Loewy & Madsen, 2009; Trinh, 2020a). Worse, after the 2016 U.S. Presidential election, fears and anxiety increased for many immigrants and refugee students (Gonzalez et al., 2018; Jones, 2018). Therefore, teachers of immigrant and undocumented queer students have advocated against fears, racism, xenophobia, homophobia, and legislative bans in schools (Cisneros, 2018; Nguyen & Kebede, 2017; Pentón Herrera & Obregón, 2020; Rodriguez & González Ybarra, 2020) and outside of school (Burns, 2020; Kutner, 2017; Poteat et al., 2019).

In addition to challenges facing queer SLIFE youth, the teachers, educators, and administrators have found it challenging to work with this population. Specifically,

the curriculum is not open and ready to discuss the issues of gender, sexuality, and queerness in the language classroom (Paiz, 2018; Rhodes & Coda, 2017; Trinh, 2020b). Also, the dearth of resources is highly alarming, and acts as barriers for educators and scholars like me who are interested in learning about and supporting queer SLIFE youth. I cannot emphasize enough the complexity of this population's multiple identities and of the various challenges that they are still facing in our educational spaces (i.e., becoming accustomed to a formal schooling environment, learning L2, print literacy, standardized tests, homophobia, xenophobia, racism, etc.). As such, the writing of this chapter is an invitation and the very first step for future research with and about queer SLIFE youth.

I take this opportunity to call on researchers, teachers, theorists, policymakers who are working with queer SLIFE youth in their own spaces to start creating safe spaces for this population and to listen to their needs. Queer and youth are everywhere, but remain invisible, especially queer SLIFE youth. Even though this population *could* be minors in schools where their genders and sexualities remain invisible or not talked about, they have additional layers of needs and issues that we need to be aware of (see Appendix). If teachers only tailor their instruction to non-queer EL youth with adequate formal schooling or even to non-queer SLIFE youth, the needs of queer SLIFE youth will remain unsupported. Therefore, acknowledgment, appreciation, and validation of their voices, stories, educational needs, and gender- and sexuality-related issues are essential to support them as they become familiar with formal schooling and overcome additional challenges (e.g., visibility) (Trinh, [forthcoming](#)).

I would like to circle back to the statement I made at the beginning of this chapter—I cannot offer a fixed framework, a successful model, or a *what works* pedagogical approach for this population and for queer youth in general because teaching queer pedagogy—and doing queer research—is non-linear, messy, fluid, partial, and situated, and so are the identities of queer SLIFE youth. I will, thus, use the rest of this chapter to offer considerations so that we will begin to understand what appropriate support looks like for this vulnerable, invisible population.

Supporting Queer SLIFE Youth: Foundational Queer Considerations

In this section, I offer three foundational considerations to support queer SLIFE youth in our learning, teaching, and research spaces. In each consideration, I describe a system of reasoning (Lesko, 2012), then offer partial, un/successful personal and professional experiences to help readers relate to these considerations. I conclude by asking a few questions to allow us to continue to think queerly about our own teaching and research practices, for doing queer projects is never complete and always invites interminable inquiries and processes.

Consideration #1: Acknowledging Students' Identities

First and foremost, we need to learn how to create a safe space for both queer and non-queer to (co)learn and support each other. I echo Hos's (2016) research suggesting that teachers' care is not enough for SLIFE youth. Rather, teachers should "offer students opportunities to express their creativity and to experience curiosity, freedom, and discovery; using humor and laughter to guide a classroom community toward knowledge making; and understanding our students' cultural backgrounds, dreams, and goals" (p. 500). Hos's suggestions reflect an idea of creating a classroom community or space where students are able to explore their own identities with freedom and curiosity. Therefore, I ask you to consider the first and foremost suggestion, which is to create a welcoming, non-judgmental space where queer SLIFE youth can feel safe, heard, and seen to (re)negotiate their identities with peers, teachers, and staff. Specifically, introducing the concept of gender-neutral (or inclusive) pronouns (i.e., they/them/their, or no pronouns) at the beginning of the semester is helpful in disrupting gender binary assumptions such as 'there is only male and female,' or 'man and woman' in gender and sexuality (McGlashan & Fitzpatrick, 2018; Miller, 2018; Trinh, 2020b).

Gender pronouns "refer to names and pronouns that one feels most comfortable identifying with or being used when spoken or referred to. Names and pronouns can change over time and based on context and should be honored" (Miller, 2018, p. 38). Using gender pronouns could be painful and complicated to some of the teachers and students (Levin, 2018). For example, Levin (2018), a professor, argues that some students are unsure about their identities; therefore, they cannot choose a pronoun to claim. Also, some students may not be ready to come out in a new and unsafe environment, especially where some of their classmates may also be part of their communities outside of school (i.e., neighbors, coworkers, etc.). However, queer students may be comfortable using gender pronouns in schools because it disrupts the power and essentialist/heterosexual thinking, helping them open a space where they can create an allyship with non-queer peers (McGlashan & Fitzpatrick, 2018).

It is important to note that although the teacher may plan to introduce gender pronouns in their pedagogy, it needs to be a *voluntary* action for the students. In other words, teachers should not disclose the students' identities unless there is consent from the student. Teachers must be aware that the goal of this practice must be to create a safe and welcoming environment for all students, not to accidentally uncover students' gender and sexuality in front of the class if they are not ready to do so. The element of freedom should be practiced in order to minimize power, authority, and pressure from the teachers and other non-queer peers, especially for queer SLIFE youth who are dealing with mental, social, emotional, and academic struggles while becoming accustomed to formal education (Custodio & O'Loughlin, 2017; Newcomer et al., 2020; Pentón Herrera, 2021a). In addition, if the teachers misgender the students' pronouns in public or in front of other students or staff, we need to acknowledge our mistakes and correct ourselves. By acknowledging and

respecting students' identities in public, teachers partially create an inclusive, non-judgmental atmosphere for all.

During my practicum at a high school where the majority of students were SLIFE, the co-teacher did not make a grounding rule or mentioned anything related to gender identity. For my co-teacher, the priority was improving reading scores and passing standardized tests. At that point, I did not have knowledge about gender and sexualities, either, because the teaching preparation programs did not prepare me for the inclusion of critical perspectives in the classroom. Therefore, I came to class with an essentialist/binary thinking, which stopped me from recognizing other gender identities in my class. Later, when I taught English to Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) to adult immigrants and refugees, I reflected on what I had learned from the lesson in high school and introduced gender pronouns at the beginning of the class, including my gender pronouns as they/them/their (Trinh, 2020b). Even though there were discomforts at the beginning, the students found it important to acknowledge the differences in gender and sexuality among their peers. Teachers can find resources at the GLSEN website (<https://www.glsen.org/>) for a step-by-step lesson plan to get a broader sense of how to use gender pronouns in the classroom (for example, <https://www.glsen.org/sites/default/files/Misgendering-and-Respect-for-Pronouns.pdf>, or https://www.glsen.org/sites/default/files/2020-06/TRANS-AWARENESS-WEEK-PRONOUNS-LITTLE-WORDS-THAT-MAKE-A-BIG-DIFFERENCE-GLSEN_1.pdf).

Consideration #2: Adding the Discourse of Difference

To encourage queer and non-queer SLIFE youth to explore gender and sexual identities, I propose adding a discourse of differences in the classroom. This discourse is inspired by Michelle Fine's (1988) ideas where she asks teachers and educators to "reconstruct schooling as an empowering context in which we listen to and work with the meanings and experiences of gender and sexuality revealed by the adolescents themselves" (p. 36). Fine (1988) states, "when we refuse that responsibility, we prohibit an education which adolescents wholly need and deserve" (p. 36).

I found the idea of an *empowering context* inspiring, radical, and effective, which is why I suggest adding the discourse of difference to build an inclusive curriculum. The discourse of difference, for me, is fluid and moving like queer identities, which are located in "everyone, everything, and everywhere" (Talbur, 2006, p. 91). This discourse could be manifested in different forms of knowledge, such as research articles, blogs, podcasts, films, or even right in the classroom (i.e., the students' knowledge about their bodies, feelings, and identities for themselves and for each other). The discourse of difference does not merely use the representation of queer to try to normalize the curriculum because this is not what queer pedagogy is about. Rather, the discourse of difference incorporates queer images and representations as a *challenge-the-heteronormativity* text to openly discuss with queer and non-queer students. As "queer pedagogy begins with the question of how we come to know

and how knowledge is produced in the interaction between teacher/text and student” (Luhmann, 1998, p. 125). As such, queer pedagogy is born where/when the relationship of the text, teacher, and students is challenged.

There are three main resources that I often visit for borrowing queer texts to incorporate into my curriculum. The first one is *I'm here. I'm queer. What the hell do I read?* (<https://www.leewind.org/>). The second resource is LGBTQ+ books at the Lewis library (<https://libguides.luc.edu/c.php?g=49784&p=2764896#s-lg-box-wrapper-10274662>). The third resource is Lambda Legal (<https://www.lambdalegal.org/>), a national nonprofit organization committed to achieving full recognition of the civil rights of LGBTQ+ and everyone living with the human immunodeficiency viruses (HIV). Teacher-readers, if you find these library archives hard to access, you are still able to track the titles and find the version virtually or at your local library. Depending on the students' reading levels, teachers can differentiate and accommodate their lessons accordingly.

When we incorporate LGBTQ+ texts, we have to be mindful of the assumptions we bring into these readings with the students. As Deborah Britzman (1995) reminds us of queer reading practices, “For interpretation to exceed the impulse to normalize meaning and certify the self, reading must begin with an acknowledgment of difference as identity and not reduce interpretation to a confirmation of identity” (p. 163). Therefore, teachers need to be careful in not totalizing the meaning and interpretation of the text. Instead, teachers should be open to different perspectives and ideas from queer and non-queer students to challenge the ‘fixed’ queer images/texts. I suggest teachers think about including opportunities for critical storytelling (see Pentón Herrera & Trinh, 2021) where students take the lead in co-interpreting and co-discussing their stories and the stories of others. Students can use the resources provided in this chapter and/or other critical resources to think, write, and critique the binary and essentialized thinking and engage in discussions that acknowledge differences inside and outside of the classroom space.

Consideration #3: Dropping the Knowledge

Susan Talburt (2018) describes an idea of public feelings that “underscores that the ostensibly private or intimate is constitutive of the so-called public sphere, feelings are integral to community formation, and feeling and thought are not separate” (p. xvi). From my understanding, public feelings are the felt relations among personal and collective identities, and actions generated (un)comfortably—and distributed differently—in individuals (e.g., youth and adults). In her book, Talburt (2018) suggests the idea of ‘dropping the knowledge’ to turn queer reading practices into free exchanges of ideas, attempting to encourage adults (teachers) to reposition themselves, and to challenge the hierarchical relationships between teachers and students that are historically, pedagogically, and socially fixed. Talburt (2018) asks us, adults (e.g., teachers, administrators, policymakers, etc.), to reposition ourselves to listen to queer youth deeply. Therefore, my third suggestion to the readers is to drop the

knowledge, reposition yourselves from an authoritative to a caring figure, and ask, *what does it take to drop our knowledge and listen deeply to queer SLIFE youth?*

Some heteronormative examples that we may hear in our schools: ‘grow up,’ ‘be mature,’ ‘act like an adult,’ ‘follow the school policies,’ ‘speak English,’ ‘act like a man or woman,’ ‘men or women do this and don’t do that.’ I am wondering: (1) *As adults, how, why, and from whom do we perceive those messages as correct or appropriate?* and (2) *How do these messages, in the long run, affect our students mentally, emotionally, physically/bodily, socially, and educationally?* If hierarchical relationships between the teacher and students are not diminished, or at least not repositioned for the purpose of mutual understanding and deep listening, the teachers will continue to silence students and perpetuate the authority, power, and assumptions in the classroom. This exertion of power may further alienate queer SLIFE youth who may be struggling with finding a voice and a place in formal schooling. Therefore, one of the elements for teachers to drop the knowledge is to listen to students (queer and non-queer SLIFE youth) and their individual needs deeply and critically, regardless of the extra work involved in this practice. Something to be mindful of is that our students’ silence and disconnect/detachment are also forms of expression and communication.

Inspired by the idea of dropping the knowledge to challenge the hierarchical relationship between teachers and students, I suggest thinking about examples of community-based projects (Aker et al., this book, Chap. 14; Lypka, this book, Chap. 17). Research has shown community projects, or community-oriented practices, are a form of advocacy (Aker et al., 2018; Lypka, this book, Chap. 17). Through community-oriented practices, students have the opportunity to advocate for themselves and their peers, and build respectful, socially-just English language classrooms (Pentón Herrera, 2021b; Pentón Herrera & McNair, 2020). I also suggest following the thinking of another stellar example of a youth participatory research project (Torre et al., 2018), which has centered on the voices and the transitions of emotions, feelings, and affects of queer youth in public. This project has done a great job in showing how queer youth advocate for themselves by taking leading roles and queering the thinking of the readers. I suggest following the thinking of these critical works, and accommodating and planning accordingly in your own research and teaching spaces. In essence, community-based projects open a critical space for adults to acknowledge students’ identities, add the discourse of differences, and drop the knowledge to critically listen to and learn from the students.

Incomplete Conclusion

As I end this chapter, I would like to emphasize that the knowledge I share primarily focuses on supporting the social and emotional needs of queer SLIFE youth. Other chapters in this edited volume focus on practical academic considerations for SLIFE (i.e., teaching practices or *what works*), which are also needed for queer SLIFE youth. However, the humbling contribution of this chapter aims to delve deeper into

the affective domain of formal education and to explore how identity and education affect queer SLIFE youth' access to and experiences in formal schooling. There is a dearth of research and practitioner-oriented publications addressing queer SLIFE youth in schools, which may make this chapter harder for readers to understand or conceptualize in practice. However, as Anzaldúa and Keating (2002) posit, "For positive social change to occur, we must imagine a reality that differs from what already exists" (p. 5). Thus, I ask the readers, regardless of nationality, citizenship, linguistic backgrounds, or gender and sexual identities, to continue to think and write with me after this piece. I hope readers will use this chapter as a starting point to develop and explore more critical and practice-oriented approaches to greatly benefit the queer and non-queer SLIFE youth inside and outside formal educational spaces.

This chapter comes to an end due to the word limits, but it does not mean queer research and queer pedagogy with/by/for/on/of queer SLIFE youth stop here. In stark contrast, queer pedagogy and research ask the practitioners, theorists, researchers to first become the thinkers of how to 'mess' and play with fixed knowledge, turn them upside down, and ask, *What else can I do differently to benefit the students?* In this chapter, I have offered three considerations to work with queer SLIFE youth, including acknowledging students' identities, adding the discourse of difference, and dropping the knowledge; however, there are many critical approaches and topics that remain to be explored.

Based on my teaching and research experiences, I suggest continuing to find alternative ways to explore both queer and non-queer SLIFE youth' hidden stories (Pentón Herrera & Trinh, 2021). I also propose acknowledging students' identities by having queer and non-queer SLIFE youth write and reflect on their experiences through art such as photovoice (Trinh, 2020c; Lypka, this book, Chap. 17). Teachers can also consider having students sit in the circle to share their feelings and emotions with others to add the discourse of differences (Trinh, 2019) or having them write about the dreams and question the meaning of it (Kasun et al., 2019). Further, teachers can drop their knowledge by co-writing with students to discuss perspectives about 'American dreams' versus the reality to unfold the myth of meritocracy and cultural assimilations (Trinh & Merino Méndez, 2020; Trinh, 2021). Lastly, teachers can consider having peers write and share stories in different spaces (i.e., virtually, in person, and/or hybrid) (Trinh & Pentón Herrera, 2021). These suggestions neither promise "successful" queer pedagogical practices nor presume to make a completely positive change overnight; these suggestions just come from the willingness of an accented Vietnamese, queer, ESOL teacher/researcher to drop their knowledge and listen attentively to students and their needs. Queer pedagogy will never be complete; it always invites processes and inquiries.

Two decades ago, Susan Talburt (2000) reminded us that tension might occur when sexuality and education come together; therefore, we must "ask how knowledge, both determinate or indeterminate, queer or not queer, can be put to new uses ... [because] even the creation of proper subjects may open possibilities" (p. 6). However, I am optimistic, hopeful, and thrilled about the future of possibilities

where critical queer research and queer pedagogy will be conducted and enacted so that both queer and non-queer SLIFE youth will study, play, and live in the safe, respectful, accepting, and peaceful spaces they deserve to be.

Reflection Questions

1. What unique challenges and barriers do queer SLIFE youth face inside and outside of our schools that non-queer English learners and SLIFE do not face? How can we support queer SLIFE youth to overcome these challenges and barriers?
2. As an adult and teacher, what are practical and conceptual challenges you may face in applying the considerations shared in this chapter? What are possible solutions to overcome these challenges?
3. What local community projects could challenge the binary thinking of both queer and non-queer students, teachers, and staff? How do these projects look like?
4. How similar or different is the experience of queer SLIFE youth in your context? What do you base your view on?
5. How might you learn more about the educational experience of queer SLIFE youth in your setting?

Acknowledgment I appreciate Luis Javier Pentón Herrera for his critical comments in supporting me throughout the peer-reviewed process. He has pushed me out of my normative thinking to create something that has not existed before. I also appreciate Manuel de Jesús Gómez Portillo for his insightful comments so that this chapter can be teacher-friendly for the teacher/practitioner to consider putting into practice. This chapter is a community effort and a starting point in supporting queer SLIFE youth in schools now and in the future.

Appendix: Brief Summary of Challenges Queer SLIFE Youth Face in Comparison with Other Students

	Non-queer EL youth with adequate formal schooling	Non-queer SLIFE youth	Queer SLIFE youth
Before arriving in the host country	Had access to or received appropriate formal schooling.	Did not have access or did not receive appropriate formal schooling.	Did not have access or did not receive appropriate formal schooling due to different factors including gender and sexuality identity.
			May have faced prosecution, bullying, rape, sexual assault, rejection by their family and loved ones, prostitution, and life-threatening events due to different factors including gender and sexuality identity.

(continued)

	Non-queer EL youth with adequate formal schooling	Non-queer SLIFE youth	Queer SLIFE youth
In the host country	Learning L2	Learning L2	Learning L2 and learning language related to gender and sexuality.
	Becoming accustomed to the new culture and environment.	Becoming accustomed to the new culture and environment.	Becoming accustomed to the new culture and environment. Hiding their queer identities or trying to “fit in” with queer community in the host countries. Worrying about their physical safety due to different factors including gender and sexuality identity.
	Bullying from non-ELs due to language learning status and/or race.	Bullying from non-EL due to language learning status and/or race. Becoming accustomed to a formal school environment.	Bullying from non-EL due to language learning status and/or race. Becoming accustomed to a formal school environment. Additional bullying from homophobic classmates.
	Usually have family support back home for school-related matters.	Usually, parents are also SLIFE or have limited print literacy skills and can provide limited support in school-related matters.	Usually, parents are also SLIFE or have limited print literacy skills and can provide limited support in school-related matters. Also, they may be unaccompanied or alone because they have been rejected by their family members and their communities due to their gender and sexuality identity.
		Learning print literacy in L1 and L2.	Learning print literacy in L1 and L2. Learning non-print literacy (i.e., verbal and/or non-verbal expressions) in queer culture in the host country.

Note: This table is not exhaustive at the time of writing this chapter. Therefore, it requires future research to add in or revise to accommodate with the queer SLIFE youth in your own spaces

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Chapter 13

Supporting Elementary-Age ELs with Limited or Interrupted Formal Education: Literacy Events for Families Using Wordless Books



Judith R. Cruzado-Guerrero and Gilda Martínez-Alba

Abstract This chapter focuses on students with limited or interrupted formal education (SLIFE) who are English learners (ELs) in elementary grades. It provides an overview of this population and addresses specific challenges younger children and families experience at the elementary level. The authors discuss effective evidence-based practices for supporting language and literacy development, in addition to strategies for working with families and communities inside and outside of the classroom. In particular, the chapter explores the use of wordless books and translanguaging practices with ELs. Wordless books are discussed for use with children and parents to develop reading, writing, listening, and speaking skills in their native language or in English. The authors have discovered firsthand the power of providing non-threatening support using wordless books to develop language and literacy skills with ELs and their families (Martínez-Alba G., Cruzado-Guerrero J. *Wordless books: so much to say*. TESOL Press, 2015). The authors conclude with recommendations for teacher education programs based on research and their numerous practical experiences. Examples are also provided throughout the chapter to bring different concepts to life.

Keywords ELs · ESOL · Elementary schools · SLIFE · Wordless books · Translanguaging

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Introduction

The number of English Learners (ELs) in the United States (U.S.) public school system has increased through the years as projected by many scholars. The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES, 2020) indicates that in the fall of 2017, the average percentage of ELs in public schools was 10% compared to 8% in the fall of 2000. The number of ELs attending lower grades in public schools was also higher than in upper grades (NCES, 2020). ELs in lower grades attend elementary schools, and their age may range from approximately five to eleven years old. It is important to note that grade levels in elementary schools are from Pre-Kindergarten or Kindergarten through grades fifth or sixth, depending on the public-school system. Thus, the ELs in these early grade levels receive foundational instruction in English, literacy, and other subject areas such as math and science. The complexity of the different content areas in these grade levels increases as the ELs progress from one grade to another.

The national percentages of ELs in elementary schools do not provide an accurate picture of the diversity of cultures and linguistic backgrounds of students. In the fall of 2017, the ten most common home languages among ELs in the U.S. were Spanish, Arabic, Chinese, Vietnamese, Somali, Russian, Portuguese, Haitian, and Hmong, and these ELs represented a variety of ethnic and racial backgrounds such as Hispanics, Asians, Blacks, and Whites (NCES, 2020). Besides their rich cultural and diverse linguistic backgrounds, ELs may also have limited or interrupted formal education. These students may be refugees, immigrants, or may have lacked access to education due to a variety of reasons such as violence, political instability, or poverty in their home countries (WIDA Consortium, 2015). For example, in 2018, 58% of refugee children in U.S. resettlement programs were below age fourteen and from five top origin refugee groups: Democratic Republic of Congo, Burma, Ukraine, Eritrea, and Afghanistan (Blizzard & Batalova, 2019). These young refugees enter the U.S. school system as newcomers in lower grades.

Understanding who students with limited or interrupted formal education (SLIFE) are and their life situations is critical to providing effective instruction in Pre-K-6 learning environments. This chapter offers an overview of SLIFE in elementary-age grades and addresses the challenges they face. The authors then discuss effective practices for supporting native and English language and literacy development and the use of wordless books. The chapter concludes with recommendations for teacher education programs and working with families.

Elementary-Age SLIFE: What Teachers Need to Know

Elementary-age SLIFE are usually identified as students who entered a U.S. school after third grade and up to fifth or sixth grade. Nonetheless, there are also younger SLIFE whose education may have been limited or received none at all during their

pre-primary (PreK-3rd) grades. These younger students are two or three years behind academically compared to their peers, specifically in reading, writing, and mathematics (DeCapua et al., 2009; Hos, 2016). SLIFE language and literacy skills in their native language and English may also vary depending on their educational experiences; and in addition to these academic differences, young SLIFE may also experience stress as they adjust to school. The social-emotional needs of young SLIFE are unique due to events that cause the interruption of educational experiences or limited formal education altogether. These life events may impact the social, emotional, and academic development of young children and their success in school. Moreover, these life events can also have long term effects where older SLIFE sometimes end up dropping out of school (DeCapua & Marshall, 2015).

Adjusting to school is a challenging process for elementary-age SLIFE. Elementary grades are organized with specific school routines, transitions, and activities that may be new or foreign to SLIFE. The pre-primary grades provide a foundation to learn about the school culture, expectations, and socialization in schools. If students are unaware of these expectations, behavioral incidents may occur in the classroom. Birman and Tran (2017) studied Somalian Bantu refugee students in elementary school for a period of two years and found how difficult it was for students to adjust to U.S. schools as well as the pressure the students felt from educators. The study highlights how behavioral incidents occurred due to a misunderstanding of the rules and demands in the classrooms rather than a lack of interest. The type of behavioral incidents recorded by these researchers during the study included disruptive behaviors (i.e., talking, getting out of seats), academic refusal (i.e., not doing work, pushing books off desks), academic complaining (i.e., complaining about being tired), child distressed (i.e., crying), not being in the right place or being late for class, and stealing or hoarding (i.e., food, pencils). The findings revealed that behavioral incidents resulted in SLIFE academic disengagement mainly because of unfamiliarity with the school culture and a lack of academic background about tasks assigned in school (Birman & Tran, 2017).

Educators play a significant role in SLIFE engagement and their integration experiences in elementary schools. The attitudes and perspectives of teachers may impact their interactions with students, instructional practices used in the classrooms, and the social-emotional support they provide. Birman and Tran (2017) found that teachers' attitudes toward SLIFE acculturation were either *assimilationist* or *multicultural*. Teachers with a more assimilationist view expected students to adhere to the school culture without any teaching accommodations, while teachers with a multicultural view were more flexible in their teaching practices. Teachers with a multicultural view used strategies such as building relationships and providing affirmation, practicing one-on-one attention, and incorporating meaningful and culturally appropriate materials. Cho et al. (2019) also found in their study about refugee ELs social-emotional competencies that teachers had a deficit-oriented view rather than a strength-based one. In this study, the social-emotional competencies of young students were viewed as problematic and not sources of strengths. The researchers found that teachers made instructional decisions with the intent of alleviating the problem, focusing on what students could not do, rather than increasing

opportunities to learn and engage in the classroom, focusing on what they could do. List 13.1 provides recommendations for approaching SLIFE in a positive manner.

List 13.1: Recommendations for Approaching SLIFE in a Positive Manner

- Take the time to get to know your SLIFE through informal daily conversations, parent surveys, or phone calls.
- Support SLIFE transition into formal school cultures using visuals to help them follow directions.
- Teach about classroom expectations, such as routines when entering the classroom.
- Model practices, such as what to do if they finished an assignment early in class.
- Focus on strengths, such as artistic talents, and build on those strengths whenever possible.
- Consider students' backgrounds as their families might come from various countries.
- Be mindful of their previous experiences because there may or may not be an overlap between students' prior experiences.

Overall, by showing SLIFE you care and want them to succeed, you can begin to establish the rapport needed to start helping them thrive academically. The practice of building a caring relationship with SLIFE is an ongoing process that takes time but can be very rewarding to all involved.

Elementary-Age SLIFE: Involving the SLIFE Family

SLIFE families are also important for the successful integration experiences of their young children in schools. Educational settings are ideal for building family-school connections and providing the support needed for a successful transition. Connections between family and school are strengthened when parents are engaged in the education of their children. The research is clear about the impact parent engagement has on positive outcomes in children's development and academic achievement (Hoover-Dempsey & Whitaker, 2010; Lawson & Alameda-Lawson, 2012). Thus, it is important, as Ferlazzo (2011) reminds us, that educators must make these connections by getting to know families and building relationships with them. But, building relationships with diverse SLIFE families who may not speak English as their first language may pose challenges for many educators. In addition, SLIFE families may also be adjusting to their new country and communities. Families may experience several stressors beyond language needs and academics. SLIFE families need social-emotional support as well as academic support in understanding the U.S. educational system, becoming aware of school expectations, and learning how to support their children at home (Cairo et al., 2012). Thus, it is important to know the families, to build strong relationships with them, and provide the support needed as a foundation for academic success.

Understanding SLIFE and their families is critical to facilitate the development of parent engagement and activities at school, home, and other educational settings such as newcomer facilities and after school programs. Educators can gain an understanding of how to work with families by also learning about their strengths and assets (Zepeda et al., 2011). SLIFE families share a wealth of knowledge with their children at home, and educators sometimes overlook SLIFE strengths, such as survival, problem-solving skills, and resilience (Cho et al., 2019; Moll et al., 1992; Roy & Roxas, 2011). Thus, this information could be used to design and engage in activities that support children's literacy learning through appropriate and relevant cultural practices, including using their first language and English (Fredrich et al., 2014). Appropriate literacy resources, such as wordless books, may facilitate literacy experiences and cultural connections.

The practical suggestions offered in List 13.2 are intended to help teachers make home-school connections with SLIFE families. Keep in mind, parents might not know what their role is in participating and helping with their child's education. For example, you might have noticed that families with limited formal schooling themselves are not comfortable in a school setting.

List 13.2: Recommendations to Make Home-School Connections with SLIFE Families

- Have ongoing communication in order for families to become familiar with you.
- Ask family members how they prefer for you to communicate with them (text, phone call, email, etc.).
- Invite families in for celebrations and other school events.
- Provide transportation, child care, and meals if possible.
- Create school events at different times/days to help families participate.
- Ask a family liaison (or a family that regularly participates) to invite other families, especially new families.
- Share the benefits of having families participate in school.
- Ask family members what they would like or what they need from you, giving them examples.
- Provide an interpreter.
- Create a welcoming environment by greeting everyone as they come in, having greetings in their native language posted on the walls, and having some music while they are entering to help everyone feel comfortable.

Once you have established rapport with families, you will see how conversations flow easier, and you can more readily help them. If you feel as though establishing rapport with families is taking longer than you would like, remember they might be going through many struggles (i.e., financially, overcoming trauma, etc.) that you are not aware of, so patience is definitely necessary. In general, ongoing positive communication is key to keep the connection progressing with families.

Literacy and Wordless Books

Wordless books have been around for many years and can be used in lower grades for literacy and language instruction. Although this is the case, many parents and educators do not use these books often or do not know about them (Jalongo et al., 2002). Wordless books are perfect to use with SLIFE because they contain pictures and few or no words. The pictures in wordless books tell the story the author wants to convey. The illustrations in these books are usually very appealing and provide an opportunity for the student to engage in the story. According to Jalongo et al., “wordless picture books connect visual literacy skills, (learning to interpret images), cultural literacy (learning the characteristics and expectations of social groups), and literacy with print (learning to read and write language)” (2002, p. 168). Therefore, SLIFE could greatly benefit from using wordless books.

Wordless books provide the reader with a variety of benefits. The use of these books can take many forms when used for language instruction and can benefit the readers’ literacy skills in many ways. Jalongo et al. (2002) noted that wordless books may impact a variety of emergent literacy behaviors such as book handling, storytelling, recognition, and interpretation of illustrations. In wordless books, illustrations are also key to understand the story. Young children begin to use the illustrations to make sense of the story and create meaning (Arizpe, 2013). Through small group work, teachers can develop discussions and generate inferences with children (Ramos & Ramos, 2011; Stahl, 2014).

Wordless books are also good for SLIFE and their families because they can explore the book using their native language and/or English. Wordless books provide an opportunity for SLIFE parents to use them without relying on text to *read* the story. In addition, families can discuss the meaning of the illustrations and make their own stories. While exploring the wordless books, parents can share their funds of knowledge (see Moll et al., 1992) as a tool for constructing meaning and learning. In other words, parents can share their life experiences, expertise, and cultural practices to make connections with their children and interpret the stories. Louie and Sierschynski (2015) suggest viewing, speaking, and writing as an instructional strategy to stimulate vocabulary, oral language, and facilitate literacy development. These researchers propose that in order to use this strategy, we must help children: (1) “identify the plot and structure, the characters, and the setting of the book; (2) support their decisions using details from the book; and (3) orally retell the stories, using details of the illustrations to construct a text” (p. 108). These instructional strategies and guidelines can be shared with SLIFE families and community leaders in workshops and family events where educators could model how to support students.

Below is a plan to assist educators in creating family literacy events using wordless books while taking into consideration the strengths and needs of SLIFE and their families. Planning such events provide families with an opportunity to utilize translanguaging or multiple languages while engaging with storytelling and other literacy skills. In addition, the events could be planned in a culturally homogeneous

learning environment to create opportunities to strengthen their ethnic and cultural identity while learning and gaining appreciation for the new culture (Nykiel-Herbert, 2010). As you will see in the next section, wordless books can be particularly helpful for SLIFE elementary children and their families because they do not require the ability to read in any language. Therefore, regardless of their literacy skills, children and their families learn about story structures, procedures to ask questions to help with comprehension, and other strategies for reading development, while also enjoying books together.

Literacy Events and SLIFE Families

Before the Event Before planning literacy events for SLIFE families, educators need to take time to know their children and families' languages, cultures, and their unique journeys to their new school and communities (TESOL Principle 1: Know Your Learners; TESOL International Association, 2018). An effective strategy to gather information from families is by informally interviewing them (WIDA Consortium, 2015). For example, educators can work in collaboration with the ESOL teachers, newcomer program faculty/staff, and/or other community liaisons to learn more about the families (TESOL Principle 1: Know Your Learners; TESOL Principle 6: Engage and Collaborate within a Community Practice; TESOL International Association, 2018). ESOL educators, rather than the children, could support families when participating in interviews and/or completing questionnaires in their home language that can include questions about background, preferences, strengths, and needs. The purpose of gathering this information is to plan family events or school activities to promote language learning in environments in which the children and families feel comfortable (TESOL Principle 1: Know Your Learners; TESOL Principle 2: Create Conditions for Language Learning; TESOL International Association, 2018). The learning environment should be one that provides a sense of safety and belonging among SLIFE and their families to build a strong community within these events (Cairo et al., 2012). In addition, the information allows for the integration of interests, strengths, resources, and other structures to support the children's learning (Isik-Ercan, 2012).

Planning and Implementing the Event Creating family literacy events that are culturally and linguistically relevant and meaningful is critical for SLIFE families. Although these events are usually planned to be in physical locations, the events could also be virtual using video conferencing platforms. It is important that schools increase and enhance access to technology for students to engage in online instruction and to provide teachers with training on how to support SLIFE in online learning environments. Assuming these practices are in place, families could use technology devices available through the school, community organizations, or their own devices. Before planning virtual events, parents must be informed and supported in learning about how to use these video conferencing platforms and any

other educational technologies used to support academic growth (Isik-Ercan, 2012). In these virtual or physical events, educators must provide interpreters, translators, and/or community members who can serve as cultural and linguistic facilitators. In addition, meaningful materials and resources must be selected for before, during, and after the events and shared with facilitators before the event. Materials could include pictures and wordless books about familiar concepts and interests to the children (Birman & Tran, 2017). It is important to also connect SLIFE families with resources available in the community—not necessarily related to literacy events—such as support groups, counseling, and financial assistance programs. These resources can help SLIFE families with their physical and psychological needs (WIDA Consortium, 2015). Educators can also share information about multicultural and multilingual community events that can help families connect with others.

The design and schedules of family literacy events can be structured into three segments: parents, children, and family time. The parents and children segments can occur simultaneously but with different educators facilitating the segment. Educators can model literacy strategies, incorporate hands-on activities, and provide parents/children with opportunities to practice the strategies. During this time, parents and children could explore materials and resources. In the parent-child segment, families can practice the strategies together as they complete learning activities using wordless books. Personal, text, and world connections can be modeled and facilitated through the exploration of wordless books focusing on listening, speaking, reading, and writing activities (Martínez-Alba & Cruzado-Guerrero, 2015). These segments should be implemented in small groups individualizing attention to SLIFE.

Family literacy events can also include interdisciplinary approaches that allow students to make connections between ideas and concepts from different subject areas. Integrating other disciplines such as the arts and social studies could also facilitate connections with families' linguistic and cultural backgrounds, stimulate creativity, and serve as a source of motivation (Chukueggu, 2011). For example, art integration can facilitate vocabulary knowledge and build oral language skills when children use gestures, visual cues, and their bodies to express meaning through theater and dance (Brouillete, 2012). Drama exercises can also facilitate visual literacy, especially when used with wordless books that describe a journey where characters experience different emotions (Harris, 2016). For example, the wordless book *The Arrival* by Shaun Tan is an immigrant story with rich imagery and concepts that explore emotions and encourage creativity. Educators can use this wordless book to plan learning activities that allow children to use their body language to express emotions. In addition, this book provides opportunities to explore the complexities of migration and target social studies skills (Mathews, 2014).

Practical Application of a Family Literacy Event Using a Wordless Book

Flotsam by David Wiesner is a complex wordless book that can be used in different ways to accommodate different language proficiency levels in English and the native language of families. The book provides illustrations of underwater scenes from a camera found by a child on the beach. Various storylines can be created from the entire book as well as specific illustrations. SLIFE and their families can use *Flotsam* to work on speaking, listening, writing, and reading skills. The example below focuses on strategies when implementing a family literacy event that focuses on oral language skills.

Prior to the event, prepare a thematic exploration table with visual art related to the content of the wordless book to stimulate curiosity and creativity. Include appropriate food or snacks. As families eat and get settled, encourage them to explore the materials on the table. Before the exploration begins, you can ask families to guess what the book will be about and to think about what comes to mind when reviewing it. Using sticky notes, families can draw their predictions and place them on a board. For example, the table can have visual art materials such as photographs of diverse families at the beach, posters of beaches in different countries, and drawings or paintings of multicultural artists. In addition, educators can include real items—known as *realia*—on the table, such as a camera, film, sand, shells, and magnifying glasses.

Plan to set the tone of the event with music related to the content (i.e., beach, ocean) of the wordless book. Preferably, include multilingual and multicultural music about the theme and from countries represented in your group. Before the event, have music playing in the background while families get settled, eat food, and examine the thematic exploration table. Interact with families and have your cultural and linguistic facilitators interact with families as well. Learn greetings in their native language to welcome them to the event. This part of the event can take fifteen minutes. Then transition to the parent and children segment.

The parent and children segment can occur simultaneously for a half hour. In this segment, educators implement meaningful activities to promote language learning (TESOL Principle 1: Know Your Learners; TESOL Principle 3: Design High-Quality Lessons for Language Development; TESOL International Association, 2018). These segments can be facilitated using English and/or the families' native languages. Explain to parents and children what wordless books are before beginning the sessions. The explanation can be something as simple as “*wordless books are books without words; the best part about wordless books is that they help the reader create their own story through the visuals.*” Then read some of the predictions and connections from the exploration segment and connect to the story.

At the beginning of the parent session, the teacher can model book reading techniques, such as previewing the book and asking meaningful questions. The information gained from getting to know the families can help when asking questions. Educators can prompt families to share their experiences and make connections.

This segment provides a great opportunity for parents and children to determine the meaning of the illustrations as they preview the book. In the story of *Flotsam*, parents can describe what the boy did when he found the camera, the journey the camera took through the ocean, the different underwater illustrations, and how the story ends. Parents can share their interpretation of the story, and if they choose, change the ending of the story. The beauty of wordless books is that individuals need not be proficient in English, or reading and writing in their native language, to interpret the story, ask questions, and talk about their own experiences.

Then plan to have a parent-child segment for thirty minutes in which families practice their literacy and oral language skills. SLIFE and their families can interpret the wordless book and perform activities together. Fifteen minutes of this segment can be devoted to exploring the book, practicing how to formulate questions, sharing experiences, and making connections. The rest of the fifteen minutes can be used for book-related activities. In these activities, the arts and sciences could be integrated by creating an underwater scene for the wordless books. Families can paint, draw, or use different materials to create the scene. Families can also act out the actions of the boy in *Flotsam* and make a song about a trip to the beach or underwater adventures. Families could record their songs, share drawings, or act out scenes during sharing time at the end of the session.

The closing segment can take fifteen minutes. During this time, educators can close the event by providing opportunities for families to present the work completed. In addition, educators can provide supplemental activities to take home, handouts, and information about resources in the community. Activities can include making personal wordless books about their experiences and creating a science model of an underwater habitat. At this time, you can also share a short pictorial evaluation of the event to get feedback from families.

Recommendations

Caring for SLIFE and their families alone is not sufficient to impact student achievement (Hos, 2016). This chapter addresses the use of wordless books to potentially increase parent engagement and positive literacy outcomes among SLIFE. Below are recommendations for educators.

Teacher Education Programs In order to impact student learning, educators need to be knowledgeable of critical, caring, and culturally relevant pedagogies. Teacher education programs must have a rich curriculum that includes essential theories, pedagogies, and teacher advocacy in their coursework with specific topics such as immigration, ELs, and SLIFE (Allman & Slavin, 2018; Cruzado-Guerrero & Martínez-Alba, 2018; Lucas & Villegas, 2013). Cultural and linguistic diversity are also areas that teacher candidates must understand and reflect upon to develop sociolinguistic and sociopolitical consciousness (Lucas & Villegas, 2013). The pedagogical practices teacher candidates learn should also include specific instructional

Table 13.1 Examples of wordless books

Stories with easy pictures	Stories with more complicated pictures
<i>Chalk</i> by Bill Thompson	<i>Flotsam</i> by David Wiesner
<i>Rainstorm</i> by Barbara Lehman	<i>Journey</i> by Aaron Becker
<i>Shapes, Shapes, Shapes</i> by Tana Hoban	<i>Mr. Wuffles!</i> by David Wiesner
<i>My Friend Rabbit</i> by Eric Rohman	<i>The Red Book</i> by Barbara Lehman
<i>Wave</i> by Suzy Lee	<i>Zoom</i> by Istvan Banyai

models focused on SLIFE, such as the Mutually Adaptive Learning Paradigm® (MALP®). This particular instructional model can support elementary school teachers to adapt their instruction to facilitate instruction and maintain active engagement in a meaningful manner (DeCapua & Marshall, 2011; Chap. 8, this book).

Wordless Books Professional development for educators is needed to assist teachers in becoming familiar with wordless books, selecting appropriate wordless books, and learning strategies on how to use these books for instruction with children and families (Jalongo et al., 2002). Knowledge and skills on how to use wordless books in the classroom can also assist educators in using books to create meaningful literacy experiences for SLIFE families. These activities could use wordless book stories with easy pictures, as well as stories with more complicated pictures, targeting listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills with different levels of English proficiency (see Table 13.1). The activities can also be aligned with literacy and TESOL Standards, technology resources (i.e., websites, apps, etc.), and can also be integrated to make the lessons engaging and meaningful (Martínez-Alba & Cruzado-Guerrero, 2015).

As noted, wordless books can be incorporated in classrooms, literacy events, and after school programs to facilitate language learning among families. The use of wordless books can assist SLIFE families who have low literacy skills in their home language feel more comfortable engaging in literacy activities. In addition, the outcomes of these activities can provide SLIFE with opportunities to demonstrate what they know using multiple means of expression.

Conclusion

In conclusion, educators need to know about the specific characteristic of SLIFE and their families and how to support them. In addition, it is important to also learn about effective practices for supporting language and literacy development and the use of wordless books. Creative literacy events also have the potential to strengthen oral language skills, facilitate communication, and promote bilingualism and biliteracy among SLIFE and their families. In addition, these events can be modified as needed to support families with individual physical and psychological needs. As families feel more comfortable working with school personnel, their level of

engagement increases, which ultimately impacts children's educational outcomes in a positive manner.

Reflection Questions

1. How might you help your SLIFE and families develop their literacy skills?
2. How might you use wordless books with your students and their families?
 - (a) What are the first steps you need to take?
 - (b) Do you need to acquire funding to purchase books?
3. When will you teach SLIFE families about wordless books? At a family night?
4. From the suggestions provided throughout the chapter, what information makes the most sense for your SLIFE and families?

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Chapter 14

The Promise of Problem-Based Service-Learning and SLIFE: Building a Future in the Middle School, High School, and GED Classrooms Today



Margaret Aker, Lynn Rochelle Daniel, and Luis Javier Pentón Herrera 

Abstract In this chapter, we propose problem-based service-learning (PBSL) as an effective instructional framework to support students with limited or interrupted formal education (SLIFE). Problem-based service-learning instruction fosters literacy development and the skills that SLIFE will need in their future workplaces as identified by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) (Education for all 2000–2015, EFA Global Monitoring Report. <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0023/002322/232205e.pdf>, 2015), the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) (The future of education and skills. Education 2030: The future we want. [https://www.oecd.org/education/2030/E2030%20Position%20Paper%20\(05.04.2018\).pdf](https://www.oecd.org/education/2030/E2030%20Position%20Paper%20(05.04.2018).pdf), 2018), and the Partnership for 21st Century Skills (Framework for 21st century learning. Definitions. http://static.battelleforkids.org/documents/p21/P21_Framework_DefinitionsBFK.pdf, 2019). As such, the chapter is divided into four main sections proceeding the introduction: (1) PBSL: An introduction; (2) explanation of how to integrate PBSL in the classroom, (3) real-life applications of PBSL in the middle school, high school, and General Educational Development (GED) classrooms; and (4) final thoughts. The

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primary purpose of this chapter is to showcase the promise of problem-based service-learning for the SLIFE population in providing the development of twenty-first-century skills SLIFE currently need to succeed in their learning environments as well as in their future.

Keywords SLIFE · PBSL · Twenty-first-century skills · Middle school · High school · General educational development (GED)

Introduction

Having access to inclusive, equitable, and quality forms of formal education is increasingly becoming a matter of global sustainability and social justice. In 2015, the United Nations published *The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*, proposing a plan of action for prosperity and peace for the planet. In this document, the United Nations commits to working towards the achievement of 17 sustainable development goals and targets to improve our world and end poverty. One of the goals shared in this document—Goal 4—advocates for ensuring “inclusive and equitable quality education and [promoting] lifelong learning opportunities for all” (United Nations, 2015, p. 19) as a requirement for global sustainable development. At the same time, the United Nations stated that “all people... especially those in vulnerable situations, should have access to life-long learning opportunities that help them to acquire the knowledge and skills needed to exploit opportunities and to participate fully in society” (United Nations, 2015, p. 9).

The United Nation’s commitment to world change (United Nations, 2015) comes at an opportune time. The International Organization for Migration (IOM) reports that an estimate of over 272 million people, or 3.5% of the global population, from around the world are global migrants (2020). Within this population of international migrants, there are those who leave or are forced out of their homes and countries for a range of “compelling and sometimes tragic reasons, such as conflict persecution and disaster. While those who have been displaced, such as refugees... comprise a relatively small percentage of all migrants, they are often the most in need of assistance and support” (IOM, 2020, p. 19). The population of students with limited or interrupted formal education (SLIFE) is often found within this percentage of international migrants arriving in their host countries with varying levels of print literacy in their first language (L1) and with diverse understandings and experiences of formal schooling, through no fault of their own.

A report by The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) indicated that 617 million—or more than one-half—of children and adolescents are not learning worldwide (2017). This number is “equivalent of three times the population of Brazil being unable to read or undertake basic mathematics with proficiency” (UNESCO, 2017, p. 1). Given the slightly faster increase of international migrants in recent years (IOM, 2020), host nations can no longer ignore the effects of limited or interrupted schooling for the newcomer student population. For arriving

adolescents and young adults,¹ specifically, overlooking limited or interrupted formal education can result in academic failure, demotivation, detachment from peers, teachers, and staff, and eventual school dropout (see Custodio & O’Loughlin, 2017; Marrero Colón & Désir, this book, Chap. 10; Pentón Herrera, this book, Chap. 3, 2021). For SLIFE entering the public education system at an older age, inadequate academic support and time become additional barriers keeping them from attaining enough proficiency in English, print literacy, and content knowledge to graduate high school or complete a General Educational Development (GED) diploma.

In this chapter, we propose the instructional strategy of problem-based service-learning (PBSL) as an experiential learning tool to bridge the school-community gap often found in traditional schooling (Edwards, 2001). The focus of this chapter is adolescent and young adult SLIFE, first in traditional middle and high school classrooms, and then in a community college GED program. To do this, we begin the chapter with an explanation of PBSL, including the appropriateness of PBSL for adolescent and young adult SLIFE. Also, we highlight important considerations for teachers hoping to incorporate PBSL into their learning spaces and provide seven strategic steps students can follow to successfully engage in PBSL. Then, we share real-life examples of how PBSL was applied by the authors of this chapter in middle school, high school, and a GED program at a community college. The chapter concludes with an invitation for teachers and practitioners to incorporate twenty-first-century skills into their learning spaces to support adolescent and young adult SLIFE in their classrooms and beyond.

Problem-Based Service-Learning: An Introduction

PBSL is an effective instructional model combining elements of service-learning and problem-based learning. PBSL fosters literacy development and skills, supports differentiated learning, encompasses practical applications in the real world, and promotes lifelong learning (Aker et al., 2018; Bielefeldt et al., 2009). Guided by the principles of civic engagement and community service, “PBSL takes into consideration the skills learners—especially minority and underserved students—need today to be successful in their classrooms and will need in the future to be successful in their workplaces” (Pentón Herrera et al., 2019, p. 1). The PBSL model focuses on “collaboration, critical thinking, deep learning, teamwork, oral and written communication, problem-solving, reflection, and the development of social skills” (Aker et al., 2018, p. 166). These aforementioned skills are desired in the twenty-first century as our world becomes more interconnected, and schools are tasked with educating learners to acquire global perspectives, knowledge, and skills.

The core of problem-based service-learning is practical, authentic, experiential, real-world, twenty-first-century learning. Through PBSL, students work with

¹In this chapter, we use the term *adolescents and young adults* to refer to students who are between the ages of 13–21.

community members—or with community members in mind—to understand, make recommendations, and develop a solution to a problem. Under the PBSL model, students are regarded as *consultants*, and the community or community members are addressed as *clients* (Heffernan, 2001). PBSL creates the possibility for authentic, real-world problem solving through a variety of projects where students, regardless of previous formal schooling background, can contribute by offering solutions. For SLIFE, the PBSL model is beneficial because they “see learning in terms of real-world experiences and problem-solving strategies” (Marshall & DeCapua, 2010, p. 397). For adolescent and young adult SLIFE, specifically, additional benefits of participating in PBSL projects include orality, visuality, real-world experiences, and strong community ties (Lypka, 2019; Portes & Rumbaut, 2006).

In Table 14.1, we offer a brief overview of desired twenty-first-century skills that are also found in PBSL, which adolescent and young adult SLIFE will need to be successful global citizens (OECD, 2018; Partnership for 21st Century Skills, 2019). Under *SLIFE Skills*, we make a direct connection among PBSL skills, twenty-first-century skills, and the available literature on best practices for teaching SLIFE. We hope that teachers and practitioners will find the *SLIFE Skills* section particularly relevant for their practice and knowledge as they support SLIFE.

Fast Start: How Do I Integrate PBSL Into My Classes?

Before engaging in a PBSL activity, teachers must first explain in detail the model and expectations to students and determine where the project will take place (i.e., in the classroom or in the community). As educators, our intentions are always to create rich learning environments filled with wonder, high expectations, and an atmosphere replete with respect, empathy, and compassion revolving around a community core. To increase the chances of accomplishing these intentions, appropriate planning, and a detailed explanation of expectations is necessary to avoid misunderstandings among students, teachers, and community members involved in the project. It is important for students to know and be reminded that, when they are engaging in PBSL, their title changes from students to *consultants*, and the community or community members are addressed as *clients* (Heffernan, 2001). In turn, their goal as consultants is to work together to solve a problem for the benefit of their clients, who may be members of the community or the community at large.

Some considerations that teachers and practitioners should keep in mind when planning to implement PBSL are:

- Learn about your students’ stories and explore PBSL topics relevant to their experiences and strengths.
- Engage in backward planning; begin by forming engaging topics, brainstorming problems, and creating assessments.

Table 14.1 Skills for success and SLIFE

PBSL skills	Twenty-first-century skills	SLIFE skills
Collaboration	Collaboration	“Learning is accomplished through sharing among SLIFE” (DeCapua & Marshall, 2010a, p. 165).
Critical thinking	Critical thinking	“Teachers should focus directly on academic tasks that help [SLIFE]...develop their critical thinking skills” (DeCapua & Marshall, 2010b, p. 54).
Deep Learning	Deep Learning	“One of teacher’s most important roles is to assist students develop a set of strategies that they can use as needed to facilitate their own learning” (Custodio, 2011, p. 89).
Oral language	Oral language	“Learning is an oral process for SLIFE” (DeCapua & Marshall, 2010a, p. 165).
Problem-solving	Problem-solving	Democratic learning environments train young people to “be critical thinkers, engaged in their communities, activists and problem solvers working toward a more equitable society” (Lukes, 2015, p. 25).
Reflection	Reflection	Opportunities for reflection and expression “can validate student migration experiences and connect reading, class discussion, and journaling” (Custodio & O’Loughlin, 2017, p. 78).
Social skills	Social skills	Hos (2016) emphasizes the importance of the role of schools in social-emotional learning: “Schools, in most cases, are the primary contexts through which refugee children learn about and are socialized to their relocation community” (p. 480).
Teamwork	Teamwork	“The majority of SLIFE come from collectivistic cultures, where the needs and expectations of the group outweighs those of the individual and where relationships and networks are highly prized” (DeCapua et al., 2020, p. 63).
Written communication	Written communication	“True literacy involves both reading and writing, and students must have exposure to and experience with both every day. In a newcomer school, every teacher becomes a reading and writing teacher, in every class” (Custodio, 2011, p. 54).

- PBSL is student-centered. Utilizing the gradual release model (see Fisher & Frey, 2014) affords SLIFE the opportunity to assume responsibility for their own learning.
- Ground PBSL in standards and objectives, set realistic goals, and pro-actively prepare a web of support to make those targets achievable (Custodio, 2011; Custodio & O’Loughlin, 2017).
- Share with SLIFE *why* inquiry learning is important and *how* they will benefit.
- Create excitement to motivate; hook the students with engaging problems.
- Provide student choice and remember to facilitate enthusiastically.
- Link the unknown (new information) to the known (students’ funds of knowledge).

- Add new skills to skills you have already noticed in your students and/or skills your students have told you they possess.
- PBSL is based upon collaboration; develop teamwork activities.
- Provide a wide range of activities—focus on oral and visual activities at first and gradually introduce reading and writing as SLIFE’ print literacy develops.
- Celebrate, engage, and connect the classroom to the community at every opportunity.
- Engage interested partners within the community, including your own school and students’ family members.

Integrating PBSL into the Classroom: Finding a Topic

The PBSL process is constructed upon student choice. PBSL problems are real-world, which means that, at times, PBSL activities might look ill-structured, messy, and may possess multiple solutions. Finding solutions to real-life struggles and challenges through PBSL projects is relevant and of interest to adolescent and young adult SLIFE. The initial process for a PBSL project is separating the class into PBSL groups based on the knowledge the teacher has gained about (and from) the students. At this point, teachers assume the role of facilitator (i.e., instructing, modeling, coaching, and guiding). Each PBSL group is allowed to explore a problem in the community to which they must find a solution. As an important clarification, students must understand that engaging in PBSL projects means they will find a solution to a problem for the benefit of someone in the community or for the community at large. For a detailed planning strategy built on backward design, see Appendix.

Strategic Steps to Problem-Based Service-Learning

After coming to an agreement on the topic for the PBSL project and groups, teachers can give each group a seven-step guide, shared in Table 14.2., that students can follow as a group to understand, plan, make recommendations, and develop a solution to the problem. These seven steps are inspired by Perren (2013) and incorporate elements of service learning and problem-based learning.

Practical Applications of PBSL for SLIFE

In this section, we share examples of PBSL projects conducted by each of the authors in our classrooms with SLIFE. The following examples illustrate PBSL in action with SLIFE at the middle school, high school, and community college levels. In each example, we identify the steps shared in Table 14.2 as points of

Table 14.2 Strategic steps to problem-based service-learning

Strategic steps to PBSL (Perren, 2013)		Explanation
Step 1	Planning	Students assemble as a group to explore a problem (or identify a problem if it has not been selected yet). As applicable, conduct initial virtual or in-person site visits to the place where the problem has been identified. Share prior knowledge about the problem. The facilitator assigns student groups or guides students with member selection. The group names are posted in the classroom with members' names and assigned roles. Each student/partner group is assigned a task to research/perform individually. Provide students a timeline when the task should be completed and reported to the group.
Step 2	PBSL: The background	Each student engages in individual or partnered research (previously assigned in step one) to gain a deeper understanding of the problem. Students use classroom/ asynchronous/hybrid learning time to conduct the research via credible sources on the internet, textbooks, articles, or other vetted materials. The PBSL groups reassemble to share findings and further analyze the problem in light of this new information. The group lists possible solutions to the problem.
Step 3	Preparing for service-learning	All PBSL groups vote on a solution from the list. Identify, discuss, and vote on a solution delivery method (in-person/asynchronous/hybrid). Construct a problem-solution survey. Field test survey on the PBSL group members for revisions. Develop a problem-solution implementation timeline. Identify potential roadblocks and remedies. Review the problem-solution implementation timeline with necessary stakeholders (i.e., Principal, community leaders).
Step 4	Implementing field experience and civic engagement	When applicable, implement the plan/solution to resolve the problem. Then, all PBSL groups collaborate to survey a small community sample to test the effectiveness of the implemented solution. Collect and review the sample survey responses and adjust the plan of action if necessary. Survey the larger community. Collect and review the responses.
Step 5	Reflecting and connecting	All PBSL groups reflect on their learning experience using a reflection tool (survey/checklist/journal prompt). Students discuss their reflections and group experiences. Review the community surveys again to glean community feedback/celebrations from the surveys.
Step 6	Diversifying and repeating	Communicate with the community to collect reflections about the PBSL effort to stimulate ongoing conversations with students concerning the perceived needs, problems, and solutions.
Step 7	Expressing gratitude and evaluating	Celebrate to acknowledge students' efforts and dedication to solving a problem and serving their community.

reference. As readers will notice, depending on the learning context, situation, and group of learners, the steps proposed in Table 14.2 have the flexibility to evolve as needed.

Middle School: The Indigenous Garden (Shared by Daniel)

During the 2017–2018 academic year, middle school students collaborated on projects focusing on the sustainability of desert landscapes. At the outset of the project, students chose various aspects regarding the sustainability of desert landscapes to investigate (Step 1). The teacher/facilitator created random student groups. Then, the students researched their topic and shared the information with their group (Step 2). After the PBSL groups developed a solid foundation of knowledge concerning their topic addressing the sustainability of desert landscapes, a service-learning component was added to plan: to develop and build an indigenous garden (Step 3). The groups focused their attention on the beautification of their school campus by constructing a sustainable desert garden.

All of the PBSL groups worked together to survey the school campus and select a site that they felt could support an indigenous garden. Students listed potential problems, for instance, the dearth of water in the desert, and drafted solutions, including a potential irrigation system using run-off water from a nearby field (Step 4). Throughout the process, the students reflected in their PBSL groups upon what they had learned from their individual and group experiences; the conversations often were punctuated by rich stories. As the popularity of the indigenous garden grew, the conversations shifted to sustaining the garden—what would the plants require for survival? The PBSL groups sprang into action to research the sustainability of the indigenous plants in the garden posting their findings on digital anchor charts. Word spread in the community about the garden (Step 5).

The PBSL sustainable indigenous garden activated the community. Parents, families, and community members were eager to join the effort to create a sustainable garden; opportunities were generated for the PBSL groups to work with the volunteers to finish the garden under the supervision of the facilitators (Step 6). After the completion of the project, a celebration was held to acknowledge the students' efforts and their dedication to solving a problem and serve their community. To extend the garden project, facilitators created questions to stimulate ongoing conversations with students concerning the needs and problems they perceived on the school campus to continue PBSL as an instruction technique at the middle school (Step 7). Figures 14.1, 14.2, and 14.3 share some of the portraits of the PBSL sustainable indigenous garden at the middle school. The portraits frame the entire PBSL sustainable indigenous garden project.

High School: Monuments and Landmarks (Shared by Pentón Herrera)

During the 2018–2019 school year, my newcomer high school English learners, and I had been learning about monuments and landmarks. At this time, our classroom had a mixed representation of students with various ranges of limited or interrupted



Fig. 14.1 Students working at the sustainable indigenous garden at the middle school



Fig. 14.2 Indigenous plant Prickly Pear



Fig. 14.3 Sustainable indigenous garden

formal school, students with adequate prior formal schooling experiences, and two students with special needs. At the beginning of this unit, I was planning a school field trip to Washington D.C. so my students could learn about the Washington D.C. monuments and landmarks as well as monuments and landmarks around our community. However, the budget became a challenge, and I had to modify my initial plans for teaching monuments and landmarks. I wanted my students to learn about important monuments and landmarks in a way that was both fun and engaging for them, so I approached this learning experience through a PBSL lens.

As my students and I began to explore the most authentic ways to learn about the monuments and landmarks in our community and the United States (Step 1), students formed small groups of four or five. Each group was given a textbook with landmarks and monuments in the United States as a resource for further research (Step 2). Because this was a PBSL project, I asked students to “*think about how we can learn about monuments and landmarks in our community and the United States and also serve our community in the process.*” One of the groups proposed creating models of monuments and landmarks and donating them to the school library. My students’ vision was that, by donating their models and displaying them in the

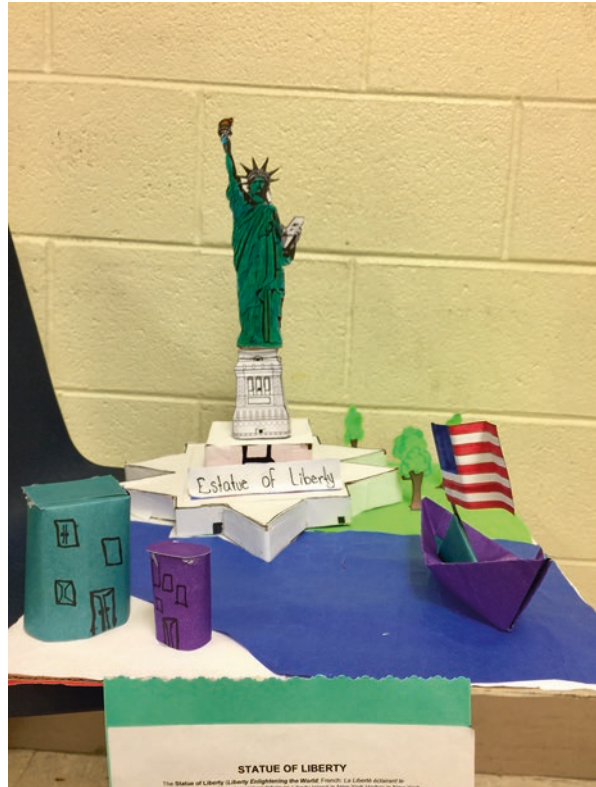
school library, other students in the school could also learn about them. The other groups in the class enthusiastically agreed to this service-learning element (Step 3).

At this point, I shared with the school librarian all the information about our PBSL project and invited her into our classroom the following day. The librarian gave students relevant information they needed to keep in mind when building the model for display at the library (i.e., materials to use, size of the model, adding a short description somewhere in the model, etc.) and invited our class to present the models at the library once completed (Step 4). Then, with the school librarian's instructions in mind, each group chose a monument or landmark and designed an action plan for building the model outside of school (Step 5). After a week, each group brought their models and briefly presented relevant facts about their chosen monument or landmark at the library. After the presentation, my students donated the models, and the librarian displayed them in the school library for everyone to see and learn about these monuments and landmarks (Step 6). At the end of the day, the librarian made a special announcement for the whole school, thanking my students by name. My students were very proud of their accomplishment and appreciated the school-wide recognition. Figures 14.4 and 14.5 share two of the final products for our PBSL project.



Fig. 14.4 PBSL project: The White House

Fig. 14.5 PBSL project:
The Statue of Liberty



Community College: A GED Literacy Program (Shared by Aker)

My experience teaching SLIFE began in a community college library. As a literacy instructor, I spend many hours in libraries. The library opened every morning at seven; there were few students. A student who was waiting at the door most mornings when the library opened was hard to miss. Ricardo (pseudonym) quickly became a fixture in the library, making coffee and shelving books. By the middle of the morning, he was gone. Relationships often unfold slowly. Over time, I learned Ricardo left school so long ago he could not remember; he was in the library because he wanted to learn. I slowly discovered he left school when he was in the third grade and never went back. Now in the United States, he needed an education to obtain steady employment.

I started working with Ricardo. He could type, so I utilized NovaNet—a math and English computer program that is no longer available. One day, Ricardo brought a friend. Soon we had a group; every week, the group grew. Every student in the group had a similar story—they needed an education to gain employment. There I was unofficially teaching a “class” at seven in the morning in the library when the Dean of the college walked in and, after learning about our informal class, asked to

meet with me that afternoon. The next week I was invited to lunch with members of the administration and three local partners of the college. By the end of the meal, a new course to teach the students was underwritten by community leaders.

The “early-bird” SLIFE class became an official class with sixteen students. The class was built on trust and respect. A group of faculty members helped to write the curriculum, and support was elicited from the counseling, math, computer, and psychology departments. Some of the librarians volunteered to become tutors. The course utilized the NovaNet program and multimedia materials. The class met in a library classroom. The goal of the course was to teach the group of students to become proficient in English so they could pass the GED. The class was not advertised; if students arrived wanting to become a member of the group, they were invited to join. The students ranged in age from 21 to 35 and were predominantly from Central and South America. The pacing was individualized; for some students, it was slow while others completed the GED more quickly. Some of the students who finished their GED became tutors for the other students. As the pool of volunteer tutors increased, evening tutoring sessions at the library were offered.

The PBSL Experience Our PBSL project began with an interesting fact I shared with my students: the site where the community college was currently standing had been a pueblo which was demolished due to urban growth. Also, near the college was a canal and Native People used the water to survive in the desert. To add interest in the topic, I mentioned the Native Peoples had a keen interest in sports. As we continued to talk about the history of the community, students became excited about the possibility of finding artifacts remaining in the area. This conversation led to our PBSL project, and the problem focused on saving archaeological sites, many of which had been looted, damaged, or destroyed (Step 1). Students organically created groups, and each group began with a discussion of what they knew about archaeological ruins, urban growth, and Native Peoples using a variety of photos. Pairs of students within each group focused on one area of the problem. The following week, the students visited a local open-air museum featuring some of the ruins found in the community—including a sports court. Through collaboration, the group gained knowledge (Step 2).

For the service-learning component, the PBSL group learned a state standard for third grade, which was exploring the state’s cultures, including prehistoric peoples. I contacted surrounding school districts to volunteer my students as presenters at elementary schools who might be learning about this topic. Through my conversations with the surrounding school districts, I learned there were two classes of third-graders at the neighborhood school who were learning this information in their classes. The PBSL group prepared a presentation, an activity, and a poster to leave in each classroom, highlighting the Native Peoples (Step 3). The PBSL students visited the third-grade classes on four successive Friday afternoons. Each PBSL student was responsible for one component of their presentation—they could work alone or together with another PBSL student (Step 4). On the fifth Friday, the third-grade classes held a party for the PBSL group. Walking to the parking lot, one of the PBSL students said, “I am part of this community; I want to live here forever.”

The PBSL experience was not over. Upon returning to the classroom, the groups reflected upon what had been learned, and a long list was produced (Step 5). After filling the board with lessons learned, I proceeded to put a checkmark in front of the skills most likely they would need in their workplaces in the future: communication, collaboration, critical thinking, problem-solving, oral presentation, written communication. The integration of PBSL infuses many of the twenty-first-century skills the students will need to be successful in their future workplaces (Step 6). The PBSL component of the course ended with a celebration. The school district administrators, community partners, school principals, teachers, students, parents, and community college administrators, faculty, students, and importantly the librarians were invited. The cafeteria catered the event, and, as guests of honor, we invited the community leaders who underwrote the course (Step 7). The GED literacy course ended, but the learning did not. As the students completed their GEDs, they gradually left the program, and others stayed in the neighborhood and continued taking classes. The program eventually became known as one of the first SLIFE classes in the community college district.

Final Thoughts: The Future Is Here

Literacy continues to be a global challenge and point of concern in the twenty-first century, especially for adolescents and adults (Cassidy et al., 2020; Richmond et al., 2008). As technology continues to rapidly evolve, the literacy gap between literate and non-literate nations and peoples becomes wider, contributing to the perpetuation of inequality. Thus, some initiatives around the world have been developed with the vision of making literacy learning more accessible for adolescent and adult SLIFE while also equipping them with the necessary, applicable skills they need to become qualified in the job market. An example of these initiatives includes the United States Department of Education's *Rethink Adult Education Challenge*, a nationwide "series of prize competitions to develop new products and services to both increase access to, and expand the capacity of, career and technical education" (United States Department of Education, 2020, para. 7).

As we end this chapter, we would like to finalize with a succinct but clear message: For adolescent and adult SLIFE, tailored literacy instruction and the opportunity to engage in experiential learning that supports twenty-first-century skills are non-negotiable. Experiential learning opportunities, such as PBSL, gives SLIFE the convenience to learn using authentic materials while involving them in real-life situations that simultaneously demand the practice of twenty-first-century skills and foster community appreciation through service-learning. The future is here; for adolescents and adults with limited or interrupted formal education, authentic, experiential, twenty-first-century literacy education, such as PBSL, creates the conditions to leveling the playing field.

Reflection Questions

1. How may you use problem-based service-learning (PBSL) with your learners? Jot down ideas for possible projects you may use in your learning environments.
2. What problem-based learning and/or service-learning programs do you have in your community? How can these programs benefit your adolescent and adult SLIFE?
3. What other experiential and twenty-first-century learning frameworks are you familiar with in addition to PBSL? How can you use these frameworks to support your learners?
4. How could you go about eliciting ideas for PBSL projects for/from SLIFE in your setting?

Appendix: PBSL Backward Planning

Problem-Based Service-Learning					
Course:		Teacher:		Grade Level:	
Problem:			Dates:		
Standards:		Aligned Objectives:			
Problem Summary:					
Problem Background:					
Problem Focus Questions:			Problem Hook:		
Standards:					
Group Members:			Group Experience Connections:		
Disciplinary Support:			Specialist Support:		
21st Century Skills (check all that apply)					
<input type="checkbox"/>	Collaboration	<input type="checkbox"/>	Global Awareness	<input type="checkbox"/>	Reflection
<input type="checkbox"/>	Critical Thinking	<input type="checkbox"/>	Interpersonal Skills	<input type="checkbox"/>	Social Skills
<input type="checkbox"/>	Deep Learning	<input type="checkbox"/>	Oral Language	<input type="checkbox"/>	Team Work
<input type="checkbox"/>	Flexible Knowledge	<input type="checkbox"/>	Problem-Solving	<input type="checkbox"/>	Written Language

Community Partners		Community Contact	
Community Outcome		Community Benefits	
PBSL Group Implementation Notes:			
Differentiation Strategies		Scaffolding Strategies	
Assessment			
<input type="checkbox"/>	Partner Retell	<input type="checkbox"/>	Emoji Exit Ticket
<input type="checkbox"/>	Thinking Map	<input type="checkbox"/>	Storyboard
<input type="checkbox"/>	Three Things	<input type="checkbox"/>	Drawing
<input type="checkbox"/>	Reflection Exit Ticket	<input type="checkbox"/>	Photo Log
Group Reflection:		Individual Reflection:	
PBSL Culminating Activity:		Individual Responsibility:	
Community Celebration:		Community Workforce Extension:	
Video Links:		Auditory Links:	
Supplies:			
Resources:		Equipment:	Community Resources:
References:			

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Part V
Effective Support for Students with
Limited or Interrupted Formal Education
in Adult Learning Environments

Chapter 15

Our Book: Creating a Scroll-Based Curriculum to Serve Adult SLIFE



Nan Frydland

Abstract Unprecedented global migration has profoundly affected adult education in the early twenty-first century, creating new demands for educational reforms responsive to the needs of immigrants and refugees. Migrants (The term *migrant* is preferred by the United Nations as encompassing the 272 million individuals currently displaced within or beyond their countries' borders, by war, civil unrest and fear of persecution (International Organization for Migration, World Migration Report 2020. https://www.un.org/sites/un2.un.org/files/wmr_2020.pdf, 2019; United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), Global education monitoring report summary 2019: Migration, displacement and education. building bridges, not walls. UNESCO Global Education Monitoring Report Team. <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000265996>, 2018). Within this migrant population are groups identified by their levels of literacy and formal education, including Students with Limited or Interrupted Formal Education (SLIFE), and Literacy Education and Second Language Learning for Adults (LESLLA) learners.) who come from oral cultures, or countries where access to formal education is limited, are sometimes identified as Students with Limited or Interrupted Formal Education (SLIFE). When SLIFE settle in highly literate countries, they require well-trained teachers and specialized reading and writing instruction to ensure the successful acquisition of the language and skills needed to function in a new country. One approach to instruction that expressly addresses the needs of SLIFE is a learning model called the Mutually Adaptive Learning Paradigm® (MALP®). Using MALP®, teachers leverage the wealth of knowledge and experience that SLIFE bring to school and accommodate learners by adapting formal classroom instruction to their needs. By creating contextualized and relevant curricula, teachers reduce cultural dissonance, transition learners to higher levels of thinking and more complex tasks, and facilitate critical literacy and agency. This chapter reports on three MALP® projects implemented with adult SLIFE by an English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) teacher working in a non-

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governmental organization (NGO) in New York City and a community-based-organization (CBO) in a New York City suburb.

Keywords Agency · Culturally Responsive Teaching · LESLLA · Migrants · SLIFE · Critical literacy

Introduction

At the time of this writing, more than 272 million migrants across the globe have been displaced by war, civil unrest, or credible fear (International Organization for Migration, 2019; UNESCO, 2018). Many will ultimately find homes in post-industrialized countries where they will need to learn a new language, although they may not know how to read or write in their native tongue. In the United States, of 44 million immigrants, 21 million need English language instruction, but less than one million are currently receiving it because current programming is insufficient to meet the need (Jaros-White, 2017; Vanek et al., 2020). In addition to the challenge of accessing language instruction, changes in adult education policy in the United States prohibit many migrants from qualifying for it. A shift away from a holistic focus on adult literacy to a market-based approach has resulted in the abandonment of migrants who require basic literacy skills for everyday living, helping their children with schoolwork, and navigating in their new communities (Frydland, 2019a; Jurmo et al., 2020; Mortrude, 2020; Yankwitt, 2020). These learners require skilled teachers and specialized print literacy instruction while learning a new language and adapting to a new country (Burt et al., 2008; Peyton & Young-Scholten, 2020).

This chapter reports on how the Mutually Adaptive Learning Paradigm® (MALP®), an instructional method developed by educators working with preliterate¹ Hmong refugees (Marshall, 1998; Marshall & DeCapua, 2013), can serve as a framework for effective instruction for teachers working with students with limited or interrupted formal education (SLIFE). Using MALP®, teachers reduce cultural dissonance, and facilitate critical literacy and agency for adult SLIFE, also known as Literacy Education and Second Language Learning for Adults (LESLLA) learners. (As a note of clarification, in this chapter, the terms SLIFE and LESLLA will be used interchangeably to refer to adult migrants.) I first ground this chapter in the literature by introducing culturally responsive teaching (CRT) and situating this approach within the context of migrants. Then, I briefly introduce MALP® and describe how the Scroll-based Curriculum was conceived within the context of an action research project. Next, I provide instruction on how to create a Scroll-based Curriculum and illustrate how it was used in a New York City non-governmental

¹In this chapter, I use the term *preliterate* to refer to learners whose native languages do not have a written component or students who have not had access to literacy instruction. In contrast, *low literate* or *semiliterate* is used to refer to students who are in the process of learning how to read and write, also referred to as *emergent* or *literacy* learners (Faux & Watson, 2020).

organization (NGO) and a community-based-organization (CBO) located in a New York City suburb. This chapter concludes with additional examples of MALP® applications in contextualized face-to-face and remote learning, and questions for reflection.

Culturally Responsive Teaching

Culturally Responsive Teaching is an approach to social justice in education that arose out of cultural conflict during the 1960s when African American children in public schools did not perform as well as their privileged white counterparts (Gay, 2018; Ladson-Billings, 2009). The disparities in performances were identified as the result of culturally biased curricula administered by teachers who disproportionately represented the white dominant class and its values. According to Gay (2018), in order to transform this situation, instructors had to first examine their own pre-conceived cultural assumptions and beliefs as well as that of their learners, to bridge the gap between them. By developing their cultural competence and using materials relevant to learners, teachers changed the outcomes for African American students. The incorporation of CRT resulted in a redirection in education, putting the focus on student engagement to create conditions of success for all learners.

Culturally Responsive Teaching and Adult Migrants

Migrants participating in adult education programs are commonly subjected to curricula and materials that represent the belief and cultural value systems of the dominant culture and are delivered by instructors who promote these views, causing marginalization and cultural dissonance (Campano, 2007; Goodson, 2014; Greene, 2015; Pentón Herrera, 2019a, b; Pentón Herrera & Obregón, 2020). In addition, these materials are written at a literacy level beyond that of thousands of learners who are served more effectively by intentional literacy-based instruction (Peyton & Young-Scholten, 2020). Teachers who rely on these types of resources and foster an exclusionary value system perpetuate conditions that are detrimental to migrants, resulting in less successful outcomes for learners. Culturally competent teachers, on the other hand, develop a multicultural curriculum by eliciting information from learners about their lived experiences (Gay, 2018; Ladson-Billings, 2009). They approach the construction of knowledge as a collaborative process that involves teachers and students alike, with every stakeholder engaged in teaching and learning (Freire, 2018; Goodson, 2014; Herrera, 2016). Culturally Responsive Teaching creates a learning community, honors learners' rich experience and knowledge (DeCapua et al., 2017; Frydland, 2019b; Marshall & DeCapua, 2013), lowers the affective filter (Krashen, 1982), and promotes language acquisition through social interaction (Vygotsky, 1986).

The Mutually Adaptive Learning Paradigm® (MALP®)

As more fully described by DeCapua and Marshall, this book, Chap. 8, MALP® developed out of a need to teach English to Hmong refugees from the war that the U.S. government waged in Cambodia in the 1980s (Marshall, 1998). These migrants were preliterate because the Hmong language did not have a written component. The Hmong students insisted on learning literacy in their own language while acquiring the language of their host country, a demand that was met by arranging instruction for each of the two languages on alternate days.

Out of this experience, Helaine Marshall (1998) conceived a framework for teaching that focuses on learners’ knowledge, experience, needs, beliefs, priorities, ways of learning, ways of communicating, and ways of relating to other people. Marshall aligned herself with the Hmong migrants and shifted her authority as a teacher to capitalize on their knowledge. By becoming an emergent teacher, open to learning from her students, she created a learning and teaching model whose overarching principle is that teachers prioritize learners’ knowledge, needs and interests, and accommodate their ways of learning, to create an effective learning environment (shown in Fig. 15.1) (Marshall & DeCapua, 2013).

The first component of MALP® asks culturally competent teachers to accept two conditions for learning that are familiar to learners from collectivist cultures. The first condition is the need for immediate relevance. SLIFE typically acquire practical knowledge that is useful in their present lives, rather than studying in a classroom for a future reward like a college degree (Hofstede, 2005; Triandis, 1995). Textbooks for adult English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) students typically have little in common with learners’ lives, and are confusing and unappealing to SLIFE due to the nature of a concentration of print, decontextualized tasks,

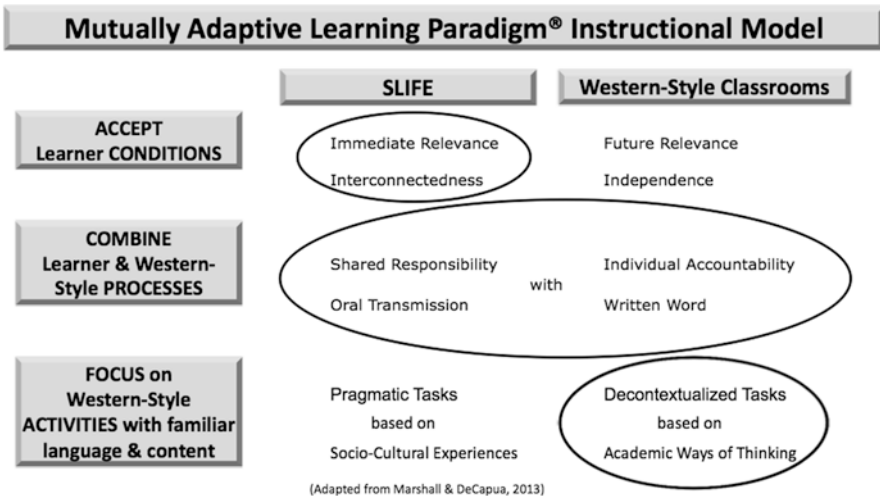


Fig. 15.1 MALP® Instructional model

abstractions, and dominant culture bias. By accepting this first condition, teachers embrace students' funds of knowledge, experiences, interests and needs to inform the educational plan and how it is delivered (Christensen, 2009; DeCapua & Marshall, 2011; Freire, 2018; Herrera, 2016; Moll et al., 1992).

The second learning condition to accept is developing and maintaining interconnectedness. SLIFE are accustomed to learning from people with whom they have close relationships. In the new learning environment, classroom teachers become part of migrants' re-formed communities and are considered part of their interdependent web of relationships. For this reason, a primary consideration for instructors should be to develop closer relationships with migrants than in the mainstream classroom. These more intimate relationships are necessary in order for migrants to trust their teachers, which is a precondition for their being willing to learn from them (Moll et al., 1992).

The second component of MALP® is aimed at combining two processes of learning: (a) formal education's individual accountability with migrant learners' preference for shared responsibility, and (b) educators' focus on the written word with learners' preference for oral transmission of knowledge (DeCapua & Marshall, 2011).

In the third component of the MALP® trajectory, instructors make new, academic activities accessible using language and content from students' lives (DeCapua & Marshall, 2011). Because their experience has been different from students who have highly-developed print literacy skills, in addition to reading and writing instruction, migrants need to develop academic skills (Faux & Watson, 2020; Marshall & DeCapua, 2013; Ouellette-Schramm, 2020; Parrish, 2019).

To develop MALP® lesson plans, teachers can follow the MALP® instructional model diagram (see Fig. 15.1 above), which summarizes features from the collectivist education paradigm and that of Western-style education, and identifies the characteristics from these paradigms that are mutually adapted, accommodated, or combined. In addition, teachers can also use a MALP® Teaching Planning Checklist (see Appendix), which provides an easy reference tool for both planning lessons and for reflecting afterward on whether the implementation was successful.

A Scroll-Based Curriculum

The Scroll-based Curriculum arose out of my experience implementing an action research project at a small CBO serving Central American migrants. The CBO was located in a New York City suburb, situated in a warehouse that lacked a traditional classroom with a chalkboard or whiteboard. In search of a whiteboard substitute, I found a huge roll of Kraft paper at an art supply store, and after cutting a six-foot strip of it, attached it to a wall with painter's tape. Although I had created a writing surface, it quickly became more than that.

This was an opportunity for me as a graduate student to practice implementing the Mutually Adaptive Learning Paradigm® that I had just studied. MALP® appealed to me because it seemed suited to incorporate elements of Freire's generative word

approach (2018), Auerbach's participatory classroom (1992), and Wrigley's literacy instruction (2009; Wrigley & Guth, 1992). My goal was to improve attendance and learning outcomes for 12 male migrants who had volunteered to participate in a 14-week experimental course. By co-creating lessons with learners based upon their needs and interests, and in alignment with MALP[®], I believed that students were likely to be more engaged with learning (Freire, 2018; Greene, 2015). They would also be able to connect their own spoken language to text when they saw their words transcribed.

The participants were young day laborers with little work during winter days. On the first day of class, I drew a chart on the paper I called a scroll, with headers that included *Name, Home Country, Languages, Favorite Food, and Weekend Activities* (The chart exemplifies the third component of MALP[®], focusing on academic tasks). I greeted each student individually, shaking their hands, asking their names, and thanking them for coming. This was the beginning of developing interconnect-edness and creating a learning community (the first component of MALP[®]). At the start of class, I wrote a question on the scroll '*What's your name?*' and asked it aloud. Then, I modeled the task by writing my name on the scroll. As I asked each question derived from the category headers, I continued to model the responses by filling in my answers. This process is aimed at promoting collaboration and playfulness from all participants, rather than a straightforward question-and-answer exercise. Using facial expressions and body language in addition to English, the entire class became engaged in an effort to complete the scroll. In this way, students of all literacy levels were able to participate from the outset, connecting their spoken language to the printed word, and using language and content familiar to them to create classroom texts.

Over the course of three months, I conducted two-hour classes twice a week. The scrolls became a curriculum as I keyboarded and formatted them into Microsoft Word documents, then distributed hard copies to students each week. The printed scrolls were organized in loose-leaf binders, capturing the learning process, and serving as an introduction to academic work and ways of thinking. As in many action research projects, it was at the conclusion of the project that I realized the value of the scroll-based curriculum could reach beyond my classroom.

Reflecting on what I had learned at this point, it occurred to me that capturing oral classroom interaction in the form of the teacher's transcription of student speech might be a unique teaching method. The scrolls clearly confirmed the high value placed on students' language, rather than on teachers and textbooks, making them invaluable for emergent learners. They showed migrants how their speech was connected to the printed word, facilitating print literacy development (Faux & Watson, 2020). The value of student knowledge was codified in the scrolls as they become integral educational materials to be studied in the classroom, used for homework assignments, and assessment. Finally, the learners had a meaningful context for literacy because the scrolls reflected their lived experiences.

Our Book: How to Develop the Scroll-Based Curriculum

Armed with my graduate degree in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL), my next scroll-based curriculum was implemented in an adult education program at an NGO in New York City, where I taught 15 migrants and refugees from West Africa and Southeast Asia ranging in age from 18 to 61. Teachers were required to design a competency-based curriculum. I began in the same way that I had conducted my action research project—with a class survey that helped us get to know each other. I changed the formatting of the transcribed scrolls from Microsoft Word to PowerPoint to utilize the superior design elements and to make reading easier by printing in landscape mode.

After two weeks of class surveys and community-building exercises, I turned to teaching students how to ‘do school,’ beginning with organizing the scroll printouts in three-ring binders (see Fig. 15.2 for an example of a class survey as a PowerPoint slide. Please note: All the student names used here and throughout the chapter are real, with the students’ permission). The binders were titled *Our Book*, and each page bore that title as well. I found that it took deliberate instruction to help SLIFE understand that the numbered scroll pages followed a numerical order and that each day’s pages were to be placed behind the older ones. Tab dividers for grammar, homework, maps, handouts, notes, and assessments were supplied along with careful instruction as to how to manage papers as they were distributed. In this classroom, the scrolls became the curriculum, and served as our textbooks.

Next in the process of co-creating an educational agenda came identifying topics for study. Based on the principles of MALP® and Freire, students must be engaged in the content decision-making process in order to be invested in learning. Equipped with a list of competencies provided by the NGO, the class crossed out skills they knew how to do and circled the ones they did not. The class voted on the

Name	Home Country	Languages	Favorite Foods	Weekend Activities
Nan	U.S.	English, Spanish, French	Chocolate, berries	I like to read, do yoga and bake.
Rose	Central African Republic (CAR)	Sango, French, Housa, Fulfulde, English	Fish, vegetables, fruit, dark chocolate	Exercise. Cook and clean. Talk on the phone with my family back home.
Esam	Yemen	Arabic	Chicken and fish	Relax.
Niru	Tibet	Tibetan	Fish, vegetables	Go shopping. See friends.
Annie	Senegal	French, Wolof, Jiola	Fish, rice, fufu	I go to church on Sunday. I wash my clothes and clean my room.
Hawa	Guinea	French	Fruit	Shopping and time with family.
Jean Baptiste	Burkina Faso	French, Dagara, Dioulla	Gumbo	Dance, listen to music. Watch people making music in the park.
Nadege	Cameroon	French, English, Bamileke	French Fries	Do the laundry.

Fig. 15.2 Class survey first day

competencies they were most interested in learning and used a calendar to schedule the topics over the 14-week semester.

My responsibilities included adding visits to grocery and department stores, a pharmacy, a community garden, and a library, that would help skill-building and broaden learners’ cultural knowledge, as well as input from appropriate sources such as Rethinking School (<https://rethinkingschools.org/>) and realia. Fieldtrips to the Stature of Liberty, the Museum of Modern Art, and the Tenement Museum supplied rich Learning Experience Approach activities (Parrish, 2019). Students were assigned the task of creating photostories that captured our group activities, as well as their individual lives. See Fig. 15.3 for an example of two students’ photostory, which was printed in a booklet of migrant photostories.

Contextualized phonics and numeracy exercises were incorporated on an ongoing basis. With a structural foundation secured, scrolls are a reliable and effective way to deliver planned lesson topics, but they can also be used to respond to



Fig. 15.3 Student photostory: Mi Zar’s and Nai Kyaw’s dinner

learners' questions or interests spontaneously. In this class, they were used to (1) record student speech and knowledge; (2) capture data compiled by students in classroom activities; (3) provide the content of lessons, handouts, clozes, quizzes, and assessments; and (4) connect student knowledge and experience with the world. The scroll method can be used for projects that are integrated into established adult education programs, or as a replacement to traditional teaching methods and materials. They are but one example of how MALP® can be implemented to serve SLIFE effectively.

How Scroll-Based Curricula Work with Textbooks

In another role, as an ESOL teacher in a community-based-organization in a New York City suburb, I taught literacy in an Intensive English Program (IEP) to twelve LESLLA learners from Haiti, Eritrea, and Latin American countries, ranging in age from 19 to 42. These learners aspired to earning a General Education Diploma (GED), obtaining citizenship, enrolling in vocational training, or helping with their children's homework. Our assigned textbooks presented a perspective rooted in dominant class values, rife with gender stereotypes, and an abundance of academic vocabulary that impeded students' comprehension of the instructions for workbook exercises. The scroll-based curriculum became an excellent critical literacy tool for curing these inadequacies.

For each textbook unit, a scroll in the form of a class survey or mind map was created to elicit and prioritize student knowledge. For example, a chapter on health began with a doctor's office visit and concluded with reading over-the-counter medicine labels from a chain drugstore. This deficit view, that is, framing health as seeking professional medical assistance and relying on pharmaceuticals, is alien to many migrants. I reframed the chapter by asking, "*What is health?*" and students quickly identified foods and activities that contributed to their well-being, and described their experiences in asking for advice and wisdom from family members familiar with herbal and plant remedies. Much of this collectivist, nature-based knowledge is shared across continents as connective tissue in multiple cultures. It is, therefore, no surprise that natural ingredients such as ginger, lemon, aloe, and herbal teas, are more commonly used by SLIFE than American pharmaceuticals. Students gathered data from each other and produced scrolls with it.

After the student scrolls were created on a classroom whiteboard, I transcribed them into PowerPoint documents and printed one slide per page. Copies were organized in loose-leaf binders titled *Our Book*, as described above.

Students were also given a second binder named *Picture Dictionary* supplied with A–Z tab dividers to draw and define new vocabulary (see Fig. 15.4). Magazines distributed in class supplemented Picture Dictionary entries. A hardbound journal called *My Culture Book* was used for students to draw pictures and write about their home and new host countries. Because the purpose of these books was to facilitate students' expression and ownership of language, they were not graded, although they evidenced student progress.

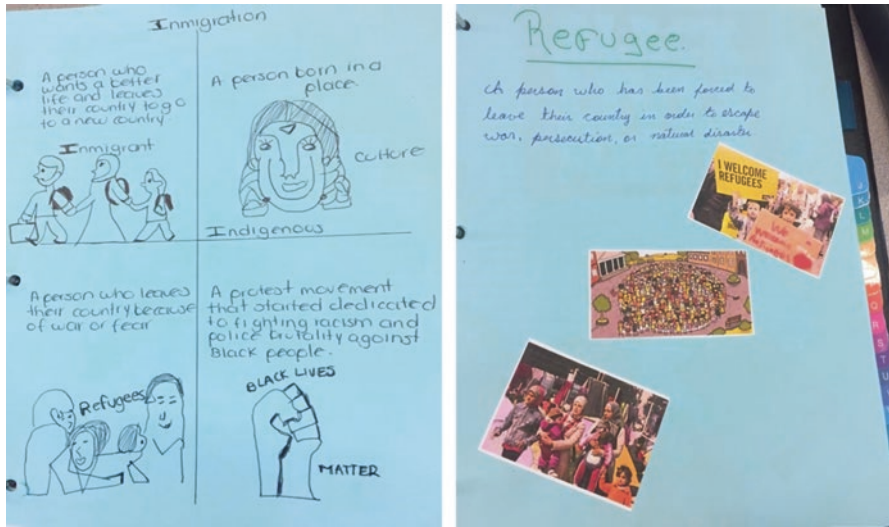


Fig. 15.4 Picture dictionary examples

Practical Application of the Scroll-Based Curriculum

The scrolled-based projects shared in this section are examples that were implemented in adult education programs for SLIFE.

Project #1: Where Are You From?

This project is most appropriately started on the first day of class for several reasons. Firstly, it facilitates interconnectedness as students and teacher share personal information. Secondly, it offers learners the experience of creating a scroll, laying the foundation for future work. And thirdly, the text in this scroll will be the first required-learning content, confirming the value of students' knowledge over any other source of information.

Day 1 After introductions were made, I drew a chart on a whiteboard with the headers shared above in Fig. 15.2 and the title “*Class Survey*.” I modeled answering the questions and writing my answers in the first row of the chart, and then I invited students to follow. The students quickly grasped the task and began working collaboratively. They encouraged shy classmates, volunteered as scribes, and helped others find words to express themselves. To extend the lesson and develop closeness, I invited learners to find their home countries on the large, laminated world map when it was their turn to share their personal information and to write their names on a line pointing to their home.

Day 2 Hard copies of the Class Survey scroll were formatted as a PowerPoint document and distributed with a loose-leaf binder. Students personalized the binder covers with a sense of prideful ownership. For most, this was their first experience with school supplies and classroom procedures. Because of the personalized nature of the scrolls, the exercise provided a meaningful context for developing literacy skills, and a departure from alienating textbooks. Students took turns reading from their newly created books, and an informal discussion arose as students expanded on their personal information.

Next, students were provided a color photo of their home country as a starting point for their first assignment, which was to make a poster about themselves, and their country's flag, time zone, and climate. Magazines were available for cutting and pasting pictures. Providing class time for students to conceive and execute poster designs is community-building and allows for learning to occur without the demands of a teacher-fronted classroom.

Day 3 Students presented their posters (see Fig. 15.5) and answered questions from classmates. Printed copies of the transcribed discussion were distributed. The posters were displayed in the classroom, consistent with MALP® and CRT principles.

Day 4 Students were assigned the homework task of drawing their home country flags in *My Culture Book* (see Fig. 15.6) and writing about the meaning of them, if they could. In class, I drew a chart titled "Home Country Flags," and students identified the colors and characteristics of their flags, such as birds, stars, and emblems. Learners read from their culture books and displayed their artwork. In this way, learners were the acknowledged experts of this lesson.

Day 5 To evaluate what students learned during this project, they were given a written test that included writing about a flag other than their own, comparing their flag to another, and identifying the home countries of four classmates.



Fig. 15.5 Examples of student posters

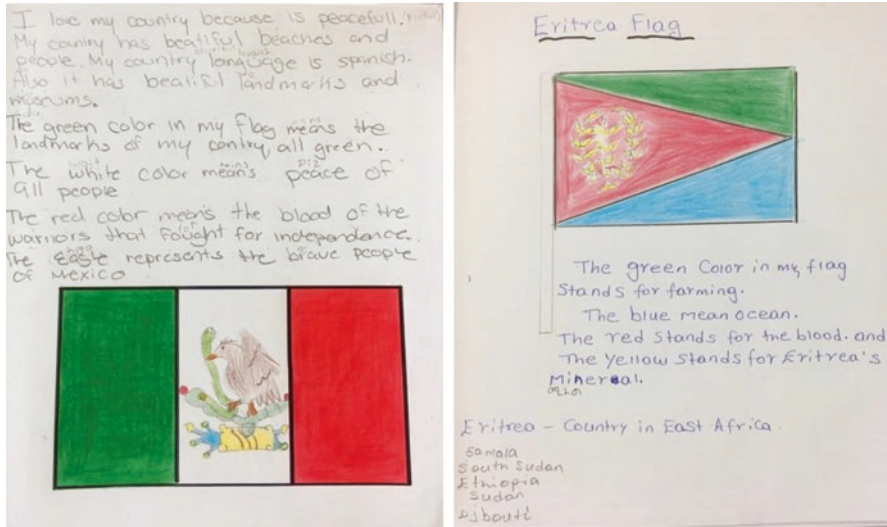


Fig. 15.6 Culture books: Home country flags activity

Over the course of a semester, this information was woven into many lessons, so that students came to know each other and their classmates' backgrounds intimately. This is an example of the third component of MALP® and supported by Dewey's (1968) belief that learners are most likely to remember information if they have a personal or emotional connection to it.

Project # 2: What Does the Word “Immigrant” Mean?

A visit to the Statue of Liberty was used to explore the theme of immigration, extended to the history of civil rights in the United States, and connected to the current wave of anti-immigrant and anti-Black sentiment. For teacher-readers outside of New York City, this project can be modified to include a monument, landmark, or location in your community where students can reflect on the history of civil rights in their region and connect it to their lives.

Day 1 Prior to visiting the Statue of Liberty, students shared their thoughts and feelings about the landmark, and I created a mind map scroll as they dictated. Keywords such as *immigration*, *forced immigration*, and *refugee* were discussed. I took the opportunity to share my family's immigration and migration experiences. Students were assigned to write about their immigration experiences in their journals

and invited to share their writing on a voluntary basis. Their stories were incorporated into a printed scroll and distributed to the class.

Day 2 I played the song ‘Land of the Free,’ by The Killers,’ and asked what words they heard and what they understood. I transcribed their comments on a scroll. Then, I played the music video and asked how their feelings changed. Students were given copies of the lyrics with missing words, and they watched and listened again. Another viewing of the video aided students in completing the lyrics, and a class discussion followed. In this way, learners were provided aural and visual connections to text, and an opportunity to connect their own thoughts, feelings, and experience about immigration to the present climate.

Day 3 Students prepared questions for the tour guide about the immigrants who came to Liberty Island. They recorded their observations on-site, sitting in the grass on Liberty Island, and in class the following day, they dictated their experience as I wrote it on the whiteboard.

Day 4 To add to the knowledge constructed by students from the videos and their own experiences, I delivered a timeline of American history events featuring slavery, civil rights, current immigration, and the Black Lives Matter movement. For the following several weeks, mini-lessons in history were provided. An audio and textbook about Harriet Tubman were used to introduce the Underground Railroad, and worksheets that accompanied the text aided students in understanding and processing the abundance of historical and linguistic information.

Project #3: What Happened to Columbus Day?

Multiculturalism requires educators to move beyond sharing heroes, holidays, and recipes (Nieto, 2010), but one holiday that offers a rich opportunity for examining American history and students’ cultures is the recently renamed Indigenous Peoples’ Day.

Day 1 Students created a scroll containing information about their home countries’ Independence Day dates, who had colonized their countries, the language(s) spoken by the colonizer(s), and the language(s) currently in use. I produced a PowerPoint table of the data and added data about the United States.

Day 2 We created another scroll in class using data about Indigenous tribes and languages spoken by them for each country represented in the class, as shown in Fig. 15.7. Students were asked to write their thoughts and feelings about colonization.

Indigenous Tribes from Our Home Countries

Country	# of Tribes	Examples of Tribal Names	Classmates
Colombia	3	Quimbaya, Chibchas, Kalina	Luisa
Dominican Republic	1	Taino (Arawak)	Francia
Ecuador	14	Quechua, Achuar, Epera, Awa	Wendy
Eritrea	9	Tigrinya, Naro, Saho, Tigre, Kunama, Afar, Blien, Hidareb	Yordanos, Saba
Guatemala	22	Q'eqchi', Kaqchikel, Mam, Garifuna, Matan	Grizeth, Milvia
Haiti	1	Taino (Arawak)	Mirlande
Mexico	9	Maya, Huave, Amuzgo, Kiliwa, Mazahua, Matlatzinca	Lupita, Rebeca, Yesenia
United States	574	Chickasaw, Choctaw, Creek	Nan
Venezuela	26	Yanomamo, Pemon, Warao, Baniwa, Kali'na, Yaruro	Maria Emilia

Fig. 15.7 Scroll about indigenous peoples from students' countries

Day 3 I introduced a mini-lesson on Columbus Day from *Rethinking Columbus* (Bigelow & Peterson, 1998), which asks students to consider historical events from the perspectives of Columbus, Queen Isabella, the Taino people, and the System that facilitated the events. This served to introduce non-dominant perspectives and the concept of critical literacy.

Day 4 Students, relying on and revisiting entries to their Picture Dictionaries, added “Indigenous” to their vocabulary and contextualized it with earlier terms, as shown in Fig. 15.8.

Day 5 A printed copy of a PowerPoint slide deck that captured the project was distributed, as shown in Fig. 15.9. We read and discussed the printed scrolls, and students were quizzed about the contents of the project.

Assessment

Assessment is necessary in every adult education program, and consistent with MALP® principles, students provide portfolios of their work or collaborate on a project such as publishing a collection of their work. MALP® focuses on formative, rather than summative, assessments to determine the knowledge or concept that the learners have acquired. Open book tasks that involve processing content are also ways to assess whether expected outcomes are being achieved.



Fig. 15.8 Adding the word indigenous to the picture dictionaries

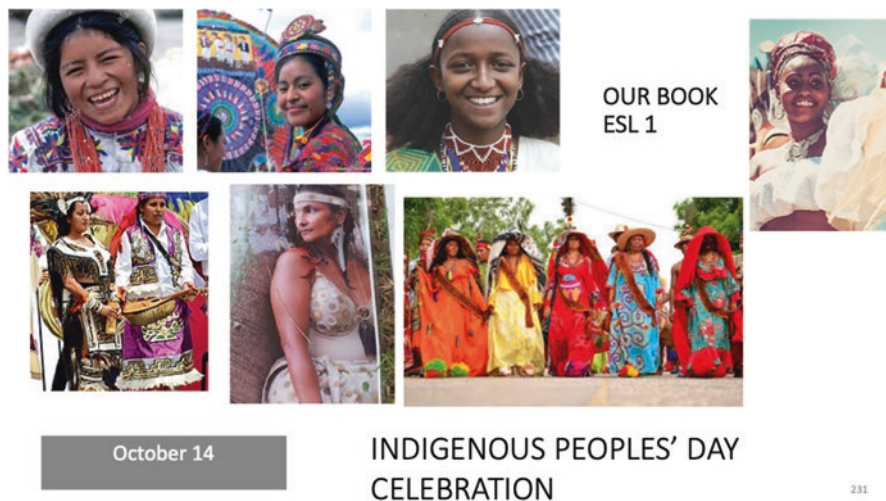


Fig. 15.9 The cover to a scroll printed as a PowerPoint slide deck

Projects, Surveys, and Booklets

MALP® is conducive to a wide range of collaborative activities, such as the creation of surveys, booklets, and other projects (Frydland, 2019b). Illustrated autobiographies or personal narratives allow students more freedom and creative license than traditional literacy assignments. Unlike commercial textbooks based on dominant class value systems, students’ experiences are more likely to have involved poverty, trauma, and struggle (Goodson, 2014). Working in a supportive learning community, they are more likely to feel comfortable enough to share experiences reflecting their lived experiences (Christensen, 2009).

MALP® can also be used to support the Learning Experience Approach (LEA) (Parrish, 2019). One such project involves the class taking photos of the neighborhood around their school. The teacher might distribute a map outline in advance, along with index cards printed with the names of buildings and institutions for students to identify. Then, learners photograph each other holding the index cards in front of the building or institution they have located. Later, the teacher can organize the photos in PowerPoint slides to scaffold the LEA story writing.

Creating a visual- and literacy-rich environment is an important facet of MALP®, and an effective way to do this is to provide copies of autobiographies written by students from other classes. This provides a meaningful context for learners to develop reading skills (see Fig. 15.10). After reporting on other students’ autobiographies, learners can be assigned to write their own. In this way, their reading and reporting scaffold the exercise.

Ancillary reading materials such as those published by Eye on Literacy (<http://www.eyeonliteracy.com>) and Grass Roots Press (<https://grassrootsbooks.net>) offer

Immigrant Stories: Student Narratives

Name	Student Author	Country	What Happened
Luisa	Kungsang	Tibet	No worries in Tibet. There are many animals: Tibetan Yak is important for milk, cheese, clothing. Many different mountains.
Maria Emilia	Larissa	Central African Republic	The problems are similar to Venezuela. Problems with the military, food, no work, no medicine, no money. She has a big family in the U.S. now.
Yordanos	Larissa	C.A.R.	The country has many diamonds. The main language is French.
Yesenia	Hawa	Guinea	She learned to be a baker in the U.S. She’s married with two sons. She worked 2 jobs for 7 years and studied English to pay for her husband and sons to come to the U.S. Now she is happy.
Grizeth	Yeshi	Tibet	There’s no school for her in Tibet. She always wanted to go school. But there was no teacher. She struggled with her family to survive. They have domesticated yaks.
Saba	Hawa	Guinea	Hawa came from Guinea. Now she’s a cook. She works in the garden to grow vegetables.

Fig. 15.10 Autobiography report scroll

wordless and photo-based books that feature the lived experiences of immigrants. Written and designed by teachers, they are sold with downloadable resources that include phonics instruction.

Contextualized Learning and Learners' Goals

Contextualized learning has reemerged as a legitimate focus of instruction as educators strive to accommodate SLIFE who cannot meet the literacy benchmarks required by federal mandates. MALP® finds its place within this construct as contextualized learning is, by its nature, learner-oriented, and aligned with facilitating students toward achieving their own goals (Marshall, 1998). For example, in response to learners' requests, the teacher can facilitate class visits to local supermarkets, pharmacies, banks, and the like, providing opportunities for students to learn or practice life skills. Large department stores can be overwhelming, and teaching migrants how to navigate the aisles and locate products can be made into scavenger hunts on location (see Kidwell, this book, Chap. 19).

Digital Literacy and Distance Learning

Early in 2020, schools across the United States were shuttered in response to the COVID-19 global pandemic. Teachers were caught off guard, with little time to prepare—or to prepare students—for a pivot to distance learning. In my school, we were advised to create classroom groups using WhatsApp, a texting and video application used by migrants worldwide. We expected to contact students to provide them with instructions for future classes once teachers were ready. But for learners without computers or WIFI access, I realized using WhatsApp might be the best solution, so I went to work to create a scroll-based curriculum using WhatsApp as a teaching platform.

First, I considered how to limit the cognitive load on students as they were asked for the first time to use a cellphone for learning, rather than as a device for a personal purpose. Second, because we had already developed close relationships, I focused on how to visually share content, rather than using the video feature to see each other. Using my laptop, I arranged WhatsApp side by side with PowerPoint, and found that I could send one slide at a time for students to view, since they couldn't open a PowerPoint deck on a phone. I made thirty-second videos of myself performing household tasks to provide audio and visual variety.

Although some learners were unable to connect to our WhatsApp classroom, others were able to interact with voice messages, and some were able to text. Most importantly, students sent photos of themselves engaged in activities in their homes, contributing to a new scroll form that was recorded in the WhatsApp thread. We

succeeded in conducting synchronous classes on schedule for the remainder of the term, proving our resilience, commitment, joy for learning, and adaptability (Frydland, 2020).

In the fall of 2020, at another school, our leadership made digital literacy a priority. Incoming students were surveyed to determine their computer and WIFI access. Computer teachers delivered five hours of training a week to students, including Google Classroom and NorthStar Digital Literacy (<https://www.digitalliteracyassessment.org/>), a Literacy Minnesota program. When the school shifted to remote learning a few months later, learners were equipped to participate fully in distance learning. Our classes were conducted using Google Meet and Google Classroom; I mailed PowerPoint scrolls to learners' homes, and we co-created scrolls using WhatsApp (see Fig. 15.11). Newly-digital-literate students sent internet images and photos of their *Culture Book* entries. Clearly, new ways of implementing the scroll-based curriculum will emerge as teachers develop digital proficiency.

Fig. 15.11 WhatsApp scroll



Conclusion

The scroll-based curriculum, based on the MALP® approach to teaching migrants, is grounded in the theory that LESLLA learners' knowledge, beliefs, and priorities are different from learners born in highly industrialized countries, and that migrants experience a cultural dissonance in classrooms that fail to recognize their unique experiences and needs (DeCapua & Marshall, 2011). MALP® addresses cultural dissonance by respecting the educational paradigms of migrants and teachers, and replaces ineffective, mainstream teaching methods with a process of adapting to the needs of SLIFE. Through MALP®, emergent learners can acquire literacy skills while learning a language and adapting to a new culture. The scroll-based curriculum is an innovative approach to MALP® with the flexibility to be used in any environment. Educators and administrators committed to providing the most effective education to migrants are well-advised to appreciate the value of culturally responsive pedagogy and to engage culturally competent teachers to deliver it.

Reflection Questions

1. How could you and other educators in your teaching environment implement MALP® to support your learners?
2. How would you implement MALP® on a long-distance learning platform?
3. What are some possibilities and barriers to developing a broadly-based MALP® curriculum that is flexible enough to be adaptable to classrooms for all emergent learners?
4. This chapter has focused on adults who are learning as SLIFE. However, the ideas presented might also be useful with other learners. When, where, and why might you use them with K-12 learners?

Appendix: MALP[®] Teacher Planning Checklist

A. Accept Conditions for Learning
A1. I am making this lesson/project immediately relevant to my students' lives. Explain:
A2. I am helping students develop and maintain interconnectedness with each other. Explain:
B. Combine Processes for Learning
B1. I am incorporating both shared responsibility and individual accountability. Explain:
B2. I am scaffolding the written word through oral interaction. Explain:
C. Focus on New Activities for Learning
C1. I am developing academic ways of thinking using familiar language and content. Explain:
C2. I am teaching students how to engage in decontextualized tasks to demonstrate their mastery of these new ways of thinking. Explain:

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Chapter 16

The Case for Explicit Instruction for Adult SLIFE



Zohar Beatrice Friedman, Rachel Joyce Laitflang, and Alon David Pilosoph

Abstract This chapter advocates for the use of explicit instruction for adult SLIFE and identifies the curricular support and training that teachers require to adopt explicit methods. As such, the chapter begins by providing an overview of explicit instruction, establishing its appropriateness for novice learners. Next, it evaluates the specific learning needs and formal schooling backgrounds of adult SLIFE and argues that fully-guided instruction is highly effective for addressing SLIFE' barriers to classroom integration and language learning. It then contextualizes and elaborates on these claims by describing case studies from an adult refugee education center in Tel Aviv, Israel, where the authors implement explicit instruction. The chapter concludes by discussing the challenges related to teachers adopting explicit methods and argues that robust curricular support, as well as high levels of content knowledge, are essential for successful implementation.

Keywords Explicit instruction · SLIFE · Adult education · English language teaching · Literacy

Introduction

Educators of students with limited or interrupted formal education (SLIFE) have a wide range of instructional methods at their disposal when designing and implementing lessons. However, little discussion has been devoted to evaluating what methods, specifically, are most effective for SLIFE. This chapter argues that explicit methods of instruction are most effective for adult SLIFE.¹ Using practical

¹In this chapter, we use *adult SLIFE* as a preference, but we acknowledge that the term literacy education and second language learning for adults (LESLLA) is also used for adults in the field.

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examples, the authors demonstrate the potential explicit methods of instruction have to meet the learning needs of adult SLIFE while maximizing the effectiveness of instructional time.

Defining Explicit Instruction

The term *Explicit Instruction* was first introduced in the 1990s as an alternative to the term *Direct Instruction*. While some practitioners still use these terms interchangeably, *Direct Instruction* originally referred to a set of instructional practices and corresponding scripted curricula developed by Sigfried Engelmann and Wesley Becker in the 1960s (Hughes et al., 2017). For our purposes, explicit instruction refers to a research-based instructional design framework as well as a wide selection of lesson delivery strategies (Hughes et al., 2017), usually employed in the context of full-class, teacher-centered instruction of new content (Hollingsworth & Ybarra, 2018). Explicit instruction is sometimes referred to as “fully-guided instruction” (Clark et al., 2012, p. 6), as teachers are responsible for organizing, actively directing, and monitoring student learning. In explicit approaches, teachers directly supply students with the knowledge, concepts, and skills required to meet the lesson objectives through frontal presentation and modeling techniques such as think alouds. To this effect, considerable effort is invested in sequencing students’ learning into digestible, logical chunks through careful attention to instructional design, curricular mapping, and learner background knowledge. While explicit approaches should not be confused with lecturing to passive students, teachers do adopt frontal teaching roles, rather than those of facilitators (Knowles et al., 2005). During frontal teaching, student engagement is elicited through the frequent employment of formative assessment mechanisms that allow teachers to monitor student learning in real time, and when necessary, provide corrective feedback and/or reteach.

Explicit vs. Indirect Instructional Approaches

For teachers who are unfamiliar with explicit teaching, it is helpful to distinguish it from other instructional methods, especially indirect instructional approaches. Indirect instructional approaches involve exposing learners to a variety of rich, authentic, and often real-world tasks and contexts where instruction is either partially-guided or entirely unguided. In indirect learning, engagement with the task spurs the student to seek and discover the content and skills required for its completion. As such, inquiry and the process of discovery are paramount in indirect approaches. Readers may recognize some indirect instructional approaches by the following names: inquiry learning, problem-based learning, task-based learning, discovery learning, experiential learning, or project-based learning.

While fully exploring the theoretical basis of indirect approaches is beyond the scope of this chapter, it is worth briefly noting their philosophical underpinnings. E. D. Hirsch (2007) attributes the foundation of indirect approaches to romanticism and romantic thinkers:

Following the Colonial period, during the heady days of the early 1800s, the most influential thinkers in New England were no longer writers like Jonathan Edwards, who had exhorted us to follow the commandments of God's law, but writers like Emerson and Thoreau, who admonished us to develop ourselves according to nature (pp. 3–4).

When applied to formal schooling, these romantic ideas often manifest in efforts to make learning more natural by situating it in real-life and authentic contexts, rather than the artificiality of teacher-centered instruction. Other thinkers, such as Freire (2018), believed that the dynamic of teacher-led instruction was oppressive and disempowering to learners.

In our view, one of the most significant differences between explicit and indirect approaches is the extent to which learning outcomes and expectations are uniform for all learners. In indirect approaches, teachers often believe that students will learn different, but equally-valuable content and skills from real-world tasks. In explicit approaches, teachers take full responsibility to ensure that all learners meet the learning objectives—not only must all learners achieve, but they must also achieve the specific targets and objectives of the lesson in question. Instructional design and delivery strategies are the tools that explicit instruction teachers wield to achieve their purpose.

The Case for Explicit Instruction for Novice Learners

In order to evaluate and select an instructional approach, it is important for teachers to consider their students' specific learning needs, such as their individualities, learning backgrounds, and familiarity with the topic at hand. While learner diversity and heterogeneous classrooms complicate the task of uniformly determining students' learning needs, cognitive psychology researchers have made considerable progress in establishing what instruction is most effective for learners at various ability levels (Sweller et al., 2011). To this effect, cognitive psychologists distinguish between learners who can be described as either novices² or experts *within the knowledge domain in question*. Broadly-speaking, explicit approaches are best for novices, whereas indirect approaches are better suited for highly advanced or expert-level learners (Clark et al., 2012).

²In the context of our chapter, we use the phrase 'novice learners' quite liberally to refer to all students for whom "most of the information provided to them is novel" (Sweller et al., 2011, p. 44). We recognize that this is quite an expansive definition and side with Sweller et al. (2011) who assert that "in general terms, most students are novices" (p. 44; see also Clark et al., 2012) It is important to remember that a 'novice' label is not a value judgement, but rather a descriptive term that describes the relationship of a learner to a knowledge domain, and that very few people achieve expert status within a specific domain.

Learning and the Brain

Many of these conclusions on the distinctions between novices and expert learners stem from research on human cognitive architecture, specifically, the interaction between long-term memory and working memory in human learning. Working memory is the cognitive structure where we temporarily store and manipulate information, and also engage in complex thought (Baddeley, 2007). According to Willingham (2009), working memory can be thought of as consciousness, or the “site of awareness and of thinking” (p. 11). On the other hand, long-term memory is a “vast storehouse” (Willingham, 2009, p. 11) where we hold factual and procedural information. Most crucial for the purpose of this chapter is how long-term memory interacts with working memory to facilitate thinking: once previously-learned information from long-term memory has been activated, it can be retrieved into working memory (Willingham, 2009).

To return our focus to novice learners and their instructional needs, it bears noting that by definition, one of the critical characteristics of a novice learner is the lack of familiarity with a specific knowledge domain (i.e., they have not stored much information about the given topic in their long-term memory). On the other hand, expert learners have access to large amounts of information—or schema—stored in their long-term memory, which they can retrieve automatically. The combination of automaticity and having vast amounts of information lowers cognitive load when processing novel information (Sweller, 1994). Without the assistance of long-term memory, however, working memory is easily overwhelmed because humans can only hold a very limited number of *new* elements in working memory at once—estimated by some to be around four elements (Cowan, 2001)—and most of it disappears within 30 s (Peterson & Peterson, 1959). As evidenced by studies on experts (i.e., chess: de Groot, 1978; electronic engineering: Egan & Schwartz, 1979; algebra: Sweller & Cooper, 1985), these limitations dissipate when a well-developed long-term memory—full of previously learned procedural and factual knowledge—supports working memory:

Altogether, the results suggest that expert problem solvers derive their skill by drawing on the extensive experience stored in their long-term memory in the form of concepts and procedures, known as mental schemas. They retrieve memories of past procedures and solutions, and then quickly select and apply the best ones for solving problems. We are skillful in an area if our long-term memory contains huge amounts of information or knowledge concerning the area. That information permits us to quickly recognize the characteristics of a situation and indicates to us, often immediately and unconsciously, what to do and when to do it (Clark et al., 2012, p. 9).

Teaching Implications of Human Cognitive Architecture

When teaching novice learners, teachers must take great pains to avoid overwhelming students’ working memory with too much novel information at once, especially when *new* learning is concerned. While partially-guided and indirect approaches

may be effective for applying what has already been mastered, for the purposes of new learning, real-life, authentic tasks risk overwhelming learners' working memories due to the sheer volume of embedded information. Teachers do not know what novices will discover, much less remember, as they navigate these tasks—indeed, novice students are likely to focus on any number of irrelevant or distracting details.

In contrast to partially-guided approaches, fully-guided approaches such as explicit instruction direct student learning to carefully sequenced, narrow chunks of new material. After reducing background noise by limiting the scope of new learning, the teacher then actively directs student attention to the central concepts and skills specified in the lesson objective. Simply put, a teacher who uses explicit instruction will deliberately shelter students from the complexity of the real world *until* the student has a firm grasp of the material.

Along with this focus on specific conceptual and procedural knowledge, explicit instruction often utilizes research-based mechanisms for formative assessment. A teacher who uses explicit instruction elicits student responses frequently and strategically in order to monitor comprehension and subsequently modify teaching in real time, if necessary. This form of ongoing assessment also engages students and improves learning for the following reasons: First, teachers who continuously elicit responses from students make sure they are attentive and on-task simply by making the lesson more interactive (Archer & Hughes, 2011). Second, frequent formative assessment allows for additional rehearsal and practice, which are conducive to consolidation and learning (Archer & Hughes, 2011). Third, when teachers regularly check for understanding, students also learn how to monitor their own understanding (Fisher & Frey, 2007). The frequent usage of formative assessment is not unique to explicit approaches; in fact, formative assessment can also be used with less explicit methodologies. However, within explicit approaches, strategic formative assessments support the logical structuring of material by continuously making sure the learners follow each step of the way until they meet the learning objectives. Both lesson planning and delivery techniques are further explored subsequently.

Are Adult SLIFE Novices?

In order to determine the suitability of explicit instruction for SLIFE, we must determine whether adult SLIFE should be considered novices. Rightfully so, many teachers recognize that their learners are adults, not children, and wish to show respect to their wealth of life experiences. However, the question is not whether or not adult SLIFE are novices at life, but whether they are novices within the knowledge domain to be learned. Given that adult SLIFE have had only limited or no access to formal schooling, they are often novices when it comes to *both* the knowledge domain to be learned and the procedures and processes of formal schooling (DeCapua & Marshall, 2013).

It is worth pausing to consider the cognitive demands that the procedures and processes of the formal classroom alone place on adult SLIFE, most of whom have little experience with these modes of thinking and behavior. Most salient are SLIFE' challenges with reading and writing, the communicative modes favored by and embedded in the formal classroom (DeCapua & Marshall, 2013). Beyond print literacy, many SLIFE do not yet know the ways of thinking, activities, and behaviors that govern the classroom. As such, they must grapple with both learning how to navigate the classroom and learning the foundations of the knowledge domain in question—often through the medium of a second language (L2). This unique confluence of barriers establishes the necessity for fully-guided and targeted instruction that prevents working memory overload

Our (Friedman, Laitflang, and Pilosoph) professional experiences with language teaching—which has dominated our experience with SLIFE—illustrates how adult SLIFE' strengths do not always translate directly into classroom success. On the one hand, many of our students are multilingual and speak a multitude of languages, demonstrating their adeptness and aptitude for language learning. In Israel, where our adult education center is located, many of our students have picked up spoken Hebrew without any formal instruction, a tremendous accomplishment. However, we have learned that our students' broad adeptness for learning oral language through real-life, authentic contexts does not translate directly into adeptness for formal or academic language proficiency. Instead, SLIFE are often largely unfamiliar with the rules, structures, and conventions that govern specific modes of academic discourse. For example, many of our teachers struggle with teaching paragraph or essay writing to novice SLIFE. One of the most difficult barriers to breach is that many students do not seem familiar with the concept that writing should be organized, having had little experience with formal writing in any language. As such, the role of the teacher evolves into going beyond that of helping students understand how certain organizational conventions strengthen communicative arguments. Instead, teachers must begin writing instruction by building background knowledge about why writing needs to be understood as an organized process. Similar claims can be made for other concepts in writing such as argument, evidence, and opinion versus fact.

In other words, adult SLIFE' advantages in learning basic interpersonal communication skills do not necessarily make them experts in learning cognitive academic language proficiency. For tasks that involve unfamiliar concepts, as with most novices, indirect approaches are likely to overwhelm SLIFE. It is difficult to discover the organizational principles of written discourse through engagement and discovery alone, especially for students who never learned these concepts in their first language (L1) and must now do so through their L2. As teachers, it would be both kinder and more effective to provide SLIFE with the full instructional guidance they require. For adult SLIFE, instructional guidance involves explaining new concepts explicitly in digestible, carefully-sequenced chunks, with well-thought definitions and familiar examples, as well as appropriately-scaffolded, guided practice.

Explicit Instruction in Practice: Case Studies

A few years ago, we began the process of implementing and training teachers in explicit instruction and evidence-based practice at our adult education center for SLIFE in Tel Aviv, Israel. While there are many explicit instruction models available today, we relied most heavily on explicit direct instruction (EDI), a framework established and formalized by Hollingsworth and Ybarra (2018) that translates research-based findings into practice for teachers. In the following section, we share descriptions of selected components of an EDI lesson with case studies that reflect on how these design and delivery mechanisms impacted and ultimately improved our teaching for adult SLIFE.

Learning Objectives

Explicit instructional approaches emphasize the importance of having clear learning objectives (Archer & Hughes, 2011; Hughes et al., 2018;) that are communicated to learners in level-appropriate language (Hollingsworth & Ybarra, 2018). A learning objective states what the students will be able to do independently and successfully by the end of a single lesson, as a direct result of teaching. Within the EDI framework, learning objectives are specifically crafted to ensure that lessons have a narrow focus. Well-designed learning objectives determine the success of learning and ensure that learning outcomes are uniform for all learners. Furthermore, learning objectives focus instruction by significantly influencing the choices a teacher makes both in the planning and delivery of a lesson.

While all explicit direct instruction approaches include a learning objective as part of the design of a lesson (Archer & Hughes, 2011; Hughes et al., 2018), we use the model provided by Hollingsworth and Ybarra (2018) who break down the EDI learning objective into three components—concept, skill, and context. **Concept** refers to the main, overarching idea that is taught in the lesson. For instance, in the learning objective *students will be able to list their daily activities using the simple present tense and related vocabulary* the **concept** is *daily activities*. **Skill** is a concrete, measurable verb in a learning objective, which in this case is the verb *list*. This skill can be easily and explicitly demonstrated by the teacher and it is also observable, allowing teachers to assess whether or not learners have met the learning objective. **Context** refers to any specific conditions or parameters within which the objective will be met. In this example, students will list their daily activities using related vocabulary and the simple present tense.

Case Study 16.1: Learning Objectives (Intermediate English, by Rachel J. Laitflang)

All of the teachers in our education center are familiar with the concept of learning objectives; however, after we adopted the EDI framework, we realized that we had misunderstood the purpose and characteristics of learning objectives. A closer look at our planning and delivery process revealed that lessons were often driven by loosely connected tasks and activities rather than by a single, unifying objective. While individual activities may have contained an objective, they were not always connected to the larger learning objective for that particular lesson. Furthermore, learning objectives were rarely made transparent to students at the start of a lesson, and instead, we assumed that the activities would communicate the objective implicitly. For instance, in the Houses and Apartments Unit, one of the objectives for Intermediate Level English is to be able to describe where one lives. I would teach the necessary vocabulary and grammar through a series of activities but when the time arrived for the descriptive task, many students did not use the input that had been provided (vocabulary and grammatical constructs). At this point, I would often return to the previous activities and point out the connection. Eventually, this back-and-forth process would pay off but it was admittedly quite time-consuming and exhausting for everyone involved. When I started to communicate the lesson objective with the students at the start of the lesson, as well as before certain individual activities, the change was immediately visible. Students were able to apply the input from each of the activities into the final task. The goal was no longer hidden, and I could draw direct connections between the house-related vocabulary and grammar, and the overall goal.

Concept Development

As stated in case study 16.1, EDI lesson objectives include concepts. After sharing the objectives, teachers must explain and illustrate the objectives' concept for the learners. While Hollingsworth and Ybarra (2018) refer to this as *concept development*, most explicit instruction frameworks emphasize clearly explaining key concepts, vocabulary, and terms to students that are relevant to the lesson. Beyond ensuring that the central lesson concept is transparent and comprehensible to students, Hollingsworth and Ybarra (2018) argue that explicit concept development is important because it focuses instruction on the larger, generalizable ideas, rather than individual instances. Focusing on the generalizable aspects of concepts provides the foundation needed to apply learning to future contexts.

Hollingsworth and Ybarra (2018) formalize concept development by outlining two key steps: first, teachers give clear and accessible definitions of the concept, and

second, they provide students with labeled examples that illustrate the key attributes articulated by the definition. If relevant, teachers can also provide non-examples, which work in conjunction with examples to allow learners to recognize “the boundaries of the concept—what it is and what it is not” (Archer & Hughes, 2011, p. 55). Depending on the level of challenge the teacher wishes to introduce, non-examples can be quite similar to the illustrative examples, but must have “at least one critical attribute... excluded” (Archer & Hughes, 2011, p. 55). For example, if teaching learners to distinguish between opinion and fact, the teacher might begin by providing a definition and accessible, supporting examples of facts. Afterward, the teacher might provide a very obvious non-example of an opinion and identify the ways in which this non-example defies the attributes of a fact. Eventually, the teacher might heighten the rigor of the task by introducing opinions that comment on established facts, but are still opinions (e.g., “New York City has almost nine million residents” versus “New York City has too many people”).

In our experience, a central challenge to good concept development lies in ensuring that definitions are delivered in a language that can be easily understood by adult second language learners *and* that the examples used to illustrate concepts are immediately familiar to learners. Given that the concept being taught is likely novel for learners, an example that is not resonant for learners will do nothing to illustrate an unfamiliar concept. While this statement is true for any learner, finding examples that are both illustrative and familiar can be particularly challenging with adult SLIFE from diverse cultural and educational backgrounds. In part, these challenges stem from the fact that teachers and adult SLIFE often share little by way of educational or cultural background. As such, examples that seem familiar or resonant to the teacher may be unfamiliar to the learners, especially if the examples are culturally-specific or academic in nature. Furthermore, definitions can be challenging for beginning-level language learners and must be delivered with simple vocabulary.

Case Study 16.2: Concept Development (Beginning English, by Zohar Beatrice Friedman)

We witnessed the impact and importance of concept development in our own classes. Prior to adopting explicit instruction, I struggled to teach my beginning English students to navigate activities wherein they interpreted or created family trees using graphic organizers. I would usually structure the unit in three steps: first, familiarize learners with family vocabulary and relationships, as well as read a story about a famous, popular family, which clearly stated the family relationships; second, I would show learners a family tree of the same family to help them see how the family tree organized family relationships; third, I would ask learners to record their own family tree and present it to the class. Every step was peppered with build-up and review, many instructional supports, and what, to my mind, was a tremendous amount of scaffolding. The unit was never successful. Although it felt

(continued)

Case Study 16.2 (continued)

very thorough at the time, I realized later that I had been delivering the lessons through exploration and inquiry rather than through clear explanations. Instead of *telling* learners what a family tree was, I tried to *show* them a familiar family tree and help them deduce its organizational structure. When I began to implement EDI into my teaching, I stuck to the same three steps, but I foregrounded the activity of identifying relationships in a familiar family tree with concept development. I began with a definition: Family trees show us family relationships. We reviewed how members of a family can have multiple relationships, such as father and husband, or sister and daughter. I then provided them with a two-generational familiar family tree that was clearly labeled, showing them what lines meant parentage, what lines meant marriage, and what lines meant siblings. While the activity was still challenging for many students, the change was instantaneous. Even my volunteer teacher's assistant of many years commented to me that student performance on the activity had been far superior to previous years. Rather than burdening my students with discovering how a family tree represented relationships they were familiar with, I told them its purpose. Now, my students could practice navigating and identifying relationships, rather than discovering how this unfamiliar graphic organizer worked.

Skill Development

In most teaching frameworks, the teacher models how to accomplish a task or solve a problem before expecting students to do the same independently. Hollingsworth and Ybarra (2018) refer to this process as skill development. While concept development focuses on the concept part of the learning objective, skill development is when students practice the concrete, measurable verb in that learning objective. When planning this part of the lesson, Hollingsworth and Ybarra (2018) recommend working out a problem for yourself and writing out the steps. If it is difficult to identify the discrete steps involved, it will be difficult to explain to students how to do it. In an EDI lesson, the teacher works out a problem first, modeling for students how to do this, step-by-step. After this part of the lesson, students are given a similar problem to solve. Teacher guidance is gradually withdrawn as students work on similar problems until they are able to work independently and successfully. Scaffolding and modeling are not unique to the explicit instruction paradigm; however, the EDI framework highlights the importance of making the procedures and steps transparent to the students.

Case Study 16.3: Skill Development (Intermediate English, by Rachel J. Laitflang)

I often have students collect information from their classmates and report the answers to the rest of the class using the third person point of view. I use this activity quite often, but the reporting is always challenging. When I was teaching the Countries Unit, I designed an activity where students had to interview each other about their countries. After collecting the information, students had to introduce their classmates and report their answers. In both cases (introducing their classmate and reporting), many students would stumble through the third person conjugation. Consequently, I found myself doing on-the-spot teaching of third-person pronouns and possessive adjectives. Most students would eventually become comfortable with manipulating these grammatical constructs; however, not all were able to make the connection between the brief grammar lesson and the final task because certain key steps were missing. Students still needed prompting to produce grammatically correct sentences when reporting.

After I started to include skill development, the lessons were noticeably more successful. The next time I asked students to interview, introduce, and report the answers of their classmates, I broke down the process into key steps that actually equipped them with the skills required to report. Students had to identify the pronoun or possessive adjective and verb in the questions, and then change them while collecting information and reporting. Instead of a spontaneous grammar lesson towards the end of the class that seemed disconnected from the main activity, I explicitly taught steps to show students how to adjust their speech in different contexts (for an interview and for presenting to the rest of the class). Although students still made mistakes while reporting, it was easier to address the grammatical issues because I had already established a framework.

Checking for Understanding

As mentioned in case study 16.3, explicit instruction is usually accompanied by frequent formative assessment delivered throughout the lesson in effective and engaging routines. Hollingsworth and Ybarra (2018) refer to this practice as *checking for understanding* (CFU). When checking for understanding, the teacher elicits student responses to ensure their comprehension and to inform her own teaching. Our experience with adult SLIFE showed that checking for understanding should be as frequent as possible, ideally every three to four minutes. Frequent CFU allows the lesson to have a brisk pace and to be engaging. At least one CFU question should be presented to the students after every chunk of new information. As suggested by Hollingsworth and Ybarra (2018), CFU questions should always refer to what was

just taught and be specific (i.e., have a right/wrong answer) to allow the teacher to monitor understanding in an efficient way without wasting too much time on open-ended questions.

Case Study 16.4: Checking for Understanding, Asking Specific Questions (Basic Computer Skills, by Alon D. Pilosoph)

While exploring different ways of integrating EDI in my beginner computer class, I noticed how effective checking for understanding could inform my own teaching. Previously, I used to check for understanding by asking my students questions that were not specific enough. However, I saw that students rarely answered questions such as “Is it clear?” in the negative. Instead, my students would say *yes* even when something was not clear enough (as I would later find out quite incidentally). In addition, when I asked my students something like “Any questions?” they seemed to be reluctant (or unable to) explicitly articulate any gaps in their understanding. Consequently, I would usually carry on with the lesson, thinking that everything was clear, only to find out later that this was not the case. Looking back, I can now tell that these events happened especially with topics that are taken for granted by people who are digitally literate, for example, phrasing a concise and relevant subject for an email. However, after exploring different EDI techniques in the classroom, I started asking specific questions to check for understanding. For example, while presenting the body of an email on the board, along with several subject choices, I would ask: “Which of the following subjects would be suitable for this email?” I would then wait for all the students to come up with an answer and then call on two or three specific students to present their answers. More than once, this practice revealed misunderstandings and informed my decision to go back and reteach the last chunk of information.

As illustrated in case study 16.4, another central strategy for asking CFU questions is addressing the entire class, and subsequently calling on non-volunteers to present their response. The teacher can either sample several responses (approximately two or three students) or, as Hollingsworth and Ybarra (2018) suggest, view all the responses at once by using mini-whiteboards. In both cases, the goal is unison responding, i.e., every student answers every question. This technique promotes on-task behavior and accountability since every student can be called on. In simple terms, addressing the entire class ensures every student thinks of an answer.

Case Study 16.5: Checking for Understanding with Whiteboards (Hebrew Literacy, Alon D. Pilosoph)

The first time I used mini-whiteboards to achieve unison responding was during a Hebrew literacy class I was teaching. Throughout the semester, I spent considerable time going into parts of speech and sentence structure in order to support my students' reading and writing in Hebrew. After teaching parts of speech and different ways to recognize them, I used to check for understanding by presenting a word in Hebrew and asking the students whether it was a noun, a verb, or an adjective. Consequently, the strongest students would shout out the answer before anyone else had the opportunity to think about it. Even when calling on a non-volunteer to answer, I could see that the other students were not necessarily thinking of an answer. However, after integrating EDI in my classroom and utilizing mini-whiteboards to check for understanding, I started asking all the students to write their answers on their boards, and raise all the boards at the same time on my cue. This way I could make sure everyone was thinking of an answer while monitoring the students' understanding. To keep the pace brisk and the lesson engaging, I would write the different options on the board with a number next to each one—for example, (1) noun, (2) verb, and (3) adjective—and instruct the students to write on their boards either 1, 2, or 3. Given that many of my students were struggling with print literacy to begin with, this scaffold also allowed me to accommodate them. It ensured that they were not overloaded by steps (such as writing entire words on their boards) that, while quite important in themselves, were not relevant to the question at hand (in this case, recognizing parts of speech). Finally, I would ask several students to present their answer in class, in addition to justifying their answer or modeling the way they reached their conclusion. This form of whole-class participation allowed me to monitor my students' understanding and consolidated the concepts and skills that they learned. In addition, a significant improvement during independent practice was evident as well.

EDI Implementation Challenges: The Importance of Curriculum and Teacher Content Knowledge

While there are various frameworks of explicit instruction on the market today that simplify the paths of teachers who wish to implement fully-guided instruction, we have identified several significant implementation barriers at our school. With a few exceptions, most of the explicit instruction frameworks are content-neutral. In other words, explicit instruction frameworks supply a method of instruction, but they do not supply the knowledge base or curriculum required to teach explicitly within a teacher's subject area. However, explicit approaches—with their mandate to

provide students with the content and skills they require to meet lesson objectives—tend to assume that teachers have the structural support and training to carry out this task. Throughout our efforts to implement and train teachers in explicit instruction, we identified two crucial variables that were missing in our context: (1) a curriculum which both breaks down and logically sequences content and skills; and (2) teachers who have the adequate content knowledge to deliver these curricular goals coherently to students.

Our inadequate curriculum was the first problem we encountered when implementing EDI. At our center, we used a curriculum based on our own needs analysis as well as commercially available coursebooks. However, we found this solution lacking: our curriculum was composed of larger, vague objectives that were not broken down into supporting objectives; there was little coherence between larger objectives; and there was little sense of unity or progression between units, semesters, and course levels. These inconsistencies were partly due to the fact that our coursebooks served as a poor template for explicit teaching. The coursebooks used in our program tended to be topic-based, and usually incorporated a loose conglomeration of larger objectives that were vaguely related to the topic, but were not broken down into supporting objectives. Units typically functioned like isolated islands and did not relate or build off of learning from the previous units.

We saw the difficulty of the challenge we faced when we tried to solve these problems. In order to support our teachers, our pedagogical team spent significant time reworking our course outlines, breaking larger objectives into supporting objectives with clearer content and skill goals. In addition, our pedagogical team also conducted planning meetings with individual teachers and delivered full-staff professional development workshops that could help teachers navigate our admittedly piecemeal curriculum. However, this solution, too, was lacking, especially among our language teachers. Even after we imposed better order on our unit outlines that illuminated the instructional path towards meeting course objectives, we realized that our English and Hebrew teachers themselves had a poor grasp on the content and skills to be taught, especially when it concerned reading instruction and grammar teaching. Many of our teachers were L1 speakers of the languages they taught; however, they had little explicit knowledge of the language itself.

While we would argue that high levels of teacher content knowledge and a well-planned, supportive curriculum are a boon to all educators regardless of their chosen instructional method, we observed that their absence is far more salient in explicit teaching than in indirect teaching. In the past, when our education center relied on indirect methods of instruction, although our projects and tasks did incorporate critical content and skill, the onus of lesson planning was on developing tasks that would expose students to this content. In contrast, since adopting explicit approaches, the onus has shifted toward developing high-quality explanations of concepts and breaking down complex skills into logical steps, which requires a different skill-set than in indirect teaching. Whereas in indirect approaches a lacking curriculum and low teacher content knowledge likely harmed learning outcomes, in explicit teaching these curricular deficits and teacher content knowledge gaps sometimes threatened to completely undermine the learning process. This is not to say that either

approach is inherently more demanding of teachers, only that the demands are distinct. Despite these challenges, we firmly believe that explicit approaches are best suited to the needs of adult SLIFE learners—especially novice adult SLIFE learners—and that our investment in our teachers and curriculum have been worth the effort.

Reflection Questions

1. Instructional approaches that rely on discovery and exposure alone are likely to overwhelm SLIFE. In explicit approaches, teachers reduce background noise to help students focus on critical content. Think about your own teaching experience (if you do not have teaching experience, try to think of an experience as a student where you felt overwhelmed). What details were embedded in the task that might have been unseen and unobserved by a more advanced learner, but that threatened to overwhelm your learners' working memory?
2. When first implementing explicit instruction, teachers often struggle to identify the information that they need to make explicit. Background knowledge that teachers assume 'traditional' learners to have, may be absent in SLIFE due to their limited time in formal educational contexts and diverse cultural backgrounds. What types of content and/or background knowledge might you take for granted, that would need to be explicitly taught to SLIFE if included in a lesson?
3. Sometimes, explicit instruction is confused with lecturing. In reality, in explicit teaching, teachers should stop every 2–4 min to engage students and/or assess understanding. Survey your last lesson, and identify places where you could have paused to engage learners and ask a whole-class assessment question to gauge understanding.

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Chapter 17

Toward Participatory Digital Visual Methods (PDVMs) to Support LESLLA Learners: Theoretical and Practical Considerations for Practitioner-Researchers



Andrea Enikő Lypka

Abstract Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) scholars have devoted scant consideration to innovative research and pedagogical frameworks grounded in refugees and migrants' linguistic and cultural capital, semiotic repertoires, real-life situations, emotions, and academic needs. Practitioner-researchers in English-speaking countries welcoming populations with emergent print literacy need to implement methods that support these individuals' target language proficiency and print literacy skills to become successful members of their communities. In this chapter, I describe four community-engaged visual research techniques—Photo-elicitation, PhotoVoice, VideoVoice, and Community Filmmaking—that practitioner-researchers can adapt to investigate assets and issues of concern through multiple means of expression, modalities, and digital technologies. I offer pedagogical implications of these techniques and demonstrate the potential of culturally-sensitive multimodal forms of inquiry and practice in the language classroom. The participatory approaches shared in this chapter contribute to the disruption of researcher-participant power relations, binary notions of target language literacy development and also promote experiential, equitable, and authentic language learning.

Keywords Community-engaged Visual Methods · ELLs · Filmmaking · Photo-elicitation · PhotoVoice · Refugees · VideoVoice

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Introduction

Albeit less established in the disciplines of Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) and applied linguistics, participatory arts-based and visual methods can help disrupt the privileging of researcher voices and academic practices while honoring community members' perspectives, preferred modes of thinking, and nonlinguistic means for expression (Kalaja & Pitkänen-Huhta, 2018). Anchored in anthropology, sociology, public health, and critical pedagogy, the ethnographic qualitative methods of Photo-elicitation (PEI), PhotoVoice, VideoVoice, and Community Filmmaking fuse community wisdom and multimodal literacies to inquire into subjective truths and emotions, lived experience, and power hierarchies. These approaches also broaden opportunities for multisensory meaning-making, crossing linguistic, text-centric, and memory boundaries (Catalani & Minkler, 2010; Catalani et al., 2012). It is vital that researcher-practitioners in TESOL and applied linguistics expand their research repertoire to participatory methods to capture the voices of their students using digital and visual practices.

In English as a Second Language (ESL) classrooms, Gallo (2002), Geres (2016), Lypka (2018), and Pentón Herrera (2021) complemented traditional data with digital photographs, videos, drawings, and paintings with Literacy Education and Second Language Learner Adults (LESLLA) and English Language Learners (ELLs) to gain insights into stories that may otherwise not emerge in talk-data (i.e., focus groups, interviews) and surveys. These scholars advocate for a value-oriented paradigm shift in language teaching and learning and underscore the need for transdisciplinary, multimodal, and socially-just frameworks to increase the appreciation of participant-centered meaning-making. A profound awareness of individual educational paths can prompt inquiry into constructive interventions to democratize practice, research, and advocacy *about* and *with* the target language (henceforth, L2) speaking community members.

Pentón Herrera (2021) notes, "It is not the SLIFE [students with limited or interrupted formal education] textual literacy skills that present the biggest challenge for their academic literacy; it is our school's failure to take into consideration the social aspect/experience of learning that alienates those who do not conform to the norms of traditional learning" (pp. 30–31). Acknowledging the challenges ELLs and LESLLA face in traditional learning environments, as described by Pentón Herrera (2021), I propose the use of participatory digital visual methods (PDVMs) to expand the traditional understandings of L2 print-based practices and literacy with multiliteracies (New London Group, 1996). More specifically, in this chapter, I encourage practitioner-researchers to infuse PDVMs to create meaningful, real-life opportunities where participants¹ document topics relevant to them, engage in critical conversations, and reflect on these experiences, drawing on their linguistic and cultural repertoires and technology affordances.

¹In educational research grounded in PDVMs, students are often referred to as participants. In this manuscript, I will use the terms *students* and *participants* interchangeably.

As we will notice in the chapter, through PDVMs, participants have the opportunity to formulate their roles as co-researchers, co-authors, and experts and simultaneously develop English language and print literacy skills. In addition, the incorporation of PDVMs in classrooms welcomes the participants' abilities (i.e., practical knowledge, multilingualism) and viewpoints to authentically explore, reflect on, and express their identities as L2 learners with emergent literacy (Geres, 2016; Lypka, 2019a). Understanding these critical learning experiences helps respond to perceived conventions that undergird L2 teaching and research. In the following sections, I review PDVM scholarship and present possibilities of infusing Photo-elicitation (PEI), PhotoVoice, VideoVoice, and Community Filmmaking to bridge the home, community, and school gaps in community-based ESL classrooms. I conclude with practical applications for implementing these methods to support L2 development in the classroom and beyond.

Background of Participatory Digital Visual Methods

Participatory enable community members to construct knowledge (as opposed to researcher or teacher-produced knowledge) (Gubrium & Harper, 2013). When using participatory methods, practitioner-researchers infuse participant-authored digital photographs, maps, videos, or other artifacts with storytelling in interviews, focus groups, surveys, or other methods to uncover complex, subjective truths, inner feelings, and beliefs in ways that are difficult to articulate via verbal or written means. By involving participants in composing and interpreting multimodal texts, these approaches "afford the subject, community member, and/or field site greater narrative latitude when it comes to knowledge production and a larger role in determining why and how research outcomes are produced and received by lay and academic audiences alike" (Gubrium & Harper, 2013, p. 16). The resulting participant-authored representations challenge academic meaning-making by co-constructing knowledge across the semiotic system (e.g., the print, visual, verbal, and digital) while stimulating community-relevant inquiry, education, advocacy, and strategic communication. Complementing the researcher-driven interviews and questionnaires with participants' images or pre-existing artifacts "can show things and prompt talk that other interview types may not, and can therefore be used as evidence to develop and support, or to supplement, other forms of research data" (Rose, 2016, p. 329). Harper (2002) argues that unusual angle, composition, and metaphorical subtext in images can also "evoke deeper elements of human consciousness that do words" (p. 13).

Practitioner-researchers can adopt photo-elicitation interviews, or PEIs, by inserting self- or participant-generated artifacts or found images to evoke personal accounts related to a research question (Harper, 2002). They can also implement that are more community-engaged in nature that include PhotoVoice, or its derivatives VideoVoice and Community Filmmaking. For example, they can engage community members in image-based conversations to stimulate change on social and individual levels.

In publications, these four PDVMs are defined as:

- **Photo-elicitation:** A data collection procedure by which the researcher-practitioner inserts artifacts into an interview to elicit participants' insights to a research question.
- **PhotoVoice (also known as Photo novella):** A research, teaching, and advocacy "process by which people can identify, represent, and enhance their community through a specific photographic technique" (Wang & Burris, 1997, p. 36), reflect on this experience, and engage in a public dialogue to promote social change.
- **VideoVoice:** A research, teaching, and advocacy practice that "allows participants to capture interviews, neighborhood sounds, and movement as they happen" (Catalani et al., 2012, p. 26) to raise awareness on community-relevant issues. Like PhotoVoice, VideoVoice places emphasis on both the process and the product.
- **Community Filmmaking:** A technique that incorporates collaborative media-making to capture video, audio, and graphics in a storytelling format. Community Filmmaking emphasizes the product as an advocacy tool.

Visual-elicitation strategies are a major component in the methods of PhotoVoice, VideoVoice, and Community Filmmaking (Gubrium & Harper, 2013). In contrast to the short-term process of PEIs, PhotoVoice, VideoVoice, and Community Filmmaking aim to challenge power inequalities by fostering long-term reciprocal partnerships with organizations and promoting self-awareness and social transformation. Within these three frameworks of PhotoVoice, VideoVoice, and Community Filmmaking, the participants become co-researchers, authors, and advocates who pursue action-driven public dialogue about relevant community issues. Although these PDVMs might exclude some stakeholders' voices, grassroots artistic productions generally engage individuals absent from social dialogue while boosting digital literacy, critical thinking, and communication skills (Gubrium & Harper, 2013). For LESLLA learners, PDVMs are powerful because they help transcend literacy, linguistic, and cultural barriers. If LESLLA students perceive themselves as invisible in their social spaces and do not understand the value of L2, print literacy, and instruction, they continue to struggle to negotiate their membership in L2 discourse communities (Lypka, 2018).

As synergetic, hands-on approaches, PDVMs differ in terms of research, education, and advocacy orientation. For example, conversations guided by participant-authored photographs, or PEIs, may lack the social transformation component and constrain research involvement to one or two interviews guided by visuals (Rose, 2016). On the other hand, PhotoVoice, VideoVoice, and Community Filmmaking are long-term action-driven pursuits for social and individual change (see Table 17.1). The latter three methods involve collaboration with an organization or community partner, ethics and camera operation training, image-based dialogues or PEIs, reflection, and consciousness-raising about community needs and assets.

Table 17.1 Comparison among PEI, PhotoVoice, VideoVoice, and Community Filmmaking as PDVMs

	Photo-elicitation	PhotoVoice	VideoVoice	Community Filmmaking
Goals	To complement interviews or focus group with visuals and guided questions to elicit participants' perspectives about questions posed by the researcher	To collaborate with community partners and participants to develop an agenda of education, research, and advocacy (document, dialogue about, advocate for, and reflect on personal and community-relevant issues)	To collaborate with community partners and participants to develop an agenda of education, research, and advocacy (document, dialogue about, advocate for, and reflect on personal and community-relevant issues)	To collaborate with community partners and participants to develop an agenda of education, research, and advocacy (document, dialogue about, advocate for, and reflect on personal and community-relevant issues)
Researcher's roles	Researcher, teacher	To reach policymakers and create change through community action To focus on community action/results/change Facilitator, trainer, researcher, advocate, teacher	To reach policymakers and create change through community action To focus on community action/results/change Facilitator, trainer, researcher, advocate, teacher	To reach policymakers and create change through community action To focus on community action/results/change Facilitator, trainer, researcher, advocate, teacher
Participants' roles	Participants	Co-researchers, experts, authors	Co-researchers, experts, authors	Co-researchers, experts, authors

(continued)

Table 17.1 (continued)

	Photo-elicitation	PhotoVoice	VideoVoice	Community Filmmaking
Implementation	To research context	To research context/classroom	To research context/classroom	To research context/classroom
	Participants are invited to visually document their perspectives to a research question.	Participants receive cameras to take photographs to visually document issues in their communities.	Participants receive cameras to record video and sound to record issues in their communities.	Participants receive cameras to record issues in their communities.
Project creation	Participants engage in interviews or focus groups guided by visuals and the researcher's questions.	Participants share and discuss visuals in visual-elicitation conversations (PEIs).	Participants share and discuss their video footage in PEIs.	Participants share and discuss visuals in PEIs.
		Participants create a product (e.g., photographs, booklet, website, etc.).	Participants create a product (e.g., video project, documentary film)	Participants create a product (e.g., multimedia project)
		Participants prepare exhibits.	Participants prepare exhibits.	Participants prepare exhibits.
		Participants reflect and continue developing messages to increase public awareness	Participants reflect and continue developing messages to increase public awareness.	Participants reflect and continue developing messages to increase public awareness.
	The researcher or the participants provide the visuals.	The co-researchers author digital photographs.	The co-researchers author digital photographs, video, and/or audio.	The co-researchers author digital photographs, video, and/or audio.
Equipment	Participants receive cameras or use the technology available to them (i.e., their mobile devices).	Participants receive cameras or use the technology available to them (i.e., their mobile devices).	Participants receive video cameras.	Participants collaborate with artists and students.
			Participants collaborate with artists and students.	
Image use	For a deeper understanding of participants' perspectives and lived experience	For community empowerment	For community empowerment	For community empowerment
	Research interview	Exhibit, online video, and media reports	Exhibit, online video, media reports, and DVD	Exhibit, online video, and media reports

PDVMs' Relevance in Supporting LESLLA Learners

A major appeal of imagery as an instructional, research, and advocacy strategy is to develop a sense of community and stimulate meaning-making with culturally, ethnically, and racially diverse individuals who are difficult to reach in research and educational contexts given language, print literacy, and cultural barriers. PDVMs are well-suited to integrate naturalistic learning, preferred modes of thinking, sensory forms of expression, and participants' voices. These methods extend novel perspectives to understand L2 trajectories beyond disciplinary and power dynamics.

In educational contexts, Lypka and De Felice (2020), Shaw (2013), Veintie and Holm (2010), and Zenkov et al. (2013) drew on semiotic modalities to balance power relations in research and increase the appreciation of multisensory meaning-making with L2 speakers. As PDVMs rely less on print-based literacies and L2 fluency, they expand the appreciation of meaning-making beyond linguistic, text-centric, and memory boundaries and engage participants in the research on a deeper level (Harper, 2002; Rose, 2016). In language classrooms, practitioners-scholars implemented these methods with adults (Lypka, 2018, 2019b), adolescents (Haines, 2015; Pentón Herrera, 2021), and youths (Zenkov & Harmon, 2009; Zenkov et al., 2012, 2013) with interrupted formal education to scrutinize their complex L2 development. PDVMs engage individuals in learning without feeling intimidated by print-dominated activities until they feel more comfortable with reading and writing. In this section, I share an overview of the current literature sharing the relevance of PDVMs to support indigenous participants and LESLLA learners.

Photo-Elicitation

Veintie and Holm (2010) integrated PEIs with Indigenous pre-service teachers from oral cultures who spoke English as an L2 in the Ecuadorian Amazon. The participants embodied learning in everyday cooperative activities that included woodcutting, canoeing, and pottery—such practices are incongruent with Western formal education. Veintie and Holm (2010) illustrate the possibilities of supplementing linguistic, logical paradigms with naturalistic and visual meaning-making models. In California, Clark-Ibáñez (2004) blended PEIs with observations and journaling to map the interconnection between inner-city youth's home environment and schooling. Through visual prompts, the participants narrated how undocumented immigration status and gang activities shaped their learning. Yet, enacting PEIs was challenging with these participants because of occasional inappropriate photographs capturing family members' involvement in the project. In the UK, Cremin et al. (2011) deployed PEIs and scrapbooks to elicit ELLs' views about formal schooling. Though the findings were not shared with school officials given the fear of negative publicity, through the use of imagery and sensory resources, participants verbalized concerns related to surveillance, racism, and educational

disempowerment. Clark-Ibáñez (2004), Veintie and Holm (2010), Cremin et al. (2011) reveal PEIs can highlight the multidimensional meaning-making augmented by multisemiotic resources and constrained by asymmetries on power based on language, ethnicity, and race, among others.

PhotoVoice, VideoVoice, and Community Filmmaking

Like PEIs, PhotoVoice, VideoVoice, and Community Filmmaking apply image-guided verbal explanations to elicit participants' views. In contrast to PEIs driven by the researcher's agenda, PhotoVoice, VideoVoice, and Community Filmmaking are action-driven collaborations with artists, researchers, filmmakers, and other community partners. The stages of PhotoVoice, VideoVoice, and Community Filmmaking include ethics and camera operation training, image-based conversations or PEIs, reflection, and advocacy. PhotoVoice, VideoVoice, and Community Filmmaking engage the participants in the following six tasks: (1) provide an overview of the method, storytelling elements, copyright, authorship, and ethics; (2) develop an agenda of community-centered research, education, and advocacy; (3) collect data; (4) engage in image-based conversations or PEIs; (5) reflect on experiences; and (6) engage in public dialogue through multimedia displays. Given their emancipatory and participatory nature, PDVMs contrast with traditional research models driven by academic conventions and researchers' agenda.

PhotoVoice

In China, Wang and Burris (1997) provided cameras to rural women with limited print literacy to document experiences related to the lack of access to water, child-care, and transportation. Through PhotoVoice, the participants collected relevant data to generate policies for these women's well-being. In a low-literacy educational context in Uganda, Green and Kloos (2009) fused PhotoVoice with culturally responsive teaching and creative writing to document the sociocultural practices of displaced youth and increase awareness about forced migration and education inequality. The participants disseminated their work in public exhibits to increase financial support for education. In a Canadian high school, Geres (2016) paired PhotoVoice, storytelling, and journaling with LESLLA learners to study their resilience and support systems. The participants reported supportive teachers, relaxed learning spaces, and family guidance promoted their emotional well-being.

As an alternative to educator-researcher-fronted tasks that tend to devalue orality, visuality, and real-world experiences, PhotoVoice offers a promising direction in enacting a transformative community-based agenda in diverse settings. This method can transform the curriculum, research, policies, and individual lives. In combination with responsive teaching, PhotoVoice can address individual needs, skills, interests, pre-print literacy, and diverse learning styles and also permits LESLLA

students to reconfigure themselves as authors and community members (Geres, 2016; Lypka, 2019a).

VideoVoice and Community Filmmaking

Catalani et al. (2012) and Kennerly and Davis (2014) implemented VideoVoice and Community Filmmaking to confront observable and invisible aspects of cultures. In post-Katrina New Orleans, United States, residents captured a documentary film to bring attention to their struggle to access affordable housing, education, and child-care (Catalani et al., 2012). Kennerly and Davis (2014) paired filmmaking and service-learning to foster intercultural communication and digital literacy skill development among university students and Latinx migrant workers in Georgia, United States. Authoring multimedia ensembles allowed co-researchers to contest the media portrayal of underrepresented groups and generate activism and financial support. Catalani et al. (2012) and Kennerly and Davis (2014) affirm the potential of PDVMs to magnify community strengths and puzzles and catalyze critical thinking and equity beyond mainstream research and instruction dynamics.

As an alternative to educator-researcher-fronted tasks that tend to devalue cultures and alternative forms of literacy, PDVMs allow participants to explore multiple perspectives, metaphorically illustrate dynamic, intimate, and sometimes sensitive interpretations of the social world, and reflect on their own realities. The participants exhibited their photographs in galleries and generated funds for laptops and school fees (Green & Kloos, 2009) or disseminated their projects on YouTube to strengthen public outreach (Catalani et al., 2012). The film in Catalani et al. (2012), shown in public screenings and distributed on DVDs and social media, mobilized the public to rebuild neighborhoods, yet it failed to sustain ongoing advocacy initiatives. For example, the displacedcommunitites.org website (Green & Kloos, 2009) and VideoVoiceCollective (<https://www.youtube.com/user/VideoVoiceCollective>) YouTube channel (Catalani et al., 2012) are obsolete.

In the section below, I conceptually examine how a participatory digital image-based framework is essential for language education. I first outline the methodological approaches and then review the didactic and educational pertinency of current research findings.

Pedagogical Implications of PDVMs for LESLLA Learners

Given the multimodal turn in TESOL and applied linguistics (Kalaja & Pitkänen-Huhta, 2018), practice-oriented visual paradigms gained prominence to encourage asset-based bottom-up L2 instruction. Verbal and written data sources paired with visual stimuli present a novel way of exploring the intricate linkage between the L2 development, emotions, and identities (Greene, 2015; Lypka, 2019b, c; Pentón Herrera, 2021). Compared to language-based methods, fewer publications

employ PEI (Gallo, 2002; Shaw, 2013), PhotoVoice (Gallo, 2002; Greene, 2015), Filmmaking, and VideoVoice (Lypka, 2018) in the language classrooms. Furthermore, there is insufficient focus on multimodal authoring pedagogies for LESLLA learners (Gallo, 2002; Lypka, 2019a). This emerging body of community-engaged scholarship emphasizes the power of participatory multisensory capital to legitimize the wealth of resources that learners bring into the classroom to highlight the polyvocal, fragmented, and ever-changing dimensions of L2 development.

In language education, practitioner-researchers have been attracted to visual elicitation, in the form of digital photographs, drawings, and other artifacts as research tools to inform in-depth discussions about L2 learning, bridge the language gap, and triangulate data. Shaw (2013) implemented PEIs, focus groups, and interviews to explore 25 Saudi Arabian students' L2 academic socialization at a U.S. university. Participants photographed themes related to learning and engaged in conversations guided by visuals and questions such as "why was the photo chosen, what did it mean, what did it show" (p. 789). Students linked their success to the weather, natural environment, and feeling included in the university—this information was not revealed in their verbal interviews. Shaw (2013) contends, compared to interviews, PEIs enhanced research engagement and generated nuanced, emotional-laden, and reflexive narratives.

A deeper awareness of individual educational and L2 trajectories can prompt researcher-practitioners to inquire into constructive interventions to democratize the teaching, working, and research processes. Pentón Herrera's (2021) PEI study revealed how an Indigenous Latinx youth with interrupted formal education wrestled with being positioned by his teachers and peers as an incompetent English and Spanish speaker and a struggling learner. Discussions guided by this participant's drawing revealed his preference for practical knowledge, learning through observation in the real world, listening, and hands-on practice—such principles are somewhat underappreciated in traditional classrooms (Pentón Herrera, 2021). In another study, Zenkov et al. (2013) infused image-based writing assignments and photo walks to elicit 117 youths' perspectives on school literacy practices. Sharing their photographs and reacting to questions like "Why did you take this picture and What do you like about this image" (p. 6) led students to identify themes in their narratives. The PEIs and writing activities provided authentic means for youth to advocate their needs for a stronger vocational curriculum, teachers' high expectations, encouragement, community engagement, supportive relationships, and mentoring.

Gallo (2002) connected auto-documentary photography and learners' writings to enhance L2 progress and critical awareness of power relations in a workplace literacy program. Participants received disposable cameras to photograph themes relevant to them, discuss these visuals using guiding questions such as "Who is this?" "What is he doing?" (p. 53), generate vocabulary lists, and create picture dictionaries and booklets. Through PEIs, participants investigated workplace concerns and communicated their concerns in photo booklets, on the class website, and on the company bulletin board to decision-makers. To improve workplace conditions, they recommended installing a microwave and towel dispenser, providing access to cold water, and sanitizing bathrooms. Gallo's (2002) participants deemed improving

their English skills of low value because most occupations available to them required little to no L2 skills, and higher-level occupations attracted citizens primarily. For them, learning English was vital to interact with community members, to speak for themselves, and to help their children with schoolwork. By tapping into participants' multilingual, semiotic, and cultural knowledge, PDVMs can bring about curriculum, research, and policy changes and transform individual lives.

Visual elicitation was a major component in PhotoVoice and VideoVoice projects for educational justice. Recognizing the potential of PhotoVoice to disrupt power relations by inviting voices habitually marginalized in inquiry and practice, scaffolding print-literacy and communication skills, and capturing diverse perspectives, this approach has been adapted as a curriculum requirement. Greene (2015) combined PhotoVoice and affinity mapping to survey adolescents' literacy practices in a U.S. middle school. Instead of taking photographs in their environment, students critically discussed immigration, race, and instruction, using newspaper articles and visuals. Lypka (2019a) infused PhotoVoice with the Mutually Adaptive Learning Paradigm[®] (MALP[®]) (see DeCapua & Marshall, 2011), a responsive instructional practice, to align instruction with learners' oral traditions, practical knowledge, and lived experiences. The MALP[®]-infused PhotoVoice enabled participants to develop linguistic, literacy, and content knowledge grounded in community ties, stories, familiar information, and mundane language. The author notes, "however, increased speaking confidence in the classroom did not necessarily enhance the ability to use English for sociopragmatic reasons... perhaps because students' multilingual capital was not always acknowledged in those spaces" (p. 81).

Lypka (2018) blended VideoVoice and service-learning to connect the needs of the community partner to course objectives in a community-based ESL program. Conversations and learning tasks driven by participants' photographs and drawings enabled ELLs to practice their speaking skills and pre-service teachers to diversify their classroom practices. The outcomes materialized in a film used for grant applications and community screenings to increase the organization's visibility and spark discussions about neighborhood safety and immigration. Gallo (2002), Lypka (2018), and Pentón Herrera (2021) indicate PDVMs can enable individuals to navigate unfamiliar instructional space, share multiple viewpoints, and imagine their future selves in contexts beyond their classrooms or workplaces. By legitimizing participatory multimodal authoring pedagogy, research, and advocacy, LESLLA learners and ELLs are more likely to enact authentic, reflective, and critical discussions about their L2 literacy trajectories.

Considerations for Practical Implications

Before engaging in PDVM tasks, practitioner-researchers should identify the community needs and explain the PDVMs as well as ethical ramifications of these methods to the stakeholders. I implemented participant-centered learning through experiential practices, consciousness-raising dialogue, social interaction, and

critical reflection, which extended opportunities for L2 participation in a low-resource and low-connectivity classroom. As explained earlier, these asset-based approaches allow participants to link L2 proficiency with print literacy gaps and embody practices instead of merely learning in a classroom. In other words, these techniques empower participants to acquire new positions and meaningful skills in the L2.

Practitioner-researchers can follow these steps of how to use these approaches with LESLLA learners.

1. Orientation: The participants learn about PDVM procedures.
2. Brainstorming: The participants identify themes puzzling to their community.
3. Visual Documentation: The participants gather thematically-relevant artifacts.
4. Visual-elicitation: Using their visuals and guiding questions, participants highlight similarities, differences, challenges, and stories behind their visuals in weekly conversations.
5. Elective Public Displays: The participants select artifacts for dissemination.
6. Elective Debriefing and Interviews: The participants join optional interviews and reflect on their experiences and moving forward.

Some considerations practitioner-researchers should keep in mind when planning to implement PDVMs include customizing PDVMs to the participants' needs, mobility, accessibility, and available and free technology resources, engaging the community in all the steps of the initiative, and fostering sustainable, long-term advocacy. For instance, practitioners should encourage participants to use their L1s and engage their family members and friends in these community-relevant projects. The final project can include a short documentary movie, a mural, or public service announcements on social media or television. The projects can be distributed on YouTube, Vimeo, Flickr, Vidlii, and other photo- and video-sharing platforms, film festivals, class websites, or blogs (e.g., wix.com, blogspot.com) to engage a wide range of audience.

Integrating PDVMs with LESLLA Learners: Example Projects

Project 1: PhotoVoice Through Service-Learning and Community Mural

To connect my LESLLA learners, pre-service teachers, and the community, I implemented service-learning and PhotoVoice (Lypka, 2018). The community partner organization intended to use the final project to generate public discussions about educational inequities for adult learners and apply for grants. To help the LESLLA learners understand the project, the pre-service teachers designed a lesson plan that focused on using storytelling through images—a strategy that they relied on to

create the community mural. The lesson plan consisted of a PowerPoint on storytelling and a worksheet, as shown in Fig. 17.1.

After the lesson, students shared their drawings and discussed their goals and motivations, as shown in Fig. 17.2. Using these visual-elicitation discussions, pre-service teachers had a better idea of what the mural should consist of. The pre-service teachers then guided students to come up with the main message of the mural and decided that the mural captures the students’ journey learning English, including their goals for the future, and how learning English would help them to achieve that goal. The community partner’s mission statement “In pursuit of a promising future” became the slogan of this community mural.

Next, a pre-service teacher sketched a design that later served as the layout for the center of the mural, shown in Fig. 17.3. The sketch included a winding road leading off into the distance, representative of the students’ journeys through their education and life. At the end of the road, you see a hospital, a school, and students in graduation gowns and professional attire. The pre-service teachers got the idea to use these specific professions based on the storytelling lesson plan worksheets that the students completed prior (shown above in Fig. 17.2). One student mentioned wanting to be a teacher, another a doctor or nurse, and another student said they wanted to open their own gym. The pre-service teachers took the students’ work and their goals and incorporated them into the mural sketch. This represents the end of the road, where students achieve their goals through their pursuing their vocation, education, and learning English.

A few of the students wanted to trace their sketches directly onto the canvas. For these students, the pre-service teachers used a projector to display a blown-up



Fig. 17.1 PowerPoint presentation on storytelling

In the box below draw an image that represents: 1) Your goal and 2) your motivation to achieve that goal. Be creative and have fun!

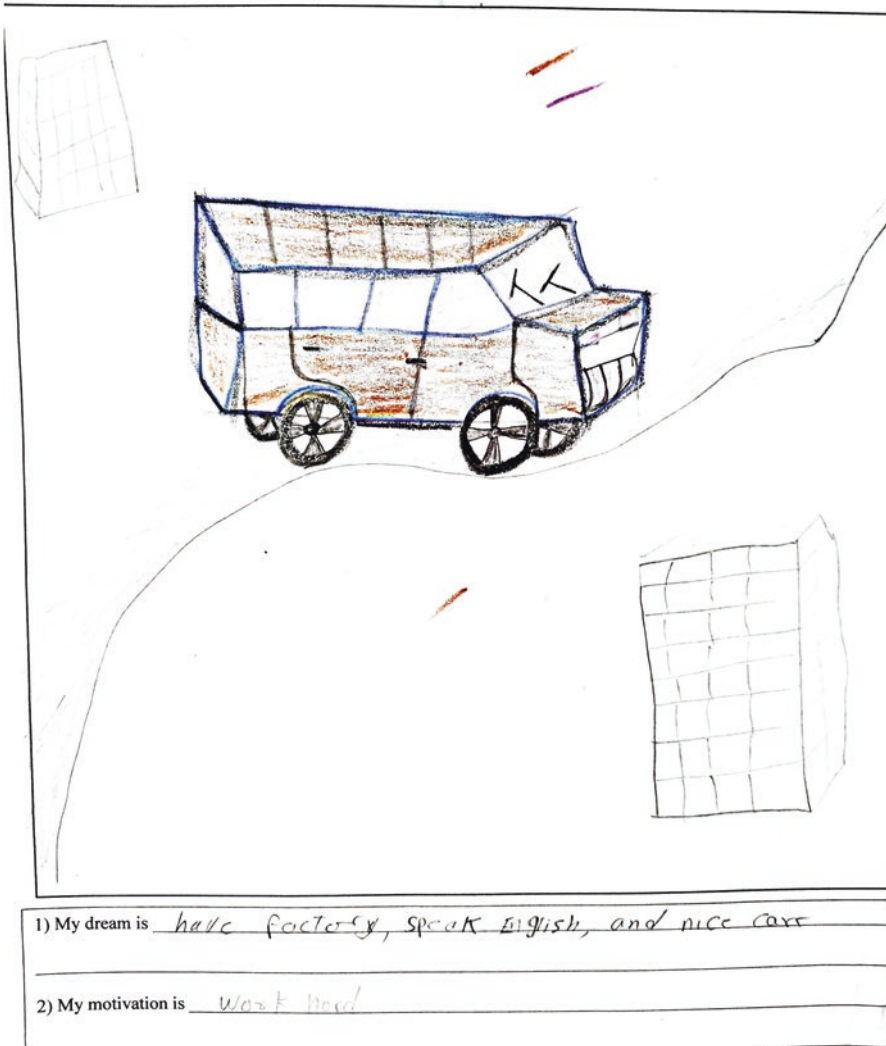


Fig. 17.2 Students' goals and motivations

version of their image, and they would trace it directly onto the canvas. The teachers hung the canvas on the wall so they could project the images, as shown in Fig. 17.4.

One of the more detailed aspects of the mural was the Chiapas crest, which the leading pre-service teacher sketched and painted as her contribution to the mural. Everything else in the mural, besides the initial sketch, was painted by the students with assistance from the pre-service teachers, as shown in Fig. 17.5. The quadrant

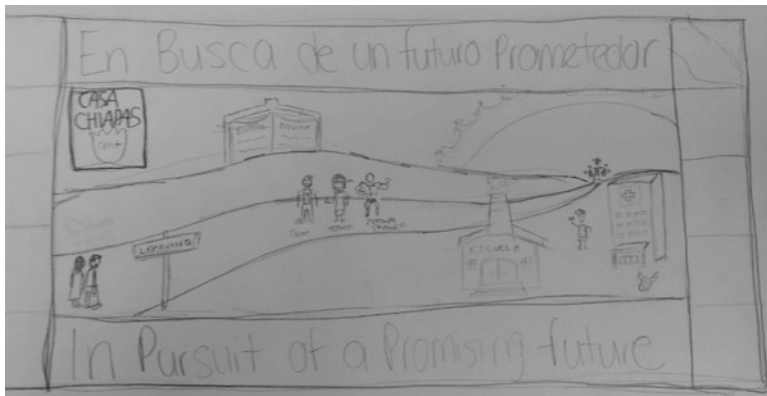


Fig. 17.3 Layout for the center of the Mural



Fig. 17.4 Canvas on the wall projecting images

on the low left side of the mural represents the work of the students' children. The mural, shown in Fig. 17.6, was unveiled at the end of the class at a public event.

At the end of this project, one of the pre-service teachers shared a reflection that reveals the value of arts-based projects for students and teachers alike:

In the ESOL [English for Speakers of Other Languages] course, we learned about ways in which to communicate with ELLs through images and the arts. I believe this was a pivotal aspect of the mural project because it allowed Spanish-speaking students—who often go unheard due to the language barrier of the community—to be heard and for their stories to be told. I believe this can carry on into their classwork because these students have a new understanding of how images can express their thoughts and emotions on a subject. As a teacher, I can take what I have learned about storytelling through images into the classroom to help my ELL students show their understandings of a topic, or express their opinions on



Fig. 17.5 Students painting the Mural



Fig. 17.6 Mural unveiled

a topic, or just simply tell their stories to obtain a cultural perspective in the classroom that would make my class more culturally responsive.

The mural project didn't really solve any dire problems in the community, but it did provide an outlet to students who are working extremely hard to make better lives for themselves. I would like to think that the mural project was a release for students once a week to get lost in their painting and de-stress from the week, while also working together to build a bond within the community. I believe this project brought a few of the students closer together, as it brought pre-service teachers closer together with the students. As a result of this project, I have established a bond with this organization, the students, and their families and plan to continue our volunteer work there in the future.

Through this project, I have also achieved the personal goal of getting back into painting and art again. After high school, life became too crazy for me to paint or ever sketch, but

this project has brought that passion back into my life. Academically I have achieved the goal of being able to apply what I have been learning in my ESOL classes to real-life situations. The lesson plan I created for the ELL students, though small, was a great learning tool for me to build further lessons on. Career-wise, I achieved the goal of doing more volunteer work that pertains to teaching or education. I now have connections with a place where I can volunteer my time, but also get the experience I need in a classroom or education setting that will help me when I one day apply for my first teaching job.

In the ESL classroom, I have met some of the most intelligent and tenacious students, and I am glad I had the advantage and work with them. Through my time in the Service-Learning Mural Project, I have learned how to be a leader and how to communicate more effectively with people in general, despite differences in language.

Conclusion

PEIs, PhotoVoice, VideoVoice, and Community Filmmaking hold much value as innovative instruction, inquiry, and advocacy techniques to promote authentic L2 development and support a social justice orientation to TESOL. As an alternative to practitioner-researcher-fronted tasks that tend to devalue individual cultures and literacy practices, PDVMs flexibly cater to individual vocational needs, skills, interests, and pre-literacy and learning styles. At the same time, they create opportunities for learners to articulate experiences at their own pace and reconfigure themselves as authors and community members (Gallo, 2002; Pentón Herrera, 2021; Zenkov et al., 2013). The information shared in this chapter highlights new insights toward a humanized and equitable curriculum, research, and advocacy framework.

The PDVM frameworks shared can be flexibly infused with service-learning, narrative writing, tele-collaborations, digital storytelling, and other methods to advance meaningful, contextual, inclusive, and responsive pedagogy, advocacy, and inquiry with diverse groups (Lypka, 2019b; Lypka & De Felice, 2020). By recognizing preferred oral and visual communication modes, practical skills, and cultural learning practices, such as observation, modeling, and storytelling, PDVMs can enhance awareness and knowledge about language learning. At the same time, PDVMs build community by affirming voice and agency and honoring community assets beyond linguistic, cultural, and literacy boundaries. More importantly, PDVMs tap into participants' multimodal literacies, orality, and lived experiences to generate nuanced ways to enact subjective L2 practices. Such affordances have been particularly useful with LESLLA learners and pre-service teachers (Lypka, 2018; Pentón Herrera, 2021).

Employing PDVMs can be an effective path to uncover the disconnect between the conventional and alternative worldviews that LESLLA participants experience, as many of them may not be able to articulate what they are thinking and feeling but can convey their lived experiences through their visuals. Furthermore, by making audible the voices of groups traditionally marginalized in research (e.g., learners with emergent print literacy and L2 fluency), PDVMs can create the possibility of

equitable instructional spaces. These approaches could be successfully implemented in TESOL to inform public debate but have been underutilized thus far.

Reflection Questions

1. How do students make meaning from the incorporation of multimedia resources in the classroom?
2. What repertoires (e.g., existing knowledge, linguistic resources, and genre knowledge) do students tap into to make sense of their language learning experiences?
3. How can multimedia projects be implemented in multilevel language classes and low-technology contexts?

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Chapter 18

Why and How Grammar Matters for Post-puberty Immigrants with Limited Formal Schooling



Egle Mocciaro and Martha Young-Scholten

Abstract Grammar provides a basis for oral proficiency and reading comprehension. Research indicates that second language learners—regardless of educational background and age—follow similar developmental routes. In this chapter, we explore the wealth of research from over more than half a century on the acquisition of grammar by post-puberty immigrants with and without formal schooling. To accomplish this, we cover seminal studies of older learners with varying levels of formal education and recent studies of immigrants with little or no formal education acquiring English or Italian. The cross-linguistic comparison between English and Italian shows the developmental progression in their acquisition of morphosyntax through comparable stages, even when one language is more highly inflected than the other. In both English and Italian, learners’ subconscious application of mental mechanisms to the input they receive prompts their creative construction of a new language, even after puberty. In understanding the processes responsible, practitioners can see how learners’ errors are a natural and encouraging sign of learners’ progression towards higher levels of second language (L2) competence.

Keywords Grammar · Morphosyntax · Development · Stages · Literacy · English · Italian

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Introduction

Imagine you are teaching a class of students learning a new language (henceforth second language/L2). Some of the learners are facing unique challenges not shared by other learners because their home language formal schooling was interrupted or never occurred.¹ These learners we focus on are those with interrupted or no formal schooling who are unable to read in their home or any other language. They have fewer of the metalinguistic skills that enable their formally-educated counterparts to focus on language forms. They are past the age of puberty and the so-called *critical period* for language learning, that is, the period during which the learner optimally responds to the linguistic input and succeeds in acquiring the grammar and sound system of a given language (Lenneberg, 1967). These two challenges—age and lack of literacy—predict the lower levels of L2 grammar and reading success in comparison to younger, formally-educated learners as observed by Bigelow et al. (2009), Condelli et al. (2003), Kurvers and van de Craats (2008), and Young-Scholten and Strom (2006).

In this chapter, we show why prediction for poor progress in morphosyntax for SLIFE learners is unwarranted. Neither the research on older immigrants nor the research on those with mostly extra-classroom exposure nor the research on learners without home language literacy supports this prediction. What we know comes from looking at more than one language, and, in this chapter, we present findings not only from the acquisition of English but also from other languages, most prominently Italian. Learners' errors are not random and can provide a window to their interlanguage. On the other hand, morphosyntax errors reveal common acquisition patterns for older immigrants leading to an understanding of learners' internal acquisition processes and, in turn, to great expectations (Lightbown, 1985).

Babies vs. Literate Post-puberty L2 Learners

Babies are equipped to acquire language but they lack the metalinguistic skills, which develop with schooling, to do otherwise (Gombert, 1992). In comparison to formally-educated post-puberty learners, we might conclude that babies are at a disadvantage. Yet, we can easily observe they are not; they subconsciously soak up the language around them, and after several years their grammar and sound system are largely indistinguishable from that of the members of their speech community. Research over the last half-century has indicated that post-puberty learners can both

¹At the international level, those past the age of compulsory schooling who may or may not be students, are known as LESLLA learners, based on the organization by that name—Literacy Education and Second Language Learning for Adults (see www.leslla.org). For the purposes of this chapter, we consider any learner aged 13 and over to fit the demographics of those we focus on. In this chapter, we use the SLIFE acronym to refer to these LESLLA learners and at times we also use 'adult'.

learn new languages consciously but also, like babies, acquire new languages subconsciously. This stems from notions in generative linguistics, where a distinction between *implicit linguistic competence* and *explicit knowledge* about language has long been assumed (Chomsky, 1957; Fodor, 1983).

The distinction between *implicit linguistic competence* and *explicit knowledge* was first taken up in L2 acquisition by Krashen (1985) and elaborated by Schwartz (1993). The word *acquisition* refers to the spontaneous and subconscious process of soaking up language, where mere exposure to a language results in the sort of implicit, internalized mental knowledge native speakers automatically draw on to produce and comprehend speech. Two terms are used for the conscious involvement of metalinguistic skills. Krashen uses *learning* to refer to the process of accumulating this knowledge, and Schwartz uses *learned linguistic knowledge* for conscious knowledge of rules and forms. The explicit knowledge is illustrated by the formally-educated L2 learner who knows the English rule for pluralizing nouns, can explain it to others, and, given sufficient time, can consciously apply it. Students with limited or interrupted formal education (SLIFE) are in a position similar to babies: while they are cognitively more sophisticated in many ways, their lack of (much) formal education or print literacy means they struggle with explicit learning. The aim of this chapter is to show what researchers have discovered about SLIFE' ability to *acquire* language.

There does not seem to be a critical period for learning how to read (cf. Morais et al., 1979), and that is reassuring for practitioners as well as learners. However, moving beyond recognizing, decoding words to reading sentences requires the learner to deploy their grammar for 'word-to-text integration' for automatic comprehension (Fraser, 2007; Grabe, 2004, 2009; Koda, 2005; Kuhn & Stahl, 2003; Perfetti, 1999; Pressley & Gaskins, 2006; Rasinski, 2003; Segalowitz, 2010; Stanovich, 2000). In addition, text comprehension goes beyond the sentence and, among other things, relies on the reader's world knowledge and experience. But the starting point for reading comprehension is grammar, what we will now refer to as morphosyntax (i.e., the morphology or study of the form of words such as 'do' and suffixes such as the '-s' 'does' whose role is functional and the order of morphemes and words in a sentence. In the question *Does he speak English?* 'do' holds the place of a verb, -s marks agreement with the subject 'he' and the auxiliary verb precedes the subject and object). It is this linguistic competence—defined as our subconscious knowledge of the rules, constraints, and forms of a language—that enables automatic comprehension and use of language (Chomsky, 1957).

Stop and Think

Let's say your student, Adron, who is an English learner, has a headache and buys over-the-counter painkillers. How many should he take? He reads the label: "Do not take more than 8 tablets in 24 hours."

Adron knows the word ‘take’ and he knows the word ‘tablet’. He can count in English and has real-world experience to know ‘8’ goes with ‘tablet’ and ‘more’ refers to the ‘24 hours’ in a day. How he comprehends the sentence in terms of its morphology and word order is filtered through his interlanguage.² This means Adron might ignore ‘do’, ‘than’, and plural *-s*. These morphemes have little semantic content and are acquired together with word order, with syntax, as we will show in section *Can-do levels* below. Adron’s interlanguage means he reads the sentence as ‘No take 8 tablet 24 hour.’ We know from decades of research that acquisition of these aspects of morphosyntax by post-puberty L2 learners is not tied to teacher’s explanations or to grammar books and that acquisition through mere exposure to a language is possible. It is useful to have this information because explaining the function auxiliary ‘do’ to formally-educated learners is difficult; for those with minimal formal schooling, it is likely to be an even more challenging task.

In section *Seminal Studies of Post-puberty Learners’ L2 Morphosyntax*, we first present findings from the acquisition of English as well as from other languages, and then, in section *Stages of Morphosyntax Acquisition*, we turn to an in-depth comparison of English and Italian SLIFE learners. This comparison will illustrate the systematicity of learners’ errors during development, regardless of the language they are acquiring, thereby providing a window to their interlanguage. Also, as we noted above, the comparison between English and Italian SLIFE will lead to an understanding of learners’ internal acquisition processes to better grasp the potential of these learners.

Can-Do Levels

Before continuing, it is important to clarify the relationship of findings from the L2 acquisition of linguistic competence to can-do levels, such as the widely used Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR, <https://www.coe.int/en/web/common-european-framework-reference-languages/level-descriptions>; see Council of Europe 2001). The CEFR’s six levels, from the A1 (basic proficiency) to C2 (most advanced proficiency), state what learners can increasingly do with/in their L2. A Pre-A1 level for even more basic proficiency has been introduced in the recent “Companion volume” to CEFR (Council of Europe, 2018). The CEFR’s levels, including the Pre-A1 level, presuppose literacy skills. Further descriptors specifically aimed at the needs of adult learners who are acquiring literacy and second language at the same time will be introduced in 2021 (Minuz et al., 2016; Minuz & Kurvers, forthcoming). The CEFR recognizes the

²The term ‘interlanguage’ was introduced in Selinker (1972) to refer to the mental system an L2 learner uses at a given point during their development. This system is influenced by their native language, by the target language they are learning, and by much the same universals we observe to be in operation during child language acquisition.

morphosyntax, which underlies these levels with a *Language Profiles* inventory.³ The inventory comes from observations of learners' spontaneous production during classroom tasks, as the outcome of instruction and of *learning* (Spinelli, 2010). The example above from the hypothetical L2 English learner, Adron, indicates he is at the second-lowest CEFR level, A2, as he can understand and/or use "sentences and frequently used expressions related to areas of most immediate relevance" and "need" (see CEFR level descriptors). Adron will not *acquire* the morphosyntax involved until later, but in the classroom he has been *learning* expressions important to functioning in daily life.

Seminal Studies of Post-puberty Learners' L2 Morphosyntax

Decades of studies have now shown that learners like Adron will acquire the morphosyntax that underpins these levels. Seminal studies of post-puberty L2 learners show they use much of the same universal linguistic mechanisms as children learning their first language (L1). Consider for a moment what we take for granted: no one teaches babies what an auxiliary verb is. Child language researchers have long explored how babies attend to the language in their environment to discover how it works. Babies are born predisposed to acquire language, with certain universal properties of language hard-wired, according to the long-held generativist view of human language (Chomsky, 1957). That hard wiring enables babies to subconsciously know when they are only a few years old, and even before they can read and write, what an auxiliary verb is.

L2 acquisition is obviously not the same as L1 acquisition because the learner knows an L1. The influence of an L1 on L2 acquisition can easily be observed, particularly with respect to pronunciation. But L1 influence on L2 acquisition was first formalized in Lado's (1957) Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis (CAH), whereupon teachers shared observations that were sometimes contra the predictions of the CAH: L1-L2 differences do not always lead to difficulties, and L1-L2 similarities do not always facilitate acquisition. By the early 1970s, the failure of the CAH to straightforwardly predict learners' difficulties along with discoveries by child language researchers had planted the seeds for systematic studies of L2 acquisition, which have germinated to address a wide range of topics (see Herschensohn & Young-Scholten, 2018).

When child language acquisition researchers began to search for evidence for children's innate pre-wiring for language, L2 researchers were not far behind. The latter replicated two studies: Brown (1973), a multi-year longitudinal study of three young children, and de Villiers and de Villiers (1973), a one-off cross-sectional study of 21 children of varying ages. The researchers looked at *suppliance in*

³For more information, see <https://www.englishprofile.org/english-grammar-profile> and https://www.unistrap.it/profilo_lingua_italiana/site/index.html

obligatory context for a set of morphemes to see what children produced. Suppliance in obligatory contexts works as follows: A researcher and a two-year-old child are reading together. The child points to a picture of a girl fishing from a boat, and she produces ‘Girl fish boat’ for ‘The/a girl is fishing/fishes from the/a boat’, in which either auxiliary + *ing* or *-es* is obligatory. Her utterance creates a context for certain morphemes that are obligatory and must be supplied if the sentence is to be grammatical. This technique is a straightforward way of detecting errors when it is clear what is not supplied or incorrectly supplied; e.g., the child produces an utterance where the verb form is incorrect: ‘Girl *eated* cake.’

Brown’s (1973) and de Villiers and de Villiers’ (1973) studies showed that children from different backgrounds and families produced morphemes absent at the start, which were then acquired in the common order in Table 18.1. This “phenomenon of substantial generality” was evidence of children’s pre-wiring for language (Brown, 1973, p. 277). Also, the findings were evidence of children’s pre-wiring for Universal Grammar (UG; Chomsky, 1981), or the ability to acquire language through a set of universal and pre-wired principles. Researchers have now amassed considerably more evidence for this claim; see e.g., Goodluck (2020) on the last half-century studying children’s first language acquisition. Table 18.1 shows the results of the L2 studies that followed on the coattails of the studies of children: Dulay and Burt’s (1973, 1974) cross-sectional studies of 151 Spanish-speaking 5- to 8-year-olds, 60 Spanish-speaking and 55 Chinese-speaking 6- to 8-year-olds and Bailey et al.’s (1974) study of 73 adults from 12 different L1 backgrounds. Statistics revealed a common order for child and adult L2 learners but not always for L1 and L2 learners. Consider just the verbal morphemes (progressive, irregular past, copula, third-person singular, auxiliary) and you will see a common pattern, *-ing* is always first, and the third person singular *-s* much later.

The common patterns in Table 18.1 indicate the operation of pre-wired linguistic mechanisms, not just for children but across the entire lifespan. Researchers have since expanded their methodological tools with thriving lines of experimental research. They are finding that older learners demonstrate sensitivity to aspects of the L2 not taught and not apparent from the input (e.g., Schwartz & Sprouse, 1996). Neurobiological research is indicating that the learner’s proficiency and exposure

Table 18.1 L1 and L2 English morpheme orders

Brown; de Villiers & de Villiers	Dulay & Burt	Bailey et al.
L1 children	L2 children	L2 adults
1. plural <i>-s</i>	1. plural <i>-s</i>	1. progressive <i>-ing</i>
2. progressive <i>-ing</i>	2. progressive <i>-ing</i>	2. contractible copula
3. irregular past	3. contractible copula	3. plural <i>-s</i>
4. articles	4. contractible auxiliary	4. articles
5. contractible copula	5. articles	5. contractible auxiliary
6. possessive <i>-s</i>	6. irregular past	6. irregular past
7. third-person singular <i>-s</i>	7. third singular <i>-s</i>	7. third singular <i>-s</i>
8. contractible auxiliary	8. possessive <i>-s</i>	8. possessive <i>-s</i>

type (i.e., classroom vs. extra-classroom exposure) are as important as their age when it comes to how they process functional morphology such as auxiliary *is*, plural *-s*, and past tense *-ed* (Faretta-Stutenberg & Morgan-Short, 2018; Pliatsikas et al., 2014).

Researchers such as Dulay and Burt, and Bailey et al. considered as their data the oral production of L2 learners. Work which relied on such data, especially when it was relatively spontaneous (i.e., engaging the learner in conversation), began blossoming in Europe around the 1980s. The *Zweitspracherwerb italienischer, portugiesischer und spanischer Arbeiter* (second language acquisition of Italian, Portuguese and Spanish workers, or ZISA) is a well-known project using a cross-sectional and longitudinal design which looks at how migrant workers acquire German without formal instruction. An examination of the functional morphemes and word order produced by ZISA learners and by an additional group of Turkish migrant workers revealed commonalities across the L1 groups. Researchers concluded that these patterns do not display the operation of universal linguistic mechanisms, which would be evidence of these adults' access to Universal Grammar. Rather they argued that the patterns which were common among all learners showed operation of general cognitive mechanisms, which have always been assumed to remain active after puberty. These are the cognitive mechanisms that are also involved in consciously learning a language, although these learners were uninstructed and did not attend formal language classrooms (Clahsen & Muysken, 1986, 1989). Why should it matter which mechanisms are involved? For practitioners, the mechanisms involved influence the choice of approach in the classroom. If post-puberty learners are only able to make use of general cognitive mechanisms, they will be unable to benefit from exposure outside the classroom or from approaches and methods that emphasize listening for meaning but do not explicitly focus on rules and forms.

Contestations of Clahsen & Muysken's conclusion came from researchers who reanalyzed this L2 German data in such a way that they were able to show that UG drives acquisition (du Plessis et al., 1987; Schwartz & Tomaselli, 1990; Vainikka & Young-Scholten, 1994, 1996). By the new millennium, sufficient evidence from further studies had accumulated for Hawkins (2001) to state that there are common stages in the acquisition of morphosyntax which are largely independent of the learner's L1; their age upon L2 exposure; their educational background; and the type of exposure to the L2 (i.e., uninstructed vs. classroom).

Stages of Morphosyntax Acquisition

The common patterns researchers have found in L2 acquisition represent developmental stages. When we talk about stages of development, it is helpful to consider how the mastery of many skills proceeds in a step-wise fashion. A simple example is babies' bipedal locomotion. First, they crawl, then they stand assisted, then they toddle, and finally, they walk smoothly. Babies do skip stages or embellish them, but

these stages follow the same order. Babies do not toddle and then crawl. Let's now look in more depth at additional patterns researchers have discovered representing the stages in the development of L2 morphosyntax. These patterns point to the operation of linguistic mechanisms regardless of the language to which learners were exposed. The *European Science Foundation project* (ESF) was another longitudinal study of L2 German along with Dutch, English, French, and Swedish (Perdue, 1993). Results corroborated the ZISA study's findings that common patterns exist across learners from various L1 backgrounds. Klein and Perdue (1992, 1997) captured these patterns in the 'functionalist' approach, shown in Table 18.2. As a point of clarification, in this example, 'variety' is similar to 'interlanguage,' the learner's system at a given point in time. In this chapter, our focus is on the second—or *Basic*—variety.

Some researchers questioned the assumption in the Basic Variety that learners do not use their L1 word order when they begin learning an L2 (e.g., Comrie, 1997; Schwartz, 1997; Vainikka & Young-Scholten, 1994) and offer the scenarios shown in Table 18.3, where V=verb and O =object:

An example of Table 18.3, under scenario c, is that of Farsi and Turkish speakers producing utterances with their L1 word order, with OV, such as 'Book read' when they begin learning English as L2. Additional documented work about scenario c, including longitudinal studies, can be found in Haznedar (1997) and Mobaraki et al. (2008).

Table 18.2 Bulleted list of language varieties

<i>Pre-basic variety:</i>
unstable syntax and word order governed by information principles such as topic and focus organization
no inflection
<i>Basic variety:</i>
semantic-syntactic word order emerges (Agent-Verb-Patient) and starts to resemble the L2
no inflection: nouns and verbs in invariant, basic forms (stem; infinitive), without case, number, gender, tense, aspect, agreement marking (learners use words such as quantifiers, e.g., 'three' for plurality instead of -s) or adverbs ('yesterday' for past instead of -ed)
aspectual distinctions are made
instead of subordination, clauses are juxtaposed
<i>Post-basic varieties:</i>
verbs start to be inflected and agree with the subject
after the first distinction—aspectual, then next is temporal
word order is governed by syntactic principles and closely resembles that of the target language

Table 18.3 L1 word order in L2 acquisition

a. Both L1 and L2 are VO: L1 Spanish → L2 English = no word order change
b. Both L1 and L2 are OV: L1 Turkish → L2 German = no word order change
c. L1 is OV and L2 VO: L1 Farsi/Turkish → L2 English = word order change
d. L1 is VO and L2 OV: L1 English → L2 German = word order change

Organic Grammar

L2 learners—regardless of whether they are taught that English is VO or subconsciously realize this—move from an early, basic stage of development based on their L1 word order to further stages of development. These stages are captured by Organic Grammar (OG; Vainikka & Young-Scholten, 2011). OG is a generative-linguistics-based approach that couples functional morphology and word order. Studies of post-puberty immigrants show they start with their L1 word order and that their earliest utterances lack inflection, along the lines of the Basic Variety shown above. But unlike the Basic Variety, Organic Grammar assumes syntactic structure from the start. This is the root of what linguists use to represent syntax—a tree. The learner’s ‘minimal tree’ at the start is a verb phrase (VP) projection in either VO or OV order, depending on their L1, as shown above. The highest projection in a syntactic tree is the complementizer phrase (CP), which accounts for complex structure, and for the structure required for questions and subordination.

Table 18.4 shows the Organic Grammar stages for English (Vainikka et al., 2017 on Arabic and Urdu L1 speakers learning British English; Young-Scholten & Strom, 2006 on Somali and Vietnamese L1 speakers learning American English; and Young-Scholten & Ijuin, 2006 on various L1 speakers learning American English). The stages shown in Table 18.4 are ‘implicational’ in that the production of word order and morphology higher in the table implies that the learner has already acquired what is lower in the table. In other words, if the learner consistently uses third-person singular *-s* to mark agreement and they produce some subordinate clauses, they are at the Agreement Phrase stage. They will also consistently use past tense and produce sentences with coordination, characteristics of the Tense Phrase stage. Each stage represents a successively higher bough of a syntactic tree. Also, see Table 18.6 further below on these projections.

For our comparison language, Italian, we apply the Basic Variety, as shown in Table 18.5 (Andorno et al., 2003; Banfi & Bernini, 2003).

Table 18.5 describes three macro stages along the continuum of L2 Italian varieties. At the start, word order reflects topic-comment organization not yet subject-predicate organization. As shown in the example below, an answer to ‘where did you go?’ where ‘I’ is the topic, already known because of the question (‘you’), while *Mondello* is the ‘comment’ about the topic:

io: *Mondello* (Italian beach)

[*Sono andato a Mondello*]

‘I [went to] Mondello.’

Next, verbal predicates appear but are still uninflected, basic forms. Unlike in interlanguages where there is morpheme omission (e.g., English: *he speak-Ø*), in L2 Italian, forms generally do not omit suffixes and are an overgeneralized form of the present or an infinitive (Banfi & Bernini, 2003). The example below shows how the 3rd person form *va* ‘goes’ is used instead of the 1st person:

Table 18.4 L2 English

Stage	Word order	Verb types	Agreement/ tense	Pronouns	Syntax
Verb phrase	L1 order, then L2 order	Thematic (main) verbs	None	No subject, object pronouns absent	None
Negation phrase	Resembles the L1 apart from complex syntax	Thematic verbs; copula 'is'	None	Pronoun forms begin to emerge	Negation; single clauses; formulaic or intonation-based questions
Aspect phrase	Resembles the L1 apart from complex syntax	-ing	None	Pronoun forms begin to emerge	Negation; single clauses; formulaic or intonation-based questions
Tense phrase	Resembles the L2 apart from complex syntax	Thematic verbs, modals; copula forms beyond 'is'	No agreement; some tense, some aspect, but not productive	More pronoun forms, but they can still be missing	Conjoined clauses; formulaic wh-Qs; yes/no Qs without inversion
Agreement phrase	Resembles the L2 apart from complex syntax	Thematic verbs, modals, copula forms beyond 'is'; auxiliaries in all forms and tenses	Productive tense, aspect; some agreement, especially forms of 'be'	Pronouns obligatory, 'there' and existential 'it'	Simple subordination; wh-Qs but all Qs may lack inversion
Complementizer phrase	Always resembles the L2	Complex tense, aspect forms; range of thematic verb, modal, auxiliary forms	Forms usually correct, apart from newly attempted ones	Use of 'there' and 'it' beyond stock phrases	Complex subordination; all Qs with inversion

notte io va a lavoro

[*Di notte vado a lavorare/al lavoro*]

'At night I go (literally: *goes*) to work.'

The post-basic stage is by definition a continuum of varieties. This means that it becomes more and more complex as the learners proceed in the acquisition of the L2 morphosyntax. In Table 18.5, this uninterrupted and open-ended nature of the continuum is indicated by the label "progressive increase" followed by empty spaces. Leaving aside the details of the development of Italian, what is interesting is that Tables 18.4 and 18.5 show a similar path of L2 acquisition by post-puberty learners: thematic verbs followed by functional verbs (copula, auxiliaries), then aspect and then tense.

Table 18.5 L2 Italian

	Word order	Verb types	Agreement/tense	Pronouns	Syntax
Pre-basic variety	Pragmatic (topic-comment organization)	No distinction; unanalyzed existential <i>c'è</i> 'there is'	None	1st, 2nd, 3rd personal pronouns	Negation; by juxtaposition; coordination
Basic variety	Argument structure, semantic organization: agent-verb-patient syntax: SVO	Thematic (main) verbs	None ("basic forms", e.g., verbal theme, unanalyzed present forms or infinitives)	<i>Progressive increase</i>	Juxtaposition; coordination
Post-basic varieties	Syntax resembles L2	Copula (some forms)	Past participle (-to, e.g., <i>andato</i> 'gone')		Prepositions governing Ns
		Perfective auxiliaries (<i>essere</i> 'be', <i>avere</i> 'have')	Differences in the present tense		Subordination: causal temporal final adverbials
			Imperfective past (some forms of 'be')		Completives relatives
		Progressive construction (<i>stare</i> 'stay' + gerund')	Imperfective past morpheme for thematic verbs (-v-)		<i>Progressive increase</i>
			Gerund		
			Future		
			Conditional and subjunctive moods		

Errors Are Not Random

At this point, it should be clear that learners' non-target-like oral production is systematic and that errors reveal their stage of development. The researcher's task is straightforward when these are errors of omission. Other types of errors seem at first to defy explanation; they might, after all, be random mistakes. We now turn to errors that do, at first, seem to be random. Child language researchers have long observed overgeneralizations and intriguing overgeneralization errors have been observed by L2 acquisition researchers too. Analysis indicates that these overgeneralization errors overlay but do not alter the stages/varieties shown above in Tables 18.4 and 18.5. Overgeneralization errors can involve a single morpheme, documented since Berko (1958) for L1 children and in Wagner-Gough (1975) in child L2 acquisition.

The overgeneralization errors can also involve several words. These multi-word overgeneralizations are similar to the native speakers' multi-word expressions, including idioms ('between a rock and a hard place'), clichés ('the good old times'), compounds ('warning light'), collocations ('share a story'), social expressions ('see you later'), and fixed expressions ('I don't understand'), see Wray (2002). Myles (2004) argues that learning of such unanalyzed multi-word chunks drives morpho-syntax acquisition, but Bardovi-Harlig and Stringer (2017) argue against this account. The chunks we consider next are involved in acquisition as placeholders for the heads of syntactic projections.

Under Organic Grammar, all learners—babies and younger and older L2 learners—draw on a set of potential syntactic heads which Universal Grammar provides, as shown in the Table 18.4 above. The language learner subconsciously searches the input to identify heads, also known in linguistics as the nucleus of a phrase. Once the learner identifies a head, UG provides the tools to subconsciously build a syntactic projection (a bough on the syntactic tree) for that head. Recent studies indicate that overgeneralized forms are 'place holders' that learners temporarily use as they work on identifying the relevant heads in the input. Post-puberty learners struggle more than younger learners to identify heads of projections due to challenges acquiring the phonology of the L2, which in turn poses problems for separating suffixes such as *-ed* from the verb stem (Vainikka & Young-Scholten, 1998; Zobl & Liceras, 1994). The challenge of identifying heads might well be compounded for learners who are not literate because they experience less visual reinforcement of language forms. Whether this is the case requires more research.

Researchers have asked whether older immigrants with and without home language schooling/literacy follow the same route and go through the same developmental stages. Bigelow et al. (2009) looked at eight 15-to-27-year-old Somali speakers' oral production of English questions in response to tasks and found that those without home language schooling/literacy were less able to correctly reproduce the researcher's recasts. Julien et al. (2015) looked at the morphosyntax of 40 Arabic-, Tarifiyt Berber- and Turkish non-home-language-literate and home-language-literate post-puberty immigrants taking Dutch language classes. In Dutch, lexical verbs follow the subject/similar material in declarative sentences and suffixes mark agreement. At the start of instruction, learners often produced subjectless sentences with forms of *zijn* 'be' and *gaan* 'go' where a lexical verb with an agreement suffix is required. Nine months later, the use of such forms decreased. Based on learners' production and comprehension of the forms used, Julien et al. (2015) conclude that learners used them as 'place markers' before producing lexical verbs with agreement and that this is not connected to L1 literacy but to proficiency.

Vainikka et al. (2017) studied 14 Arabic- and Urdu-, Dari-, Punjabi- and Pahari-speaking adult immigrants with varying home language schooling/literacy who were taking English classes. They orally responded to tasks with pictures designed to elicit sentences for production of the projections in Table 18.6.

Table 18.6 Early functional projections and placeholders

Phrase and head	Examples	Head identification	Placeholders predicted
Aspect Phrase AspP Asp	Progressive aspect (-ing suffix) <i>Is the action on-going?</i>	Easy: -ing straightforward to identify as head as it's a syllable and varies little (this phrase excludes forms of auxiliary 'be')	No
Negation Phrase NegP Neg	The morpheme <i>not</i> <i>Did the action take place or not?</i>	More difficult: requires forms of 'do'	Yes
Tense Phrase TP T	Past tense (-ed suffix) <i>When did the action take place?</i>	A challenge: existence of regular and irregular past tense morphology	Yes
Agreement Phrase AgrP Agr	Subject-verb agreement; the suffix -s in 'he walks' <i>Who did something?</i>	The greatest challenge: weak paradigm + confusion about what -s marks (plural, possessive, agreement)	Yes

The non-literates overgeneralized, including multi-word sequences, and did so more often than literates. There is individual variation in the overgeneralizations that learners produced. Some learners borrowed material from other functional projections, possibly indicating acquisition of these is further along and/or an effect of the focus of instruction.

For NegP, a Dari speaker used *is don't* rather than *not* in the negation task. For the TP projection, a Panjabi speaker produced no auxiliary verbs and few tense or copula 'be' forms but overgeneralized -s across the board, from main verbs in all persons in singular and plural and to other content words. The first example, shown below, is from a task that required this Panjabi speaker to describe a picture of a girl reading a book. The second context involved two girls who are stirring a single pot:

reads books ladies
girls this cookens...foods this *cookens*

Two of the Arabic speakers in the study overused *I'm* in the tasks in which single individuals or two or more were engaged in various activities.

two guys *I'm* reading message
three guys *I'm* washing ... washing in dishes

Another Arabic speaker overused items not from a different word class, e.g. *in the*. The context in the example below shows a woman reading a newspaper and, in the second sentence, a boy setting the table. The words in brackets were prompts:

[afterwards] this woman *in the* book *in the* writing.
[every day, this boy] *in the* cook in the spoon *in the* fish.

Italian learners produce overgeneralized forms of the copula/auxiliary to temporarily replace the target morphosyntax of lexical verbs for functions they are aware

of but cannot yet express in a target-like manner. This overgeneralization results in non-target constructions where (inflected) functional forms co-occur with (uninflected or unanalyzed) lexical verbs (e.g., *avevo credo* ‘I had I think > I thought’, target form: *credevo*; cf., Bernini, 1990, 2003, 2005; Banfi & Bernini, 2003, pp. 106–108). Starren (2001) terms *proto-auxiliaries* the inflected functional forms occurring in such constructions. The formative “proto” indicates that these forms prelude but not yet correspond to the target language auxiliaries. Proto-auxiliaries can be found in several L2s, not only in L2 Italian, suggesting that this sort of overgeneralization is a common rather than language-specific stage in second language acquisition (cf., Blom et al., 2013; Benazzo & Starren, 2007; Huebner et al., 1992; Jordens & Dimroth, 2006; von Stutterheim, 1986).

Is this stage related to literacy? The L2 Italian studies were of post-puberty immigrants, some of whom may have had little home language formal education, who were acquiring the second language in a predominantly naturalistic context. It is worth noting that the literate learners in Vainikka et al. (2017) also used overgeneralized multi-word chunks at certain stages in their acquisition, but use of these was more frequent for the non-literate learners simply because most of them were at lower OG stages. However, all learners were attending English classes. Mocciaro (2020) sought to answer this question in her 13-month longitudinal study of 20 immigrants aged 18–30 who recently arrived in Palermo, Italy, from Sub-Saharan Africa and Bangladesh. Ten were non-/low-literate. They were not formally instructed. Rather, they were acquiring Italian naturalistically while being hosted in a reception center for newcomers. Oral production data come from interviews and story retelling tasks. Results corroborated those discussed above while also revealing language-specific sub-patterns relating to literacy.

Beside proto-auxiliary constructions where Italian ‘be’ forms express grammatical categories (tense, aspect, etc.) and thematic verbs express the lexical meaning, we also find *fare* (to do, in English) constructions, in which an overgeneralized form simply expresses ‘verbness’ and the thematic verb expresses meaning, e.g., *io fare mangiare* ‘I do eat I eat’. Similar to English, the *fare* construction is ungrammatical in this use; Italian *fare* governs an action noun (e.g., *fare ricerca* ‘to do research’) and cannot be used with a verb. There is a strong link between learners’ degree of print literacy rate and stability of these constructions—and if the above studies had been longitudinal, this may turn out to be the case for English and Dutch learners, too. Non-/low-literate learners select non-target constructions, and while literate learners use them, too, this is more sporadic and transient. In non-/low-literate learners, non-target constructions are not only more frequent (both by construction types and by number of tokens), but they are more stable during interlanguage development. Like Vainikka et al. (2017), Mocciaro (2020) proposes that those without print literacy have very limited access to written texts, and even when they do have access, they are used to relying on aural stimuli—a point also made in Bigelow et al. (2009). Lack of print literacy leads them to exhibit a stronger preference for strategies that involve the selection of forms more easily identified in the input, such as auxiliaries, which are separate words rather than morphemes, such as suffixes. Learners more easily perceive and

then elaborate, re-use, and overgeneralize such forms. Their overgeneralizations are not random mistakes but highly systematic errors.

Conclusion

In the studies discussed in the section *Errors Are Not Random*, researchers found that placeholders were not used by all learners. Rather those who used them were beyond the VP and NegP stages and not yet at the CP stage. Learners do not, however, use lexical rather than functional elements in this way, and this points to the subconscious operation of mental linguistic mechanisms. The important conclusion from this study is that both the home-language-literate and non-literate learners followed the path of development for English predicted by Organic Grammar and the Basic Variety, and both groups recruited placeholders while working on the functional projections of TP and AgrP. Figuring out what fills a head is not an instantaneous process. What at first glance appears to be a coping strategy is actually evidence of subconscious knowledge from Universal Grammar. This knowledge equips post-puberty learners regardless of prior formal education and L1 print literacy with the tools to search for and identify functional elements in the input. The advice we give to practitioners is to trust learners to acquire the language to which they are exposed. With sufficient input, they will reach their potential

Reflection Questions

1. Krashen has long championed *comprehensible input*, the idea that the learner must understand what they hear for acquisition to take place. White (1987) takes this idea and extends it to note that when a learner's interlanguage stage doesn't match what they observe their interlocutor talking about, this can prompt acquisition. Have you observed this process to occur in your own learners?
 - (a) Consider how you might apply Krashen's idea of comprehensible input at $i+1$ (one level above the learner's current stage) to the stages of Organic Grammar.
2. What can practitioners do in the classroom to help learners with their acquisition both in terms of approach and method as well as with respect to materials?
3. How can practitioners support learners in getting more input outside the classroom to help their acquisition?
4. Does the use of linguistic mechanisms preclude building learners' metalinguistic skills for learning? Where might this be most useful for them?

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Chapter 19

“We Should Learn English to Solve Our Problems”: Strategies to Support Adult ESL Learners with Emergent Literacy



Tabitha Kidwell

Abstract Adult refugee English learners, particularly those with emergent literacy skills, represent a unique and under-researched population. This chapter describes a four-month program in the United States offering English classes to adult refugee women from Afghanistan and Congo with emergent literacy. Data sources include lesson plans and materials, instructors’ weekly reflections, and interviews with the students. Findings reveal compounding challenges faced by participants, including childcare responsibilities; trauma, isolation, and cultural adjustment; and low first-language literacy. Nevertheless, participants also drew on unique strengths such as resilience, strong motivation to support their families’ transition, and prior knowledge. The following promising strategies are discussed: designing a curriculum that connects to students’ lives; adhering to a familiar routine and repeating familiar language; adapting emergent literacy strategies for adult learners; and taking time to build personal relationships with students. Implications will be of interest to educators, administrators, and other stakeholders hoping to support the development of literacy education and second language learning for adults (LESLLA), particularly among refugee women.

Keywords Adult learners · ELs · Emergent literacy · LESLLA · Refugees · SLIFE

Introduction

More than 750 million adults struggle with basic reading and writing skills (UNESCO, 2017), and literacy rates are lower in settings where persecution, conflict, violence, and human rights violations contribute to interrupted schooling. These same settings are the source of 26 million refugees, a record high as of late

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2019 (UNHCR, 2020). Given these trends, it is likely that language educators working in countries that accept refugees will encounter increased numbers of adult language learners with emergent literacy skills and minimal prior formal schooling, also known as literacy education and second language learning for adults (LESLLA) learners.

Nevertheless, many language educators working with LESLLA learners have received minimal preparation to support the unique needs of this population (Vinogradov & Liden, 2009). Language teacher education programs typically focus on the needs of literate learners with previous formal education (Farrelly, 2013). If literacy instruction is included in teacher preparation programs, it is often discussed in relation to young learners (Marrapodi, 2013; Vinogradov, 2013). Because of these tendencies, teachers of LESLLA students develop their professional knowledge base through the act of teaching, and there is a need for publications from practitioners working with adults with developing literacy skills (Farrelly, 2013).

At the same time, limited research within the fields of applied linguistics and second language acquisition has examined the learning and experiences of adult refugees or immigrants with limited formal schooling and low literacy (Bigelow & Tarone, 2004). While plentiful research exists on school-age immigrants and formally-educated adults, little is known about the language acquisition of adult learners with emergent literacy (Tarone et al., 2009). This “long-term neglect” is unfortunate, given the potential social relevance and practical implications of research on LESLLA learners (Young-Scholten, 2013, p. 442).

This chapter seeks to address both of these gaps: the need for insights from practitioners working with adult LESLLA learners and research on the second language acquisition processes of this population. The chapter describes a four-month program in the United States offering English classes to adult refugee women from Afghanistan and Congo with emergent literacy. I seek to identify which instructional strategies were appropriate given the unique challenges and strengths within this group of learners. The chapter offers insights for educators, administrators, and other stakeholders hoping to support LESLLA students, and also contributes to the research base regarding the instruction of LESLLA learners. I will begin by surveying the available research on that topic.

Instructional Strategies for LESLLA Learners

In a review of the research on effective instructional strategies with LESLLA students, Bigelow and Vinogradov (2011) note that instruction must be age- and level-appropriate, and should be direct and logically organized, with a focus on phonemic awareness, phonics, and word recognition. Practice with hearing distinctions in similar phonemes supports learners’ ability to identify and reproduce new sounds (Marrapodi, 2013). Instruction should not focus exclusively on phonics or decoding text, however, so it is important to use content from students’ lives as a context for

the use of emergent reading skills (Condelli et al., 2008; Pentón Herrera, 2020). Given that few materials exist for LESLLA learners, instructors may need to adapt or create materials that match their students’ needs (Vinogradov, 2013). Materials that match students’ needs are likely to offer contextualized opportunities to build and practice literacy skills.

Some parallels exist between children learning to read and LESLLA learners. For both groups, oral and written language develop in tandem, so a concurrent focus on print literacy and oral processing can be helpful (August & Shanahan, 2006; Tarone et al., 2009). Children’s first language (L1) literacy skills transfer to the second language (L2; Bialystok, 2007), and the same phenomenon is likely among adults (Bigelow & Vinogradov, 2011). Nevertheless, adult learners’ needs and assets are distinct from those of children. Unlike children, many adults are aware of the functions and uses of print (Kurvers et al., 2007). Some adults may feel a sense of urgency to gain literacy skills so as to gain employment or address their family’s needs (Bigelow & Vinogradov, 2011). LESLLA learners are also better able to develop independent learning skills than children (Vinogradov, 2016). When appropriate, instructors should draw from techniques used with children, such as emergent literacy strategies (see Morrow, 2019), but should adapt those techniques to account for their adult learners’ assets and age.

Studies comparing the experiences of adults who are literate in their L1 and those who have emergent L1 literacy also hold insights regarding LESLLA students. As adults develop alphabetic literacy skills, changes occur in the brain. Literate adults have higher levels of verbal working memory, increased awareness of words as independent units, and a stronger ability to manipulate language phonetically (Bigelow & Watson, 2011; Tarone et al., 2009). For these reasons, LESLLA learners may struggle with the use of determiners, prepositions, and pronouns, which hold grammatical significance but little semantic value (Reis & Castro-Caldas, 1997). Visual literacy is also an undeveloped skill for emergent readers, so distinguishing between letters and drawings may present a challenge (Marrapodi, 2013). Given these trends, teachers working with LESLLA learners should avoid abstraction by planning activities that relate to students’ lives and that do not depend on prior experience with formal schooling norms (Bigelow & Vinogradov, 2011). For instance, instructors should limit the content taught in one setting, use photographs and familiar visuals, and help students make concrete connections with familiar items. Standardized testing also presents challenges for learners with limited formal education. A better assessment model is conducting one-on-one evaluations through conversation (Allemano, 2013). Instructors should adapt their instruction and assessment to address the distinct needs of LESLLA students.

Language teachers working with LESLLA learners should also have some awareness of the refugee and immigrant experience. Knowledge about students’ pasts, current circumstances, and unique cultural practices helps teachers develop more culturally responsive pedagogy (Gagné et al., 2017). Refugees often experience significant disruption to their lives, as well as traumatic events (Vinogradov, 2013). The language learning progress may proceed quite slowly, given that learners are developing language and literacy skills simultaneously while also recovering

from trauma (Finn, 2011; Young-Scholten et al., 2015). It is important to tailor instruction to LESLLA learners' affective needs and offer opportunities for them to experience success by using routines and familiar activities (Farrelly, 2017; Vinogradov, 2016). Awareness of LESLLA students' experiences and cultures can increase instructors' effectiveness with this population.

Exploration of Practices

In this section, I describe the course context, participants, and activities. My co-teacher, Deirdre, and I came to be involved with the course because Deirdre had been volunteering with a refugee resettlement agency. The agency asked her to deliver a course for a group of refugee women who were unable to attend classes at the local community college, and she invited me to co-teach the course. At the time, I was a doctoral student studying applied linguistics, and I had ten years of experience as a language educator. Deirdre was an elementary school English as a second language (ESL) teacher with a Master of Arts in teaching English to speakers of other languages (TESOL) and six years of experience. Students were recruited through posters in their apartment complex and recommendations from the social workers managing their case. Ten students registered for the class: four Congolese women and six Afghan women. Below, I briefly describe each course participant (all participant names are pseudonyms).

- *Monique*, in her 40s, had attended school as a girl in the Democratic Republic of Congo and had clear, precise handwriting. She was the oldest member of the class, and had five children, four of whom were attending school. She spoke Kinyarwanda and French.
- *Losaka*, Monique's oldest daughter, was in her early 20s and had received some schooling at a refugee camp. She had English speaking skills at the high beginner level, and spoke Kinyarwanda and some French.
- *Bulungu* was a Congolese woman in her 30s whose L1 was Kinyarwanda. She struggled to hold a pencil and copied letters line by line. Her 11-year old daughter often accompanied her to class.
- *Ndaya*, a Congolese woman in her 30s, had completed several years of primary school. She had a young son she would often bring to class. Her L1 was Kinyarwanda.
- *Aaqila*, an Afghan woman in her early 20s, had attended high school until 11th grade and spoke Dari as her L1. She had English speaking skills at the high beginner level and strong phonemic awareness.
- *Rahila* was an Afghan woman in her early 20s whose first language was Dari. She wanted to learn English to speak with people at her children's school, the hospital, and the market.
- *Tamana*, an Afghan woman in her early 20s, hoped to learn English to avoid problems in stores. She practiced with a neighbor who studied at the community college. Her L1 was Dari.

- *Duniya* was an Afghan woman in her late 20s who had no prior schooling and whose L1 was Pashto. She had two young children who sometimes came to class.
- *Farzana* was an Afghan woman in her early 20s who had no prior schooling and who spoke Pashto. She had strong numeracy skills and an 18-month-old daughter who could unlock an iPhone and turn on music in the middle of class.
- *Nazia*, an Afghan woman in her early 20s, had no prior schooling. She was quite reserved in class, but hoped to be able to speak to people at her children’s school and the hospital. Her L1 was Pashto.

Classes were held for two hours, two evenings a week, from February to May of 2015 for a total of 54 hours of instruction. Our classes took place in the living room of a two-bedroom apartment in the apartment complex where the women lived, which had been rented by the refugee resettlement agency for storage and meetings. Deirdre and I wrote a reflection after each session and saved copies of our teaching materials. We also conducted interviews with the six Afghan women. I returned to those data sources to compile the narrative describing the course below. In the following sections, I discuss the course in three phases. During the first month, we adhered to a fairly concrete routine as students began to expand their language and literacy skills. As the class continued, in month two, we adjusted the routine somewhat as we built on and practiced previously taught material. In the final months of the class, months three and four, the women increasingly used language and literacy skills in contexts relevant to them, and we learned more about them as our relationships deepened.

Month One: Settling into a Routine On a chilly winter evening, Deirdre and I arrived to a boisterous room full of interested students and many children. The women left their children in each other’s care while they came individually to another room to complete a multiple-choice placement test. We interpreted the results as showing that all the women had fairly low English literacy skills; some were able to identify letters, read a clock, and write their name, while others were clearly uncomfortable holding a pencil and unable to distinguish between the letter *O* and the multiple-choice form bubbles.

The atmosphere in the early weeks of the class was warm. The women appeared to be comfortable, if not totally at ease. The early weeks of class included four routine activities each session: conversation practice, letter/sound introduction, vocabulary, and verb practice. We included additional opportunities for writing practice, speaking practice, and review, but these four activity types were included in each session in the same order.

We began with conversation practice by doing full group call and response, partner practice, and role plays. In most sessions, we did a conga line speaking activity where students would stand in two lines facing each other. Students in one line would remain stationary and ask a question, while the students in the other line moved from person to person to answer their questions; this activity offered multiple opportunities to hear and use the vocabulary phrases. We introduced one or two question/response sets per session.

Next, we introduced five to six new lower-case letters, their names, and sounds. We practiced making the sound associated with each letter, and gave time to copy the letters. We introduced letters with similar sounds together to support students' ability to distinguish between them; for instance, we introduced B, P, V, and W in the same session. We taught both the names of letters and their sounds with the formulaic sentence "the name is bee, the sound is buh." We practiced letters by giving each woman cards with the letters we had introduced so far and saying "show me B," first with the teacher requesting a letter, then with the students doing so. We gave each woman handwriting practice activities as homework, which was particularly helpful to students with little prior exposure to literacy skills like Duniya, who arrived at class every evening with her own name written on the palm of her hand so she could copy it on her worksheets. Even the most advanced students seemed to appreciate the opportunity to practice and receive feedback on lopsided or misproportioned letters.

We then used photographs or realia (actual items) to introduce one new vocabulary word beginning with each new letter. We tried to use familiar items and images; for instance, we taught *market*, *post office*, and *bank* using photographs of locations in the neighborhood, and we handed out ice cream bars after teaching *ice cream*. As we introduced the words, we emphasized the sound/letter connection, for instance by saying, "Book starts with B. Buh, buh, book." We practiced the new words and those introduced previously by asking students to point to the item or picture. Then, we quizzed students on the vocabulary by showing the pictures and asking *What is this?* As students built familiarity with these questions, they began to ask each other to identify items.

Lastly, we introduced and built familiarity with verbs through total physical response (TPR) activities (for more information, see Asher, 1986). We would introduce a new verb by giving a command and performing an action ourselves, then giving the command for students to perform. We introduced four to six new verbs each session, and repeated those taught in previous sessions. As they became more familiar with this activity, students increasingly took responsibility for giving commands to their classmates.

Month Two: Building On Previous Learning As we spent more time together, the women became increasingly comfortable with each other and with us, their instructors. The room was filled with laughter many evenings; they laughed at me and Deirdre when we acted words out or gave silly TPR commands, like "put the pencil on your head." Certain words, like *zucchini* and *umbrella*, always seemed to elicit giggles. Many evenings, the room was also filled with the noise of children, often to a level that became disruptive. Though the women had been encouraged to leave their children at home, they often had no other childcare options. Attendance remained consistent for the Afghan women, but the Congolese women all found employment, and came to class less regularly.

We continued to include the core activities from the early classes: TPR and practice with conversation, letters, and vocabulary. In these activities, we reviewed previously taught vocabulary while teaching new words. Deirdre and I tried to always

introduce new content along with something familiar and found that we sowed confusion when we neglected to do so. For instance, we taught the question “Do you have...?” and the responses “Yes, I have...” or “No, I don’t have...” by giving each woman the picture of a previously taught vocabulary word and asking students about the items they had. We also began introducing more abstract vocabulary, such as days of the week and vocabulary for family members, by encouraging the students to make connections to their own lives. They seemed to enjoy speaking about their families despite the topic being sensitive for many—for instance, we had to introduce the phrases “he/she died” when asking about siblings.

We also began to make changes to the class format based on observations of student progress. We had noticed that more advanced students (like Aaqila and Rahila) appeared bored at times, while students needing more support (like Bulungu, Farzana, and Nazia) seemed overwhelmed. It became clear that Monique and Ndaya had learned Roman script in their previous schooling, and their difficulties on the diagnostic exam likely stemmed from unfamiliarity with the multiple-choice format. Differences in schooling for women who had not previously learned Roman script also became apparent: those with little or no exposure to literacy skills in their L1 copied letters line-by-line, while those who had L1 literacy skills appeared to have the working memory to recall the letter shape as an integrated whole. Prior print literacy also seemed to impact students’ abilities to manipulate syntax: students with still-emergent literacy skills had difficulty transforming questions into answers, for instance answering “What is your name?” with “What is my name is...” Though everyone had low English literacy skills, some had stronger L1 literacy skills to build on, and some also had more opportunities to build conversational speaking and listening skills. The needs of students with some formal schooling were distinct from the needs of students who were learning to hold a pencil and write letters on a line.

For these reasons, Deirdre and I infused differentiation into full group activities, for instance by showing a picture and asking most students to write the word on a whiteboard, while we showed the word to students with lower levels of print literacy so they could practice copying. We also began splitting into two groups for some class activities, with the lower level practicing letter recognition, decoding, and vocabulary identification, while the higher level practiced fluency and the use of vocabulary in context. Some women rejected our initial grouping; we accepted these self-placements and allowed the women to join the group they preferred.

As the class continued, we built on students’ emergent literacy skills. We introduced upper-case letters and practiced matching upper- and lower-case. We introduced the written version of each vocabulary word and practiced matching words with pictures. The women wrote and posted labels for items in the apartment (e.g., sink, door, oven). Each week, we created two to three posters listing all the words students knew that started with a single letter, as well as the names of the women and their children. We continued until 26 posters hung around the room (one poster for each letter in the alphabet), and students would add new words starting with each letter as they learned them. Aaqila would often identify the initial sound of new words and volunteer to add them to the posters. Once the posters had been created, they offered a word wall the women could consult for help with class activities.

In addition to literacy skills, we also began to address numeracy skills by introducing the numbers one to 99 and doing simple addition and subtraction problems. We brought in bags of coins, learned coin names (e.g., penny, quarter), and practiced giving exact change. We looked over a grocery advertisement and discussed the prices, then visited the local grocery store during class hours to show how to weigh produce and estimate the total price. We introduced the question “What is your address?”, which never ceased to frustrate even the women who could answer it easily, since the response was so long. We also introduced months and days of the week, and practiced saying the day and date for yesterday, today, and tomorrow.

Months Three and Four: Contextualizing Language Use and Building Relationships In the final months of the class, an easy camaraderie settled in as the women began to use their language skills to talk about their own lives. When we reviewed family vocabulary, they enthusiastically wrote the names of their family members on the board. They enjoyed conducting simple surveys (i.e., asking classmates “Do you like dancing?” or “Do you like cooking?”), especially when they found themselves in agreement with the majority of their classmates. Deirdre and I felt most successful when teaching content that was concrete or had a personal connection. On occasions when we would introduce abstract concepts (like being single, married, or divorced) or try to address several new concepts simultaneously, the students appeared frustrated.

The women also made progress in their print literacy abilities. Most could easily decode and read full sentences containing familiar language. More advanced students (such as Monique, Tamana, and Aaqila) enthusiastically volunteered to add words to our letter posters and write the date on the board. Even the students with the lowest literacy abilities showed progress: Duniya no longer surreptitiously copied her name from her palm; Nazia was able to sound out familiar and unfamiliar words; and Farzana could confidently match lower- and upper-case letters and copy words to label items in the apartment. In most classes, students completed differentiated writing worksheets; more advanced students wrote full responses to questions, and students who needed more support practiced copying words or completing sentences. After some confusion related to the Times New Roman font, we learned to create printed materials using fonts similar to handwriting, like Comic Sans.

Deirdre and I learned more about the women through our time together, and we also had the opportunity to conduct interviews with the Afghan women with translation assistance from another Afghan woman living in the apartment complex. Through these interviews, we learned that several women had been unable to attend school in Afghanistan because the Taliban had controlled their regions. All of the women’s husbands had supported the U.S. Military forces, which had, in turn, helped the family obtain a refugee visa to ensure their safety after American military operations ended. The women explained to us that they felt they needed English skills for practical reasons, such as communicating at the supermarket, doctors’ offices, and their children’s schools. Farzana explained to us: “We should learn English to solve our problems” (Interview, March 16, 2015, translated). Several of the women said they enjoyed coming to class because they felt lonely during the

day; in Afghanistan, most had lived in large houses with extended families, so living in an apartment with only their husband and children was quite challenging. Duniya told us that she felt “trapped in her house” and “like she is in jail” without English skills (Interview, March 16, 2015, translated).

On the final evening of class, we distributed certificates to each student and had a celebratory dinner. The Afghan women brought huge pans full of naan and biryani, and we chatted about their next steps. To be more accurate, the Afghan women chatted in Pashto and Dari and collaboratively settled on the best English translations while Deirdre, Ndaya, and I smiled in mild confusion. We managed to learn that Duniya and Ndaya were excited to have more connections to the local community once their oldest children started school the following year. Tamana shyly told us she was newly pregnant. Because of the high cost of living, Farzana planned to return to Afghanistan while her husband completed his graduate studies in the U.S. That final evening, we celebrated the progress the students had made, as well as the community we had built.

Discussion

The exploration of practices in the previous section reveals challenges encountered by this group of adult refugee women who are LESLLA learners. In addition, the stories and experiences shared above offer unique strengths as well as promising instructional strategies. In this section, I draw from the examples discussed above to discuss implications for practice and make connections with the challenges, strengths, and promising instructional strategies found among LESLLA learners in other contexts.

Challenges

This group of refugee LESLLA learners encountered compounding challenges, including childcare responsibilities; social, emotional, and cultural adjustment; and minimal prior formal schooling. Knowledge of these challenges is important for instructors to deliver culturally relevant instruction (Gagné et al., 2017).

Childcare The need to care for children was particularly evident, given that many evenings our classes were interrupted or disjointed because young children had come to class with their mothers. Childcare responsibilities had also contributed to the initial need for the course, since the women were unable to attend classes at the local community college with children at home. The option to bring children to class offered these women an opportunity to access instruction. We could have been more responsive to the students’ needs by offering childcare or by scheduling day-time classes, when some children were at school.

Social, Emotional, and Cultural Adjustment The women also faced challenges related to trauma, isolation, and cultural adjustment. These challenges likely slowed the students' language and literacy learning processes (Finn, 2011; Young-Scholten et al., 2015). All had likely experienced trauma related to leaving their home countries, but the challenges they shared with us more often related to the daily stressors of life in an unfamiliar country, such as being treated unfairly at stores or being unable to communicate with school personnel. These challenges were more apparent for the Afghan women than for the Congolese women, perhaps because the Congolese women were all able to find employment. The cultural perspectives of the Afghan women and their families, however, prioritized their presence in the home. Though they valued being at home with their children, many of the Afghan women experienced feelings of isolation in their separate apartments, having lived with large, extended families in Afghanistan. Because of this, the class offered a valuable opportunity to build community and engage with individuals outside of their family circle.

Minimal Prior Formal Education A final challenge these women faced concerned prior schooling and L1 literacy. Upon reflection, the diagnostic test we had given on the first evening of class was inappropriate because the students had not been exposed to multiple-choice exams before. The use of this assessment contributed to our misclassification of all the women at the pre-literate level, when a more adaptive and open-ended assessment, such as student-directed writing or conversation would have offered more detailed data as to which women had prior schooling and L1 literacy (Allemano, 2013). Those women who had prior schooling and L1 literacy not only were able to acquire English literacy skills more quickly; they also seemed to have stronger working memory and an increased ability to manipulate syntax and connect to abstract concepts. This situation has also been found among adults with emergent literacy in their L1 (Bigelow & Watson, 2011; Tarone et al., 2009).

Strengths

Despite the challenges discussed above, participants also drew on unique strengths, such as resilience, strong motivation to support their families' transition, and prior knowledge.

Resilience These women displayed remarkable resilience. They had lived through dangerous conflicts, had transitioned to life in an unfamiliar context, and continued to encounter challenges every day. They had all developed strategies to deal with these challenges, including developing a community among themselves, asking for support from their instructors and social workers, and celebrating the progress they made. Despite the challenges they encountered, they were able to keep their spirits up and make the best of their situations.

Motivation Closely related to their resilience, the women were quite motivated to learn English. Like many adult literacy learners (Bigelow & Vinogradov, 2011), they saw English skills as necessary to access healthcare and education, and to support their family’s transition. The Congolese women also hoped to learn English to gain access to employment. Knowles (1968), a foundational scholar in adult learning theory, explained that adults learn best when they can identify a clear need or reason for learning, which was certainly the case in this setting. All the students were able to find the time to attend class and complete homework while also caring for their families and working (for some). When they successfully completed tasks in class, the women were visibly proud of themselves, and often continued to practice independently, for instance by volunteering to add words to our letter posters or label items in the apartment. These independent learning skills are a great strength of LESLLA learners (Vinogradov, 2016).

Prior Knowledge The women also had significant prior knowledge to build upon. Some of them drew from their prior formal schooling to support their nascent English language and literacy skills, particularly those with L1 print literacy skills (Bialystok, 2007; Bigelow & Vinogradov, 2011). Others may have struggled with reading and writing, but had strong numeracy skills, and quickly learned to count, identify numbers, estimate costs, and make change. As adult learners, they all had life experiences that supported their acquisition of vocabulary. Losaka, for instance, came to class one evening overjoyed because she had been able to read the word *bus* while traveling to work. All the women had knowledge related to cooking and homemaking, so words like *garlic*, *cucumber*, and *salt* were learned quite quickly. Though the women were English learners at the beginning level, they were able to build on life knowledge they had already developed to use their emergent language and literacy skills (Condelli et al., 2008).

Instructional Strategies

Given the challenges and strengths discussed above, Deirdre and I found the following instructional strategies important to our success: designing a curriculum that connects to students’ lives; adhering to a familiar routine and repeating familiar language; adapting emergent literacy strategies for adult learners; and taking time to build personal relationships with students.

Relevant Curriculum The content of most of our lessons built on the women’s assets and prior knowledge, as recommended by Bigelow and Vinogradov (2011) and Condelli et al. (2008). Deirdre and I began by teaching the nouns for items they encountered in their apartments and neighborhood, verbs for actions they engaged in every day, and phrases they could expect to use often. When we introduced new vocabulary, we used real items or photographs to make the concept more concrete, a practice particularly important for learners with emergent literacy (Marrapodi,

2013). When we discussed family members, each woman considered her own family. By teaching content that was relevant to their lives, we gave the women the language necessary to discuss their own experiences.

Routine and Repetition We recycled this vocabulary throughout the course, within a familiar routine. The use of routines and familiar activities supports the needs of LESLLA learners who may be unfamiliar with classroom norms (Farrelly, 2017; Vinogradov, 2016). Our routine was quite rigid during the first several weeks of class, as the women were developing not only literacy and English skills, but also coming to understand North American formal schooling norms. As we all became more familiar with each other and with the class format, we deviated from the routine when necessary, including by differentiating instruction. We also used previously taught vocabulary within new phrases, and were most successful when we introduced fewer than a dozen new vocabulary words or concepts in each class session. Routine and repetition of language helped minimize the students' cognitive load, which is helpful for learners with emergent literacy (Bigelow & Watson, 2011; Tarone et al., 2009).

Adapting Emergent Literacy Strategies As we focused on literacy skills, we adapted some strategies typically used with children learning to read, as recommended by Bigelow and Vinogradov (2011). For example, we focused on building phonemic awareness and helping students make the connection between speech and print by using formulaic sentences (e.g., "The name is bee, the sound is buh;" "Book starts with B, buh, buh, book"). We highlighted distinctions in similar phonemes by introducing them at the same time (e.g., introducing B, P, V, and W in the same session). As recommended by August and Shanahan (2006) and Tarone et al. (2009), we introduced and practiced both oral and written language throughout our lessons. We also offered handwriting practice and created a word wall for visual reference in the classroom. When using these strategies, we were careful to deliver instruction at the appropriate age and cognitive levels by using these strategies to discuss content from the women's lived experiences rather than, say, barnyard animals; age-appropriate practices are supported by Condelli et al. (2008).

Relationships The final instructional strategy is building relationships. We saw our relationships with the women as crucial to their learning because it allowed us to learn more about their backgrounds and support their affective needs. Nevertheless, teacher-student relationships have received little attention in the LESLLA research literature. The jokes and laughter we shared together offered students a valuable opportunity to build community with other refugees. Students had the opportunity to use their emergent language and literacy skills to talk about themselves and their experiences in each class. We also learned about each other's families; though the presence of children in the class was sometimes distracting, it also helped us better understand each woman within the context of her family.

The relationships we built with the women, and the relationships among them, supported their learning.

Conclusion

It is my hope that the exploration of practices above has offered an opportunity to “observe” our work with this group of LESLLA learners across time and distance. I certainly do not intend to imply that our work was ideal or free of errors; on the contrary, I have mentioned above some of the poor decisions and missteps we made. One major limitation is that we only worked with this group of learners for four months; a more extended period would likely have offered additional insights and learning opportunities. Nevertheless, the challenges, strengths, and instructional strategies discussed above may be of use to stakeholders working with LESLLA learners, particularly refugee women.

Administrators can draw from these findings to identify ways to offer child-care, support relationship building, and design curricula that build on the motivation and resilience LESLLA learners bring to the classroom. Instructors can learn from our mistakes and build on our successes as they adapt the instructional strategies discussed above for their own classrooms and learners, especially including the use of consistent routines, activities that connect to students’ lived experiences, and the cultivation of meaningful relationships. As stakeholders working with LESLLA students learn more about effective practices to support this population, I encourage them to share their findings with others through conference publications, journal articles, and book chapters. A great need remains for research and insights regarding the language and literacy learning of LESLLA students, particularly refugee women.

Reflection Questions

1. Which of the instructional strategies discussed in this chapter would be appropriate for the context where you teach (or where you hope to teach in the future)? Explain in which ways they are appropriate.
2. What changes could the instructors have made to engage their students more successfully? Provide as much detail as possible in your response.

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