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Summer 2018

Engaging, Supporting, And Scaffolding Instruction For Students With Limited Or Interrupted Formal Education (Slife)

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ENGAGING, SUPPORTING, AND SCAFFOLDING INSTRUCTION FOR

STUDENTS WITH LIMITED OR INTERRUPTED FORMAL EDUCATION (SLIFE)

by

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A capstone submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master
of Arts in English as a Second Language

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Saint Paul, Minnesota

August 2018

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

Chapter Overview

In this Capstone, I will address the question *How can English learners with limited or interrupted formal education best be supported at the secondary level?* In chapter one, I will introduce my topic, provide background information, describe my professional and personal interest in this topic, and provide an overview of chapters. I will also define key terminology.

Immigration Trends

Over the past twenty years, immigration in the United States has grown significantly and so too has the number of English learners (ELs) in American public schools. According to a 2015 Migration Policy Institute report, 21 percent of people age five or older in the United States reported speaking a language other than English at home—the most common home language being Spanish at 62 percent, with speakers of Chinese (Mandarin or Cantonese) falling a distant second at 5 percent (Zong & Batalova, 2017). As of 2015, 25.9 million individuals age five or older were categorized at Limited English Proficient (LEP), a label used by the federal government to categorize English learners (ELs), also commonly referred to as English language learners (ELLs) (Zong & Batalova, 2017).

What's more, a significant number of immigrants entering the United States are refugees. In 2015, nearly 70,000 refugees settled in the United States, with the largest numbers originating from Burma (18,318), Iraq (12,608), Somalia (8,852), Democratic Republic of Congo (7,823), and Bhutan (5,563) (Office of Refugee Resettlement, 2016). While the population of immigrants has continued to grow over time, policies of the 45th presidential administration have begun to significantly limit entry to the United States for certain groups of immigrants, including refugees and citizens of select predominantly Muslim countries (DeVogue, 2017; "ICE ERO immigration," 2017). It is unclear how severely the policies of the current administration will impact the number of immigrants and refugees entering the United States.

Immigrants come to the United States for a variety of reasons, such as joining family or for work or education opportunities. In contrast, refugees are fleeing dangerous situations such as war, famine, or persecution (USA for UNHCR, n.d.). Additionally, documented and undocumented immigrants from Mexico and Central America enter the United States fleeing poverty and violence in their home countries (Franklin, 2014).

With this influx of new Americans, the number of school-aged English learners increased by 52 percent from 1998 to 2008 (Zong & Batalova, 2017). As the number of ELs grows, so does the number of students arriving with limited or interrupted formal education (SLIFE)—students who were unable to access adequate schooling before coming to the United States. As more students with limited or interrupted formal education enter U.S. schools, it has become increasingly important to consider how to best serve this student population.

A Note on Terminology

There are several terms used by researchers to refer to students who have had either interruptions in their education or limited access to schooling or higher-level academic curriculum. The three most common terms I have observed in the research are *limited formal schooling* (LFS) (Freeman & Freeman, 2002), *students with interrupted education* (SIFE) (Custodio & O'Loughlin, 2017), and *students with limited or interrupted formal education* (SLIFE) (DeCapua & Marshall, 2011a). In this paper, I have chosen to use the term SLIFE, because I feel it is the most descriptive and inclusive. A more detailed definition of SLIFE is outlined in chapter two. Another important term to note is *newcomer*. Newcomers are defined by Wright (2010) as "newly arrived ELLs with little to no proficiency in English" (p. 102). Newcomers may be students with a traditional education background, or they may be students with interrupted or limited formal schooling (Short & Boyson, 2012). A final term that I would like to note is *home language*, which I use in this paper to refer to the primary language spoken at home and/or the language that a child first learned (Wright, 2010).

Personal and Professional Significance

During the 2016-2017 school year, I began working with newcomer English learners at the secondary level after having previously worked solely with intermediate and advanced ELs. As I got to know my students and conducted diagnostic assessments at the start of the school year, I began to notice that there were two distinct groups represented in my newcomer English learner classes: students with a consistent academic background and higher level literacy skills in their home language, and students with either a very limited formal education background or one with significant interruptions.

The latter group also had varying levels of literacy and, in a couple of cases, the literacy skills they had were not in their home language. For example, one student spoke Somali as his primary language but the little previous schooling he had received was in Arabic. Another student spoke Mam, an indigenous Mayan language, as her first language and Spanish as a second language. Again, the limited schooling she had received had not been in her home language but in Spanish. As it turned out, more that half of my newcomer students were SLIFE, and two had never attended school before arriving in my ninth grade classroom.

One of the greatest challenges was having a combined class of SLIFE and what I will refer to as traditional ELs (those with a formal schooling background and literacy in their first language). The traditional ELs in my newcomer class not only had attended school without interruption in their home countries and had well-developed literacy skills in their home language, but they were also familiar with academic concepts, academic expectations, and the routines of school. These students simply needed to learn English. In contrast, the students in my newcomer classes who were SLIFE had low literacy or no literacy in their home language, were unfamiliar with academic concepts and expectations, and were unaccustomed to the routines of school. I quickly recognized the challenge of having these two distinct groups of students with differing needs within the same class. I also realized that nowhere in my English as a Second Language (ESL) teacher preparation program had students with limited or interrupted formal education been mentioned. As I combed through the ESL pedagogy textbooks from my teacher preparation courses, I could find no mention of students who are SLIFE and their unique needs. Because I had not been trained in practices for working with SLIFE, I decided to

begin researching the topic on my own. As I dove into the research that school year, I quickly learned that students with limited or interrupted formal education have a diverse range of needs both in and out of the classroom, from needing support for trauma experienced in migration or family separation to developing basic skills in literacy, numeracy, and acquiring basic content knowledge (DeCapua, Smathers, & Tang, 2009). According to DeCapua, Smathers, and Tang (2009), while SLIFE have very specific needs that differ from other ELs, most are placed in traditional ESL or mainstream classrooms. I found this to be the case in both the high school I worked in previously and the middle school I work in now.

When I first began working with SLIFE, I was a second-year teacher who had recently completed my teacher preparation program. Before entering my K-12 English as a second language licensure program, my limited exposure to English learners was teaching English as a foreign language abroad to students without gaps in their education. In my U.S. classroom, I found myself feeling both surprised and frustrated at my lack of preparation for working with students with limited formal education and limited literacy skills. I have also discovered that I am not alone in not knowing best practices for working with SLIFE. Many colleagues, both inside and outside of ESL, are not aware of the unique needs of these students and how to serve them.

Topic Overview

Research on SLIFE is relatively new, though there are already a few notable names, including Helaine Marshall (1994), Andrea DeCapua (2016b), Yvonne and David Freeman (2002), Jill A. Watson (2010), and Brenda Custodio and Judith O'Loughlin (2017). In research conducted by these and other scholars, which will be summarized in

chapter two of this Capstone, the unique needs of secondary SLIFE have been clearly established. SLIFE typically have no or low literacy in their first language and have learned through an oral paradigm (DeCapua, Smathers, & Tang, 2009). Middle and high school age students who do not have a formal schooling background have learned much in their lives, but this knowledge tends to be practical and immediately relevant (DeCapua & Marshall, 2011a). Skills and knowledge that SLIFE have developed have been learned through oral communication and direct experience (Watson, 2017). These ways of gaining knowledge come in sharp contrast to Western-style education, with its focus on abstract, academic knowledge largely gained through reading and writing (DeCapua & Marshall, 2011a).

The literature review provided in chapter two highlights the need for teachers of SLIFE to bridge the divide, in addition to teaching secondary SLIFE the expectations and routines of school, while supporting them in acquiring the academic language needed to be successful in school. All ELs must develop their oral language skills in English as a foundation for building literacy in English. SLIFE are not an exception. However, with SLIFE, oral language has an even greater importance, as it is the portal through which they will most readily be able to develop their reading and writing skills.

As an English as a second language teacher of newcomer SLIFE, I have observed that students do not always get their needs met, and teachers are not always aware of how to work with SLIFE. This has led me to my central research question: *How can English learners with limited or interrupted formal education best be supported at the secondary level?*

Professional Context

Since beginning my research for this paper, I have left my previous teaching position in a large urban high school in Minnesota and am now teaching in a small, rural middle school in Colorado. In Minnesota, I taught English to predominantly Somali-speaking and Spanish-speaking students. In Colorado, my students are solely from Spanish-speaking countries. My current school has a total of 270 students, 70 percent of whom receive free or reduced lunch and 20 percent of whom are English learners. Roughly 55 percent of students are white and 45 percent of students are Latino. Additionally, our school district has a 50 percent student mobility rate. The family origins of English learners in my school are Mexico and Central America, and there are a small number of students with limited or interrupted formal education. Some English learners in our school come and go throughout the school year, as their families migrate from area to area for work, or travel to and from Mexico on extended visits to family. In total, I provide direct service to 25 Spanish-speaking English learners in grades 6-8.

In my current school, all ELs are in mainstream content classes for most of the day, regardless of their English proficiency level, and attend a 50-minute ESL class once per day. Nearly all teachers in my school work with ELs and several teachers have one or two students who are SLIFE. This has further contributed to my interest in researching best practices for working with SLIFE. Based on the research I've conducted, I will create a professional development series suitable for all teachers in my current school to help them understand the unique characteristics of students with limited and interrupted formal education and the best practices for working with them. Both my personal observations and my research have revealed that teachers typically receive little or no

training for working with SLIFE (DeCapua, Smathers, & Tang, 2009; Freeman &

Freeman, 2002; Hos, 2011; Montero, Newmaster, & Ledger, 2014).

Overview of Chapters

  In this chapter, I have introduced my topic, provided background information, and

described my interest in addressing the needs of SLIFE and those who work with them. I

have also defined key concepts and terminology. In chapter two, I provide a review of the

research literature relevant to this topic and describe the gap in application that my

project will fill—the lack of teacher training for working with SLIFE. In chapter three, I

describe my project in more detail, providing a description of participants, setting, and

theoretical framework. Finally, in chapter four, I reflect on what I have learned

throughout the Capstone process and share the implications and limitations of my

research project.

CHAPTER TWO

Literature Review

Chapter Overview

The purpose of this project is to help educate myself, other teachers, and school staff on best practices for supporting students with limited or interrupted formal education (SLIFE) at the secondary level. In this Capstone, I aim to answer the question *How can English learners with limited or interrupted formal education best be supported at the secondary level?* This literature review begins by defining SLIFE and discussing their unique attributes, including their funds of knowledge and attendance patterns. Then, I discuss engagement of SLIFE, focusing on routines and the Mutually Adapted Learning Paradigm instructional model, as well as oral language development through oral interaction. Finally, I address the gap in teacher preparation for working with SLIFE.

Unique Attributes of SLIFE

Students with limited or interrupted formal education (SLIFE) are students who arrive to the United States with little to no schooling (DeCapua, Smathers, & Tang, 2009; DeCapua & Marshall, 2011a). There are a variety of terms used to describe these students, including *limited formal schooling* (LFS) (Freeman & Freeman, 2002), *students with interrupted education* (SIFE) (Custodio & O'Loughlin, 2017), and *students with limited or interrupted formal education* (SLIFE) (DeCapua & Marshall, 2011a). Freeman and Freeman (2002) define newly arrived English learners as students with limited formal

schooling (LFS) if they have fewer than five years in the country, interrupted or limited

school experience in their home country, limited literacy in their native language, and are

below grade level in math. DeCapua, Smathers, and Tang (2009) categorize SLIFE as:

students who have had at least two fewer years of formal education than their same-age

peers, are below grade level in reading and math, and began attending school in the U.S.

after second grade. There are many reasons that some children do not attend school, such

as cultural norms, family obligations, or lack of access to schooling in the area where

they are living. Others may have attended school but have been limited by a lack of

higher level instruction or their education may have been cut short for reasons such as

war, political strife, persecution, or economic factors (DeCapua, Smathers, & Tang,

2009). When these students arrive in the U.S. they have a complex array of needs, but

they also bring with them many assets. Those strengths provide a foundation that can be

built upon to meet students' needs.

Funds of Knowledge

Students whose access to formal education has been limited have developed ways

of thinking, knowing, and understanding that are based on their life experiences in the

real world rather than on the abstract, academic frameworks of school (DeCapua, 2016).

According to DeCapua and Marshall (2011a), SLIFE have ways of interpreting and

understanding the world around them that differ from traditional Western-style schooling.

Their learning has been based on their personal and life experiences outside of a

classroom, leading to a pragmatic view of learning. In many cultures around the world,

children work alongside adults from a very young age learning tasks that have immediate

results and consequences, for example weaving, pounding grain, caring for farm animals,

or working as a housekeeper (Marshall & DeCapua, 2013). In these examples, children are participating in valid processes of learning that differ significantly from those of Western-style education.

From a constructivist viewpoint, there is not a singular universal truth or a universally agreed upon interpretation of reality (Heigham & Croker, 2009). According to Heigham and Croker (2009), there are many ways that individuals construct meaning and interpret reality, each person creating his or her own understanding of the world. Constructions of knowledge and interpretations of the world can change depending on the context, the people involved, and the time in which something is occurring (Heigham & Croker, 2009). When SLIFE enter Western-style schools, their life experiences and ways of thinking and knowing may come into conflict with expectations of academic learning, as their knowledge and set of skills may differ significantly from the skill set required in U.S. schools. For example, in the pragmatic learning contexts mentioned above, literacy skills are not considered necessary or central to the learning process, and therefore are not considered immediately relevant (Marshall & DeCapua, 2013). In contrast, literacy skills are essential for success in Western-style education. DeCapua, Smathers, and Tang (2009) argue that the differences in thinking, knowing, and learning in SLIFE should not be seen as a deficit. The extensive pragmatic knowledge and life skills often possessed by SLIFE have been referred to by some researchers as "funds of knowledge," defined by Moll, Amanti, Neff, and Gonzalez (1992) as "the historically accumulated and culturally developed bodies of knowledge and skills essential for household or individual functioning and well-being" (p. 133). The term *funds of knowledge* is used throughout the literature on SLIFE to refer to the knowledge and skills that SLIFE already possess when

they arrive at school (DeCapua & Marshall, 2011a). Some examples of *funds of knowledge* include: experience in agriculture, such as farming and ranching; skills in automobile repair and equipment operation and maintenance; construction knowledge, such as carpentry, masonry, or painting; knowledge of economics through buying and selling goods, money-handling, and budgeting; and religious knowledge such as morals and ethics or study of sacred texts (e.g., the Bible or the Koran) (Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez 1992). It is essential that educators acknowledge the strengths that students bring with them and use those strengths as a foundation for teaching new skills and concepts.

However, Meyer (2000) asserts that despite the funds of knowledge that students with limited or interrupted education may possess, these funds are often not enough to meet the rigorous academic expectations of U.S. schools. A skilled teacher must be able to bridge the gap between a student's prior learning paradigm and that of Western-style schools (DeCapua & Marshall, 2011a), helping students connect their previous knowledge to the more abstract, academic concepts that are valued in Western education (Meyer, 2000). Furthermore, teachers must continually assess students to identify gaps that students may have in knowledge and skills.

Academic Demands of School

The demands of school are the most challenging for secondary SLIFE. Students must master social and academic language, build content knowledge, and develop literacy simultaneously. At the same time, SLIFE are also struggling to adjust to new surroundings and new cultural expectations (Freeman & Freeman, 2007). Because the norm in the United States is to place SLIFE in the grade that corresponds to their age,

secondary SLIFE face incredible challenges in mastering English, academic content, and academic language, while learning the culture and expectations of American schools (DeCapua, Smathers, & Tang, 2009). SLIFE also have the added challenge of limited or no literacy in their home language, which puts them at a distinct disadvantage in Western-style schools where strong literacy skills are essential for academic success. In order to ensure their success at the secondary level, it is critical to fill the gaps in knowledge that SLIFE possess, as well as support them in literacy development. One factor that can make serving SLIFE more challenging is that their school attendance rates are lower than for non-SLIFE English learners (DeCapua & Marshall, 2015).

Attendance Patterns

When looking at SLIFE specifically, a common theme emerges across the literature: dropout rates for SLIFE increase as they move through the grades and into high school. While data from the U.S. Department of Education shows that elementary-level English learners have better school attendance rates than the general population, by high school the drop-out rates of ELs surpass that of the general population (Office of English Language Acquisition, 2017). The research of Richard Fry (2005) revealed that 80 percent of foreign-born youth who drop out of school are recent arrivals. More specifically, youth with interrupted schooling in their country of origin make up 38 percent of foreign-born dropouts (Fry, 2005). Fry's data also showed that the older a foreign-born student is when they arrive in the United States, the less likely they are to stay in school. More specifically, in his analysis of census data from the year 2000 of 15 to 17 year old foreign born teens, Fry (2005) determined that the dropout rate for students with a history of interrupted schooling before migrating to the United States was 70

percent. His analysis also found that youth in this category had a high employment rate, were often married, and typically did not live with their parents (Fry, 2005). Though counted in the dropout rate, many of these youth come to the United States with the aim of working and may never have enrolled in a U.S. school (Fry, 2005). DeCapua and Marshall (2010) also observed that some SLIFE, even those who are well engaged at school, can have poor or erratic attendance due to economic constraints, work schedules, or family responsibilities. These patterns are important to note, because students who are still considered children by American legal and cultural standards are often operating as adults, and their needs differ greatly from other secondary students (Focus on SLIFE, 2015). While little research has been done specifically on the school enrollment patterns of SLIFE, one can deduce from existing data that these students are at a greater dropout risk.

Engaging Secondary SLIFE

Increasing student engagement is a common theme in education (e.g., Fenner & Snyder, 2017; Hollie, 2012; Lemov, 2010), and there is a strong need to engage secondary SLIFE. Sporadic attendance, repeated tardiness, and lack of engagement in class are barriers to any secondary student's achievement (Allensworth & Easton, 2005; Balfanz, Herzog, & Mac Iver, 2007). Because of their greater dropout risk and the ground they must cover in making academic and linguistic gains, the stakes are much higher when secondary SLIFE don't engage in school. Crawford and Krashen estimate that it takes English learners five to eight years to catch up to native English-speaking peers in academic English and grade-level literacy (as cited in Wright, 2010, p. 33). With their lower literacy levels and limited or interrupted schooling, it can be assumed that it will

take SLIFE even longer. If SLIFE are to be successful in high school and gain the necessary skills for college, it is critical that SLIFE be engaged actively engaged in school.

There are many factors both in and out of the classroom that influence students' engagement in school. While research on engagement of SLIFE is limited, there is consensus on some factors that contribute to student engagement in general and of English learners in particular. Approaches to improving engagement include establishing routines (Meyer, 2000; Sarroub, Parnicek, & Sweeney, 2007) and implementing culturally responsive teaching practices (Fenner & Snyder, 2017). Culturally responsive teaching promotes using a student's strengths and linguistic and cultural background to create engaging and relevant lessons (DeCapua, Smathers, & Tang, 2009; Fenner & Snyder, 2017). Marshall and DeCapua (2013) found that the Mutually Adapted Learning Paradigm (MALP) instructional model, which is grounded in culturally responsive pedagogy, is an effective tool for reaching struggling English learners, including SLIFE. They contend that many SLIFE experience cultural dissonance due to extreme cultural differences and the conflict between the learning paradigm of their home culture and that of Western-style schools. According to Marshall and DeCapua (2013), teachers can use the MALP model to reduce the disharmony students feel when entering U.S. schools by focusing on building strong relationships, relating new material to that which is already familiar to students, and scaffolding learning. The MALP model, which will be addressed in greater depth later in this chapter, has shown great promise in successfully engaging secondary SLIFE (Marshall, DeCapua, & Antolini, 2010).

Routines

Meyer (2000) asserts that there are four primary barriers to meaningful instruction that teachers of English learners must be skilled at addressing and lowering: "cognitive load, culture load, language load, and learning load" (p. 1). For students whose knowledge on a topic is limited, the cognitive load will be the highest. Meyer defines cognitive load as "the number of new concepts embedded in a lesson or text" (Meyer, 2000, p.1). For students whose language proficiency is lower, the language load will be higher (Meyer, 2000). Newcomer students who lack consistent formal schooling face the greatest learning load of all as they face both heavy cognitive and language loads. This is compounded at the secondary level. Establishing routines can help reduce some of the load, as learners come to know what to expect over the course of a class period, day or week. Examples of routines include, daily warm-ups, weekly circles, and classroom protocols for submitting homework or going to the restroom. Taken a step further, routine can be a very powerful scaffold when teachers create a daily and weekly schedule that is followed with fidelity.

Moving to a new country where a student does not speak the language and does not yet have the academic knowledge and skills expected of secondary students can be extremely stressful. Some students retreat into themselves, while others act out. Zimmerman-Orozco (2015) describes the case of a 6th grader who arrived to the United States with no previous schooling. She became belligerent at home and at school but, over time, responded to routines implemented in the classroom.

Routines have an additional effect as well: increasing engagement. In their two-year case study of a teenage male Kurdish refugee, Sarroub, Parnicek, and Sweeney

(2007) observed that the student excelled in the one class where the teacher followed a set routine each day. This teacher's routine allowed her students to know what to expect from day to day; she began each class with word-making activities, followed by a lesson on a phonics-related topic, with a final segment focusing on independent or small group reading, during which the teacher was able to work one-on-one or in small groups with select students (Sarroub, Parnicek, & Sweeney, 2007). In other classes, where students were expected to work more independently and where a routine was not followed, this particular student languished (Sarroub, Parnicek, & Sweeney, 2007). These examples provide a powerful illustration of the importance of establishing consistent classroom routines.

Individualism vs. Collectivism

Another factor influencing the engagement of students with limited and interrupted formal schooling is the dichotomy of individualism vs. collectivism. Many SLIFE come from collectivist cultures, while individualism is dominant in the United States. According to Merriam Webster, individualism is the idea that the interests and actions of the individual are paramount while collectivism emphasizes the collective over any individual action or identity. Many SLIFE come from collectivist cultures. According to Triandis, Bontempo, Villareal, Asai, and Lucca (1988), collectivists subordinate their personal goals to that of the group. This can come into conflict with the individualistic expectations of U.S. classrooms, where students are expected to complete their own work and where individual accountability is highly valued and expected. In order to engage SLIFE effectively, classroom strategies should build upon the strengths of collectivism while introducing and scaffolding concepts of individual accountability.

Bridging Differing Learning Paradigms

Throughout the literature, researchers have noted the unique needs of SLIFE and the importance of bridging the divide between students' life experiences and the academic expectations of Western-style schools. Traditionally, curricula designed for English learners have assumed that students have a foundation in literacy and have already developed certain academic knowledge and skills, which is not typically the case with SLIFE (DeCapua, 2016b; DeCapua & Marshall, 2010; Freeman & Freeman, 2002). In working with Hmong English learners in the early 1990's, Marshall (1994) noted a disconnect between the learning paradigm her students brought with them and the learning paradigm of North American schools. Marshall (1994) found that traditional instructional models for working with Hmong English learners did not take their oral culture into account. Students had to "make a learning paradigm shift" (p. 7) in addition to mastering the new linguistic skill of literacy in another language, English. Marshall (1994, 1998) observed that the learning paradigm of her Hmong students differed from that of U.S. schools in three prominent aspects: conditions for learning to take place, processes for building skills and knowledge, and activities through which learning occurs (Marshall, 1994). According to Marshall and DeCapua (2013), in the "SLIFE learning paradigm" (p. 26) the conditions for learning are immediate relevance and interconnectedness, the process for learning occurs through oral transmission and shared responsibility, and activities through which learning has typically occurred are pragmatic tasks. In contrast, conditions for learning in Western-style formal education are future relevance and independence, the process of learning occurs through individual accountability and the written word, and activities through which learning occurs are

traditionally decontextualized academic tasks (DeCapua & Marshall, 2011a; Marshall 1994, 1998). Through her work, Marshall (1998) created a culturally responsive framework, later named the Mutually Adapted Learning Paradigm (MALP), which recognizes the differences and assists teachers in planning lessons that are appropriate for SLIFE. The framework serves to create a bridge from orality to literacy, from collectivism to individualism, and from informal ways of learning to formal education (DeCapua, 2016b). Building on Marshall's paradigm, DeCapua (2016b) asserts that teachers of SLIFE must address three areas: conditions for learning, combined processes for learning, and activities for learning. She argues that conditions for learning must include a welcoming and supportive environment where students feel a sense of immediate relevance and interconnectedness; combined processes for learning should include utilizing oral transmission and shared responsibility to create a bridge toward literacy and individual responsibility; and, finally, activities for learning must include teaching SLIFE the expectations of school and academic assignments using familiar language and content before moving on to introducing new language and content. Finally, students need repeated exposure to new language and content (DeCapua, 2016b; Watson, 2017).

Oral Language Development as a Foundation for Literacy

Due to interruptions and/or limitations in their formal education, SLIFE arrive to U.S. schools with varying levels of literacy. DeCapua, Smathers, and Tang (2009) break SLIFE literacy levels into the following categories: pre-literate (students that speak a language that does not have a written form), non-literate (students whose language is written but they have yet to learn to read it), semi-literate (students who read at a low

level in their home language), and non-alphabet literate (students whose home language does not use the Roman Alphabet) (p. 21). These four categories show the broad range of literacy needs that SLIFE students may have. Helping secondary SLIFE to develop their literacy is crucial. One key to developing literacy in English is the development of students' oral language proficiency in English (August 2006; Pollard-Durodola, Mathes, & Vaughn, 2006; Snow, 1998; Snow & Strucker, 1999).

In examining the definition of oral language, its importance becomes clear. For example, Lesaux and Harris (n.d.) define oral language as "the system through which we use spoken words to express knowledge, ideas, and feelings" (p. 1). Lesaux and Harris (n.d.) divide the components of oral language into five categories: vocabulary (knowledge of words and word meaning), syntax (knowledge of word order and grammar), morphological skills (knowledge of word parts and word forms), pragmatics (knowledge of the social rules of communication), and phonological awareness (the awareness of sounds, in particular distinctive sounds, as well as rhymes and syllables). Oral language forms the foundation upon which literacy is built. SLIFE, particularly, need support developing their phonological awareness and phonemic awareness (DeCapua, Smathers, & Tang, 2009).

Oral language proficiency in the second language is an essential building block of second language literacy (August, 2006; Pollard-Durodola, Mathes, & Vaughn, 2006; Snow, 1998; Snow & Strucker, 1999). Snow and Strucker (1999) conducted research on the oral language development of emergent readers in the primary grades and concluded that young English learners must build their oral language proficiency in English before they will be ready for formal reading instruction. While their research focuses on younger

ELs, SLIFE display many of the same qualities as younger emergent readers and require much of the same type of support, namely development of phonological and phonemic awareness. One difference, however, is that SLIFE must develop oral language and literacy simultaneously. Because SLIFE typically come from an oral paradigm, and much of their previous learning has occurred orally, developing oral language in English is an opportunity to build upon a strength they possess.

While home language oral language development is acknowledged as a central facet of language acquisition theory, the meta-analysis of studies on oral language development conducted by Saunders and O'Brien (2006) revealed the lack of research on the oral language development of English learners. They found that there were fewer than a quarter the number of studies on oral language development of English learners than studies on literacy (Saunders & O'Brien, 2006). This shows that more research is needed that focuses on the needs and outcomes of English learners, in general, and students with limited or interrupted formal education, in particular.

Creating Opportunities for Oral Interaction

According to Constantino (1993), students need ample time for authentic language use in meaningful contexts. There are many strategies in the literature for supporting oral language development of English learners: oral retellings, songs and chants, oral presentations, discussion tasks, responding orally to text, and cooperative learning (Condelli & Wrigley, 2006; DeCapua & Marshall, 2011a; Freeman & Freeman, 2002; Walqui & Van Lier, 2010; Watson, 2017; Wright, 2010). However, the literature also suggests that students get little practice with oral language in a typical school day (Soto-Hinman, 2011; Saunders & O'Brien, 2006; Wright, 2010). Soto-Hinman (2011)

developed a protocol for teachers to shadow English learners and record the number of instances in which they were able to speak and use academic language in class. In her studies, she found that ELs have very few opportunities to speak and therefore their oral language development is hindered (Soto-Hinman, 2011). Shadowing students can be an enlightening means to learn what an English learner experiences throughout their day, and classroom observations can be a powerful way to gather data on how often English learners are getting a chance to speak in class (DeCapua & Marshall, 2011b; Sarroub, Pernicek, & Sweeney 2007; Zimmerman-Orozco, 2015).

Watson (2017) describes the assets that SLIFE bring to oral language development: a tradition of oration, transfixed listening, and, often, ease of memorization. Further, she discusses that oral forms, such as proverbs, stories, epic poems, and fixed expressions can be used to hold students' attention. These are all aspects of SLIFE knowledge that teachers of SLIFE can build upon.

In response to the need for greater oral interaction for English learners and specifically SLIFE, Watson (2017) created the RISA Oral Interaction protocol to assist teachers in planning effective oral language development lessons for their students. RISA is an acronym for the following:

- Routine: Make oral interaction a part of the regular classroom routine, with a minimum of three oral interaction opportunities per week.
- Integrated: Integrate oral interaction with content objectives. Use information from lesson or unit content to create an oral interaction.
- Structured: Provide students with a template of structured dialogue for the oral interaction.

- Academic: Link language and content objectives. The oral interaction is an opportunity for students to practice academic vocabulary and academic language structures (Watson, 2017, p. 49).

The RISA Oral Interaction protocol assists students in developing both academic language and content knowledge. This is crucial for secondary SLIFE who have to catch up both linguistically and academically. One key to this strategy is that it is designed to be used with content that students have already learned. RISA provides the opportunity for in-depth language and content practice. According to Watson (2017), it should not be used at the start of a lesson or unit, but, rather, at the end. This protocol is important, because it represents a concrete method that teachers can learn and utilize in their classrooms to increase oral language development for SLIFE.

The development of DeCapua and Marshall's MALP model (2011a) and Watson's RISA Oral Interaction protocol (2017) are both important contributions to the field of teaching SLIFE. Both have been designed by teachers of SLIFE and incorporate components that research indicates are essential for working with diverse English learners. Both are based in culturally responsive pedagogy and build on student strengths to develop academic language and content knowledge. The MALP model and RISA Oral Interaction protocol represent two important approaches that teachers of SLIFE can utilize in their practice.

Gap in Teacher Preparation

The results of a 2008 study by Wei, Darling-Hammond, and Adamson (2010) found that only 27.9 percent of teachers reported receiving professional development to support them in working with English learners. This is problematic considering the trend

noted by Fenner and Snyder (2017) that many schools and districts are adopting more inclusive instructional models where English learners of all levels and abilities are spending more time in general education content classes. Similarly, DeCapua, Smathers, and Tang (2009) found that SLIFE are often placed with other ELs or in mainstream content classes according to the grade that corresponds with their age despite their academic and linguistic needs. As a result, SLIFE are not receiving the specialized instruction they need, and their teachers lack the preparation for instructing them (DeCapua, Smathers, and Tang 2009). Freeman and Freeman (2007) discussed the need for all teachers who work with ELs to have additional training, as well a need for appropriate curriculum and learning materials. Additionally, according to Watson (2017), teachers are not providing SLIFE with enough opportunities to speak in class. This indicates that all teachers need to be trained in working with diverse English learners, including SLIFE. There seems to be consensus among those who specifically research SLIFE: teachers need more training, tools, and appropriate curriculum for students with limited formal education (DeCapua, Smathers, & Tang, 2009; Freeman & Freeman, 2002; Hos, 2011; Montero, Newmaster, & Ledger, 2014).

Research by both DeCapua, Smathers and Tang (2009) and Montero, Newmaster, and Ledger (2014) point out that, while there are many best practices for working with English learners, these practices tend to assume that students are coming to school with a formal schooling background and literacy in their first language. Montero, Newmaster, and Ledger (2014) argue that most secondary teachers are not prepared to meet the literacy needs of adolescent SLIFE. Furthermore, there are limited textbooks and materials designed for secondary SLIFE (DeCapua, Smathers and Tang 2009).

Hos (2011) studied the role of the caring teacher and discovered that in and of itself a caring attitude is not sufficient to meet the unique needs of SLIFE. She argues that teachers must be proactive in seeking out the training and resources they need to serve their students well. She also posits that teachers have a responsibility to create a safe, welcoming, environment for students wherein students are provided with positive educational experiences that not only build their academic language and content knowledge, but also build their self-esteem and keep them positively engaged in school. Hos (2011) also notes that SLIFE need significant support beyond the classroom to catch up in all aspects necessary for being successful in high school.

It is this gap in teacher preparation that this research project is intended to help fill. Teachers who work with SLIFE, whether ESL teachers or content area teachers, need more training in the needs of SLIFE and best practices to serve their diverse needs.

Conclusion

This chapter reviewed the literature regarding SLIFE and their unique attributes, including their funds of knowledge and attendance patterns. I discussed engagement of SLIFE, focusing on routines and the MALP model, and examined the literature on oral language development through oral interaction. Finally, I stated the gap in teacher preparation for working with SLIFE. This literature review shows the need for more teacher training in working with SLIFE, particularly in the area of oral language development. In chapter three, I will provide a detailed description of my project, which is designed to address this need, as well as a discussion of participants, setting, and the theoretical framework.

CHAPTER THREE

Project Description

Introduction

This Capstone project is designed to address the following question: *How can English learners with limited or interrupted formal education best be supported at the secondary level?* In this chapter, I will provide an overview of the project, a description of participants and context, more detail about each professional development session and a discussion of the theoretical framework that I have chosen.

In chapter two, I reviewed the literature relevant to working with students with limited and interrupted formal education (SLIFE). The research shows the importance of meeting students where they are, honoring differing paradigms of learning, and providing opportunities for oral academic language development as a basis for building literacy. While in my personal teaching experience I have found these factors to be important for teaching all English learners (ELs), the research shows that SLIFE need more intensive interventions and support. Through my research, I learned about strategies, such as the MALP model and RISA protocol, which have been developed specifically for working with students with limited or interrupted formal education. These are specific strategies that I wish I had known about when I first began teaching SLIFE. This project idea was born out of my own desire to know more about working with this population of students, to find tools for best serving their needs, and to help fill the gap in teacher preparation.

Project Overview

In this section, I will provide an overview of the Capstone project and its components. I have created this project to help fill a gap in teacher preparation in working with students with limited or interrupted formal education. Despite attending a master's level teacher preparation program to obtain my teaching license in K-12 English as a second language (ESL), I did not receive training or instruction specific to working with students who are SLIFE. After becoming a high school ESL teacher and having students with limited or interrupted formal education on my caseload, I quickly learned that I was not alone in not being prepared for teaching this unique population of students. In an effort to educate myself and others, I chose to research this topic for my project and design a professional development training to help raise awareness about the unique needs of SLIFE.

This project is a two-session professional development series designed to provide an overview of best practices for working with students with limited or interrupted formal education for all school staff, as well as resources that can be used by both teachers and school staff. Due to time and budget constraints that many schools and districts face for offering training, I have limited this professional development (PD) series to two one-hour sessions designed to be delivered to staff either at the start of the school year or on PD days during the school year. The scope of each session differs and each is designed for a different audience. The first session is intended for all school staff, including teachers, paraprofessionals, administrators, school nurses, and school counselors. Session one provides an introduction to students with limited or interrupted formal education and answers the questions: *Who are SLIFE? What are their unique needs? How do I identify*

a student as SLIFE? This session provides interview tools for assisting in determining which students qualify as SLIFE and outlines some of the basic needs and common attributes of SLIFE at the secondary level. Session two is designed to be delivered only to classroom teachers, classroom paraprofessionals, and administrators and focuses on particular classroom strategies that teachers can use to meet the needs of SLIFE. Each session consists of a PowerPoint presentation, an activity to aid participants in understanding SLIFE, and handouts. These items will be described in greater detail in the next section.

Participants and Setting

This project is a two-part professional development (PD) series designed for teachers, staff and administrators that work in middle and high schools that serve students with limited or interrupted formal education. The intended audience for each session differs slightly.

The intended audience for session one of this PD series is any middle or high school administrator, teacher, or staff person who works in a school with students who fall into the SLIFE designation. Very importantly, this includes school secretaries, school counselors, school nurses, school psychologists, and paraprofessionals. In many contexts, particularly in smaller schools and districts, school secretaries and school counselors may be the first staff members to encounter a student who may have limited formal schooling. Typically, secretaries enroll new students, and counselors determine a student's schedule. At the middle and high schools levels, counselors often work closely with ESL teachers to determine the best schedule for English learners. For these reasons, secretaries and counselors need to be aware that some students may have limited formal schooling. In

contexts where counselors are responsible for screening and placing students, the parent/guardian and student interview tools created for this project can be used to help determine if a student has limited or interrupted formal education. In other contexts, they may be used by the ESL or classroom teacher.

Many students with limited or interrupted formal education are refugees who have fled their homelands and endured extreme hardship and psychological stress (Constantino & Lavadenz, 1993; Dooley, 2009). This can mean students arrive to U.S. schools with physical and mental health needs that school psychologists and school nurses should be aware of. Additionally, students who have experienced trauma or who are living in poverty may need to be connected with social services.

The intended audience for session two is classroom teachers and classroom paraprofessionals in middle and high school. It is also recommended that administrators, teacher mentors/coaches, or others in the role of observing and evaluating classroom teachers attend.

Professional Development Session One: Who are SLIFE?

The goal of session one is to help secondary educators, administrators, and staff learn the unique needs of SLIFE and how to best support their needs both in and out of the classroom based on the research summarized in chapter two.

The first PD session provides an overview of SLIFE, who they are, how to identify them, and their unique needs. This first session is appropriate for all staff, and in particular, guidance counselors, school psychologists, social workers, nurses, and those responsible for screening and enrolling students.

Session one provides an introduction to students with limited or interrupted formal education by having participants read profiles of two students with limited formal education and analyze their strengths and needs. This session provides interview tools for assisting in determining which students qualify as SLIFE and outlines some of the basic needs and common attributes of SLIFE at the secondary level. Session one includes an overview of statistics and demographics of SLIFE, including dropout rates, reasons for migration, causes of limited or interrupted schooling, educational programming needs, and the needs of students beyond the classroom. This session also includes a resource list for further study on the topic of serving SLIFE.

Interview tools.

For this professional development session, I have created two interview tools that can be used to screen students to determine if they have had limited or interrupted schooling. One interview tool is designed for use in interviewing parents and guardians; the other tool is designed for interviewing students. In order to gather as much information as possible, the student and the student's parent or guardian should be interviewed separately to gather information about the student's educational background and schooling history. Interviews should be conducted in the home language of the student and family by a school staff member along with an interpreter. In cases where bilingual staff members are not available, schools should hire an interpreter or use a phone-based interpretation service that provides professional interpreters over the phone.

Professional Development Session Two: Classroom Strategies for SLIFE

The goal of session two is to provide specific strategies that teachers can use in the classroom to meet the unique needs of SLIFE based on the research summarized in

chapter two. The intended audience for this session is classroom teachers and classroom paraprofessionals at the middle and high school levels. It is also recommended that administrators, teacher mentors/coaches, or others in the role of observing and evaluating classroom teachers attend.

During session two, participants examine the academic needs of SLIFE, discuss the importance of establishing consistent routines, and review strategies for supporting SLIFE in developing literacy skills and academic vocabulary. This session is designed to help classroom teachers understand the importance of using oral language development as a foundation for literacy development, and it introduces the RISA Oral Interaction protocol developed by Watson (2017).

In the second half of session two, participants will consider the strengths and pragmatic knowledge that students with limited or interrupted formal education bring to the classroom. Session two provides an introduction to the Mutually Adapted Learning Paradigm (MALP) developed by DeCapua and Marshall (2011a), which assists teachers in planning lessons that are appropriate for SLIFE. The MALP framework serves to help teachers create a bridge from the knowledge and background students bring with them to the academic expectations of U.S. classrooms. The overview of the MALP framework in session two is intended to assist teachers of SLIFE in understanding that conditions for learning should include a welcoming and supportive environment where students feel a sense of immediate relevance and interconnectedness; that there is a combined processes for learning that includes utilizing oral transmission and shared responsibility to create a bridge toward literacy and individual responsibility; and how to create activities for learning that include teaching SLIFE the expectations of school and academic

assignments using familiar language and content before moving on to introducing new

language and content (DeCapua, 2016b). During session two, participants will be

provided with a list of resources for learning more about supporting and teaching SLIFE.

Theoretical Frameworks

This professional development series is designed to be delivered to professional

adults who are teachers, administrators, and school support staff. In working with

professional staff, I have found it very important to honor the time and knowledge base of

adult workshop attendees and to tailor training to the needs and concerns of the

participants. According to Knowles (1992), adult learners must not only perceive the

learning to be relevant to the context in which they are working, but also be "active

participants in the process of inquiry" and have opportunities to take initiative (p.1).

Similarly, in a study on the effectiveness of teacher professional development, Garet,

Porter, Desimone, Birman, and Yoon (2001) concluded that one of the practices "more

likely to produce enhanced knowledge and skills" was providing teachers with

"opportunities for 'hands-on' work" and active learning (p. 935). In this professional

development series, participants will have an opportunity to share what they have

observed in working with SLIFE and discuss the needs they have in supporting these

students. Participants will also have an opportunity to share ideas and collaborate with

one another during the training.

Engagement is another important point to consider when delivering training to

adults. It is rare to find an educator who is excited to attend another professional

development session. Making the training engaging as well as relevant is essential.

According to Mezirow (2000), in order to honor adult learners, adult learning must

"emphasize contextual understanding" and provide opportunities for making meaning through critical reflection (p. 1). Just as students are not empty vessels to be filled with knowledge, neither are adults. Adult learners must make their own meaning based on values, beliefs, and context (Mezirow, 2000). Participants will be given an opportunity to reflect on their own assumptions about learners and to apply concepts to their own classroom or professional contexts. For example, in session one, participants will have an opportunity to read a profile of a student with limited or interrupted formal education, assess the student's strengths and needs, and discuss their conclusions in a small group. Also in session one, participants will have an opportunity to reflect on their own practice and how they might incorporate at least one concept from the training into their current practice. In session two, participants will be provided an opportunity to reflect on the underlying assumptions of Western-style formal education and compare and contrast those with the "SLIFE learning paradigm," as defined by Marshall and DeCapua (2013, p. 26). According to Wei, Darling-Hammond, Andree, Richardson, and Orphanos (2009), "teachers are more likely to try classroom practices that have been modeled for them in professional development settings" (p. 10).

CHAPTER FOUR

Conclusions

Chapter Overview

In this chapter, I reflect on the process of writing the Capstone paper and creating my Capstone project for the research question: *How can English learners with limited or interrupted formal education best be supported at the secondary level?* I begin by providing context for my research question, share what I have learned as a researcher, writer, and learner, reflect on the literature review process, and share the implications and limitations of my research project. I also discuss how my project benefits my profession and share ideas for future research projects.

The purpose of my project was to help reduce a gap in teacher preparation by creating a professional development training to educate teachers, administrators and other school staff on how to best support English learners with limited or interrupted formal education.

The inspiration for this project came from my students in my second year of teaching ninth grade English as a second language (ESL). That year was my first experience teaching new-to-country English learners with limited or interrupted formal education. Some of the students in my ninth grade newcomer class had never been to school before; others had only a limited educational background. As someone who was accustomed to teaching students at the intermediate to advanced levels of ESL, I found

myself feeling unprepared to fully meet the needs of this group of unique learners. This led me to begin to informally research best practices for teaching students with limited or interrupted formal education (SLIFE). When it came time to select a topic for my Capstone, diving deeper into this topic seemed like the perfect choice. In selecting this project topic, I not only wanted to better educate myself, but also to create a resource that could help educate others and begin a conversation about how to better serve these students.

Major Learnings

Through the Capstone process I learned a tremendous amount about myself as a researcher, writer, and learner. As a researcher, I learned that choosing a topic outside of my area of expertise was more challenging and uncomfortable than if I had chosen to research a topic in which I had had more experience. The benefit of choosing an unfamiliar topic, however, was learning a great deal about a something I had known very little about before. It also meant that I needed to be careful not to miss any important research on my topic; I needed to reach out to others in the field to help guide me in the right direction. Throughout the Capstone process, I frequently found myself reflecting on the importance of networking when attempting a large research project. One challenge in the research process was deciding how to narrow down my topic. There are so many directions one could go in when talking about students with limited or interrupted formal education.

As a writer, the Capstone process helped me understand the importance of creating and keeping a daily writing schedule. During periods when I would go more than a day without writing, researching, or working on the project, it would take me much

longer to get back into the swing of researching and writing. I learned that taking detailed notes and creating an organizational system for those notes was essential, so that I could more easily pick up where I left off. In the past, my approach to writing and researching had been very free form. Over time, I realized the need to have a system.

As a learner, the Capstone process helped me see the power that I have to persevere through difficult circumstances. Despite facing several personal setbacks, I continued forward. I am thankful to my friends, family, and classmates for the support they provided. In one conversation with a friend who was providing a pep talk, she shared the insight that I seemed to be struggling with the solitary nature of the Capstone research and writing process. In reflecting on this, I realized that I prefer to work in a setting that allows me to interact with others and where ideas can be bounced off one another. While I ultimately like doing my own work, having a chance to process ideas and concepts through conversation is something that helps me synthesize and analyze.

Revisiting the Literature Review

Before I began my research, I knew very little on the subject of meeting the needs of students with limited or interrupted formal education (SLIFE). Through assessing and observing my students, I gleaned that my students needed a clear structure and routine in the classroom. This was confirmed by the work of Meyer (2000), Zimmerman-Orozco (2015), and Sarroub, Parnicek, and Sweeney (2007) who described the need for consistent routines in order to reduce stress and "cognitive load," defined by Meyer (2001) as "the number of new concepts embedded in a lesson or text" (p. 1). For newcomer students who are working to both learn language and content, while also building literacy, numeracy and filling general academic concept gaps, having a

consistent routine that is predictable helps to reduce the amount of new knowledge that is being juggled each day. Most importantly it reduces stress.

Some of the most helpful research for my project came from Helene Marshall and Andrea DeCapua, who are two of the leading researchers in the area of teaching SLIFE. Marshall (1994) first identified differences in learning paradigms between North American schools and Hmong refugees, with whom she worked in the 1990s. Later, Marshall (1998) developed the Mutually Adapted Learning Paradigm to help educators both understand cultural differences in ways of knowing and learning and create lessons that are culturally relevant for students with limited or interrupted formal education. Marshal and DeCapua have continued to develop and refine the model and have written prolifically on the subject of teaching SLIFE (DeCapua & Marshall, 2011a, 2011b, 2015; DeCapua, Smathers, & Tang, 2009; Marshall & DeCapua, 2013; Marshall, DeCapua, & Antolini, 2010). In addition to helping me understand differences between informal learning and Western-style formal education, their research highlighted the need to create a welcoming and supportive environment where students feel a sense of immediate relevance and interconnectedness, where oral transmission and shared responsibility are honored and utilized to create a bridge toward literacy and individual responsibility, and activities for learning that include teaching the expectations of school and assignments using familiar language and content (DeCapua 2016b).

Another key aspect of working with SLIFE is having tools to determine which students have limited or interrupted formal education. The work of several researchers helped me understand the importance of interviewing both students and families in order to get a clear picture of a student's educational background. Adapting information from

DeCapua, Smathers, and Tang (2009) and Custodio and O'Loughlin (2017), I created a parent/guardian interview tool and student education history interview tool that educators can use to gather the education history of a student to determine if they are SLIFE. I have seen students who are SLIFE go unidentified, and I hope that equipping educators with this tool will help students get the services they need.

Another key piece of information gathered in my research is that students with limited or interrupted formal education need specific programming that is designed for their unique needs, such as scheduling priority, extended instructional time, basic literacy instruction, and access to counseling and social services (Focus on SLIFE; Short, 2015). The research also highlighted the gap in teacher preparation in working with SLIFE and the need for more trainings, tools, and curriculum appropriate to the needs of students with limited formal education (DeCapua, Smathers, & Tang, 2009; Freeman & Freeman, 2002; Hos, 2011; Montero, Newmaster, & Ledger, 2014). Fenner and Snyder (2017) found that English learners of all levels and abilities are spending more time in mainstream content classes. This indicates that all teachers need to be prepared to meet the needs of diverse ELs, including SLIFE. However, Montero, Newmaster, and Ledger (2014) found that most secondary teachers are not prepared to meet the literacy needs of secondary SLIFE.

Researchers have also noted that the best practices for working with English learners tend to assume that students are coming to school with literacy in their home language and a formal education background (DeCapua, Smathers, & Tang 2009; Montero, Newmaster, & Ledger, 2014). This is not the case for English learners with limited or interrupted schooling. Montero, Newmaster, and Ledger (2014) argued that

adolescent refugee students need focused literacy instruction in addition to English

language development. According to the research, oral language proficiency is an

essential building block for literacy development in English learners (August 2006;

Pollard-Durodola, Mathes, & Vaughn, 2006; Snow 1998; Snow & Strucker, 1999). While

there are gaps in the research as it specifically relates to students with limited or

interrupted learning, and one can extrapolate from the existing data. For example,

through their research on the oral language development of emergent readers in the

primary grades, Snow and Strucker (1999) concluded that young English learners must

first build their oral language proficiency in order to be ready for formal reading

instruction. Because SLIFE are also emergent readers, one can infer the needs of SLIFE

are similar. Because SLIFE come from an oral tradition, and much of their previous

learning has occurred orally, beginning with oral language development is an opportunity

to meet students where there are and utilize their strengths in orality to build a foundation

for literacy.

Implications

I believe the most important implication of this project is that students with

limited or interrupted formal education have very unique needs that differ from other

English learners and require specific programming considerations. First, students with

limited or interrupted formal education need teachers and school staff who are trained in

their needs. Teacher preparation programs should include curriculum on working with

SLIFE in coursework for all teachers. Second, SLIFE need intensive literacy

interventions in addition to English language development. SLIFE need extended

learning time, whether it be a longer school day, school year, or Saturday school. SLIFE

and their families need to be connected with social services and counseling to address the traumatic experiences they may have survived prior to or during migration. There is an important opportunity available for schools and districts to take a closer look at how their programming is serving SLIFE.

Limitations

As I moved through the Capstone process, I was faced with the challenge of choosing which areas of research to focus on with regard to students with limited or interrupted schooling. I found myself constantly needing to narrow my focus. There were several additional sub-topics that I intended to research, but time constraints prevented me from doing so. When I began my project to create a professional development series on working with SLIFE, I quickly realized that it would I would need to limit the scope and timeframe of the training sessions that I was creating. Schools and school districts face tight budgets and have limited time for offering professional development sessions. The primary limitation of my project is that it is not a comprehensive training on working with SLIFE, but rather an introduction to the topic that provides an overview of their needs, opportunities for reflection on improving current practices, recommendations for working with SLIFE in the classroom, and resources for further study on the topic

Opportunities for Future Research and Next Steps

The research related to students with limited or interrupted education (SLIFE) is limited. Very few statistics are available for this category of English learners. SLIFE tend to get lumped together with other English learners, whether discussing school dropout rates or literacy development needs. Any research that takes a closer look at this diverse population of students will contribute to the field. In particular, more data is needed on

high school graduation rates and dropout rates for students with limited or interrupted

education. One area that came to light for me as I began to work with SLIFE is the lack

of appropriate curriculum and texts that exist for secondary SLIFE. As Dr. Short (2015)

cautions in the Focus on SLIFE WIDA bulletin, secondary emergent readers should not

be reading children's books aimed at students in the primary grades. As a teacher of

SLIFE, I can attest to the difficulty of finding texts and curriculum at lower reading levels

that are age appropriate for middle and high school students. Another area of possible

future research would be taking a closer look at SLIFE who arrive to the United States

from Latin America. According to Custodio and O'Loughlin (2017), the largest number

of students with limited or interrupted formal education come from Latin American

countries. It is imperative that educators understand the push factors that have led to the

flow of undocumented families and unaccompanied minors to the United States.

Communicating Results and Contribution to the Profession

In my current teaching position, I am a member of both the intervention team and

the professional development (PD) team. One of my responsibilities is to create and

present training sessions for content teachers to help them better meet the needs of

English learners in their classrooms. I created this project to be used by any middle or

high school educator to present designated during PD time. I have attempted to create the

project in such a way that others can easily duplicate or adapt it. I plan to present this PD

in my current school, as well as share the project with other educators in my network so

that they may use it to raise awareness about the needs of SLIFE in secondary schools. In

the future, I plan to create a teacher website where I will post this and other professional

development sessions that I have created and delivered. I believe this project is a benefit

to the profession because it fills a gap in teacher preparation and provides a resource that any middle or high school could implement during annual professional development.

Summary

The purpose of this Capstone project has been to research the question: *How can English learners with limited or interrupted formal education best be supported at the secondary level?* In this final chapter, I have provided context for my project, shared my major leanings, revisited the literature review, shared implications, limitations, and possible next steps, and, finally, reflected on the contribution this project will make to the profession.

This Capstone process has been both exhausting and rewarding. There were times when I did not think I would be able to finish. In the end, I persevered. Despite the struggles, the Capstone process confirmed for me my love of learning. I am always seeking out new information and am eager to share it with others. Through the vehicle of the Capstone, I was able to channel that energy and create a project that will not only help me and my colleagues, but others educators, as well. Most importantly, it confirmed for me my passion for my students, teaching, and collaborating with others.

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