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# Professional Development For Educators In Order To Support English Learner Students From Oral Cultures

Xue Xiong

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PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT FOR EDUCATORS IN ORDER TO SUPPORT  
ENGLISH LEARNER STUDENTS FROM ORAL CULTURES

by

Xue Xiong

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

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Capstone Project Facilitators: Maggie Struck, Patty Born Selly

Content Expert: Anna Parvi

Peer Reviewers: Rachel Ann Durkee and Gloria Narabrook

The notion of equity as sameness only makes sense when all students are *exactly* the same.

Gloria Gladson-Billings, *The DreamKeepers*

There is hardly an oral culture or a predominantly oral culture left in the world today that is not somehow aware of the vast complex of powers forever inaccessible without literacy. This awareness is agony for persons rooted in primary orality, who want literacy passionately but who also know very well that moving into the exciting world of literacy means leaving behind much that is exciting and deeply loved in the earlier oral world.

We have to die to continue living.

Walter J. Ong, *Orality and Literacy*

### **Acknowledgements**

There are not enough words or languages that can express my gratitude for my loving spouse, Bomnorng, and my beautiful son, Kinzo. There were many nights when Mommy had to work. On those nights Daddy made dinner and put Kinzo to bed. And Kinzo, not understanding, was left without his Mommy. From the bottom of my soul: ua tsaug, arkoun, thank you. Mommy loves you both very much.

Thank you to my parents for loving and supporting me. For believing that their daughter, a daughter of immigrants, was capable of taking on the world. My success is your success. My achievements are your achievements. You didn't have to get a formal education to be the best teachers a daughter could ask for.

Thank you to all the amazing amazonian women who continue to shine and be amazing. I gladly bask in the rays of your light and am thankful you are a part of my life. You have shaped me, and allowed me to be me. This is by no means by order of importance, you all are uniquely lovely and I love you each in a different way: Ka Chang Xiong, Xee Yang, Mai Jou Yang, Lamee Yang, Foua Xiong, Jenny Xiong, Rachel Durkee, Dae Selcer, Kelsey Romero, Charise Powell, Gloria Narabrook...and the list goes on.

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## CHAPTER ONE

### Introduction

English Learner (EL) students are identified by looking at a students' primary language as well as a language proficiency assessment. EL students must learn English while simultaneously learn academic content through the same language they are still learning. This capstone is not only about EL students but EL students who come from oral languages and cultural backgrounds. Oral cultures are languages that are based on the oral exchange of stories and information. Some of these languages may have created a written language but is recent enough that many people within that community may not necessarily know the written aspect of their language. There are also those who never learned their written language due to a variety of circumstances.

EL students are a growing population in the U.S. education system that needs to be addressed and supported. It is vital that our educational curriculum reflects that of our students and is structured in ways that EL students can be validated, celebrated and capable of exchanging knowledge, not just receiving it. The research question that will guide this capstone is, *"How can I create professional development for educators in order to support English Learner students from oral cultures?"*

### Context

#### **My history.**

My story does not truly start with me. It starts with a people. A people that do not have a country but have the strength of endurance, of survival. The Hmong people have been nomads throughout history, trying to find a place to exist in peace. It is said that



Hmong have come from China and migrated down into southeast Asia. That's where my story begins. Nao Cha Xiong and Ka Chang Xiong were born and raised in Laos. They survived the Secret War and pledged to keep their children safe by taking one of the biggest risks of their lives: coming to the United States of America.

They were sponsored by a church and set out to create a strong foundation in a foreign place for their children in Wausau, Wisconsin. My family later moved to Eau Claire, Wisconsin and that was where I was born and raised. I grew up in a large family that predominantly spoke Hmong. Fortunately, I grew up always being told of my people and our ability to survive. I always knew what I came from, even if my family and the Hmong community do not have a country to claim as their own.

This is relevant because once I started pre-school, I got lost. My ability to show my knowledge was handicapped due to the fact that my white teachers' ears did not understand the words coming from my mouth; and vice versa. I learned how to adapt, but in doing so I also lost a vital part of myself: my Hmong language. This story is not new, it is not necessary unique; but it does matter.

By providing some context, I offer some insight to my readers about where I come from, why I am doing this work and why they should care, too. I speak by providing the context before giving the example. It was the way I was raised, through an oral culture, through stories. This is the way my brain is wired. It may take a small wait before I get to "the point" but it is because I want you, as the listener, to also understand the context that surrounds what I am trying to convey.

This work is important due to the fact that I am from an oral culture. I grew up being illiterate in my first language (L1) and I have become successful in my second language of English (L2), but at a cost. I am interested in this because I want to understand more about myself and how I absorbed language, in the hopes of creating structures that support EL students who also come from oral cultures. When my students struggle to find the language to transmit their ideas, I can empathize because I have been there. This project is for the little girl I used to be, for all of the oral cultural students who struggle to find traction and success in a school that is obsessive about print culture.

Events and incidents do not occur in isolation but in context and in connection with everything else that is occurring. This is how I, along with many oral cultures, understand the world around us. It is a different way of existing, but often times our students are told, or nudged, to do things a certain way. A very white American way of thinking and conveying information. So much so that stories are lost. The magic and knowledge of oral stories have less bearing to the written words in a book. Books and the written word are seen as more vital than the stories orally passed down through generations.

By creating a platform for students to show and hone those oral skills will allow them to realize the gift they received from their families and to continue using such skills. This platform is vital, this curriculum is necessary to help fill the gaps to push our students upward. My goal in this capstone is that platform. It will not be the answer to working with all ELs from oral cultures; it will not provide everything an educator may want or need in a professional development—but it is a step in the right direction. This

direction of culturally responsive teaching that will slowly pave the way to a more equitable and obtainable education. It is about doing what is right.

My personal story and those of my parents may not seem directly pertinent to this capstone and what I am trying to accomplish in creating a professional development, but I disagree. We do not exist as singular floating blobs of paint on a canvas, but part of something bigger. And in order to understand that blob of paint, we must look at the big picture. We must see the context in which we exist, in which our students exist. Some of our English Learner students not only have to filter through everything they hear, see, read and write but also have to create a filter due to their oral language backgrounds. This is their context.

All of our EL students may share similar experiences but *all* are unique and all matter. They come to school with their whole selves, not just the “school” part. These are whole children. We can do our part by providing professional development for educators to better meet student needs. So educators can provide curriculum that reflects their students’ cultural practices and allows the students to be the knowledge bearer, not just the knowledge receiver. Having this curriculum can address some of these gaps in which our students are not being represented. In addition to filling the gaps that educators may not know even exist.

### **Statistics.**

The statistics show that oral cultural ELs need more. The National Center for Education Statistics (2017), reports that in the academic school year of 2014-2015 the average percentage of English Learners in public schools by state was 9.4%. Of the

eleven most commonly reported home languages of EL learners in public schools two of those languages are orally based: Hmong and Somali. This is directly relevant to educators because the Hmong and Somali populations are a growing community in this state.

### **Research and questions.**

This research will tackle how to create professional development for educators to best support English Learners students from oral cultures. While creating my research question, I found myself asking more questions. These questions will affect what my final product will be and how it will be produced.

One of these questions revolve around the practices, systems and biases we encounter in the education system. For example, how can I bring awareness around the *process* of how oral cultural ELs acquire information? In this case, process refers to the implementation of curriculum, the ins and out of how interactions are taking place in the classroom, the accommodations that are present for our EL students and how our students come to understand the content.

Through my teaching experience, I have found that my elementary students are excited about the process of learning. The how, when, why and exploration of a topic. In contrast, my high school students focus on the end result, more specifically the grade for their finished product: be that an essay, project or worksheet. I have also found this mentality similarly reflected by the teachers as well. Part of this, obviously, is in due part to the cognitive development of the students. In doing this capstone, I hope to capture that excited sense of learning my elementary students have and my high school students

have seem to have lost. I want teachers to want the how, when, why and excitement of learning to drive their instruction. The emphasize the process over the finished product.

Another question plaguing my thoughts is: what skills can we utilize from oral cultures that allow EL students to be successful in class? I believe this asset based thinking is present in pockets throughout our country. But it is not enough. By creating a professional development that believes in the strengths of our students, it will help not only students be engagement and validation; but it will also help teachers to think of our ELs as an asset instead of an extra layer of teaching or planning. As teachers' biases change from deficit to asset based, students and families can feel like they are a part of the educational or school community.

And lastly, how does our systemic reliance on literacy negatively impact our students from oral cultures? Our current society is built on the inherent assumption that everyone is literate in English. From street signs to grocery aisle. From transportation systems to job applications. To be illiterate in English and live in the United States is extremely difficult. On the surface level, having a literate society and system is great; but how can we provide an equitable education and society by lifting up other cultural practices?

People from oral cultures tend to talk over one another and yet still be able to follow the string of conversation. This is stifled in schools because the expectation that one person must speak at a time so that someone can record their thoughts. There is not a celebration of citing from memory an entire origin stories filled with depth and details; when you could just read about it. It doe not celebrate the ability to listen and retain

information quickly for oral recitation. This capstone hopes to capture oral practices that exist in oral cultures and produce tools to help educators use them to push learning and content.

### **Goal of Study**

The goal of this capstone is about creating professional development to support EL students from oral backgrounds, I want to emphasize the importance of the process as well as the end product. It is not solely about painting the entire picture so I have a finished product at the end. It is about focusing on how you interacted with colors and create nuances within the painting that makes it great. It is very much about the learning process that occurs while working toward the end product.

A few years back, I was teaching first graders and decided to do an oral storytelling unit. We sat in circles drinking hot chocolate and shared about our families. We told stories and I tried to track how well my students were listening. My students brought in artifacts that had special meaning to them and shared with the class. They wrote *Where I'm From* poems then had their families do one in their primary language. We ended this unit with students and their families creating a poster to represent them and shared it with the class. Throughout this unit there was very little writing and reading involved. There were zero worksheets. This was about the exchange of information and through storytelling. Students were able to create authentic language and interactions with very little interventions from the teacher.

What I came away with was the absolute certainty that my students were engaged in the content. Not only were they engaged, but their families were engaged. This was

how we created academic learning through oral practices. This is something I want to see more across all levels of languages, grades and skills. My students, who had more difficulty writing, especially loved having the opportunity to speak and be successful without being told be to quiet and listen.

My goal as a teacher, is to provide material and information that reflects that of my students and families. My goal as a teacher, is to provide opportunities for students to shine, to learn and to grow. My duty as a teacher is to use the strengths and knowledge my students and families already have and apply that to academic content. My duty as a teacher, is to provide a quality education, and in order to do so I must know my students and families in order to allow them to shine.

### **Summary**

To summarize we, as educators, must learn to adapt our teaching and curriculum to reflect our ever-changing students and families. We need to have curriculum that supports our English Learner students who come from oral languages and cultures. In our pursuit to be educated and our absolute devotion to literacy; we have overlooked entire communities who flourish on a different rhythm. We need to teach, using curriculum, in ways that uplifts the strengths of our oral language and culture students while also giving them the gift of literacy in English.

### **Preview of Chapter Two**

Chapter two will discuss the academic and historical research context surrounding my goal of creating a professional development for educators in order to support EL students from oral cultures. The research covered in this chapter include: oral cultures,

second language acquisition, mindsets and perceptions and finally, curriculum, instruction and research. This research will form the foundation of my argument and necessity of a professional development in this area.



## CHAPTER TWO

### **Introduction**

The purpose of this chapter is to capture the academic dialogue surrounding my research question, “*How can I create professional development for educators in order to support English Learner students from oral cultures?*” This literature review focuses on the following four topics: oral cultures, second language acquisition, mindsets and perceptions, and curriculum, instruction and research.

### **Topic Summaries**

#### **Oral cultures.**

This topic provides context and background on communities that come from cultures that are based on oral stories. This exists outside of print culture and can be difficult to understand especially in our very print based society. Oral culture encompasses not only the exchange of information through orally sharing but a complete way of life and how one comprehends the world around them.

#### **Second language acquisition.**

Second Language Acquisition (SLA) is a framework in which many theories stem off of. I strive to demonstrate how SLA is used to help support English Learner (EL) students. Although there is a conversation surrounding SLA and EL students, there is limited research on SLA of EL learners who are oral based or “illiterate” in their primary language (L1).

#### **Mindsets and perceptions.**

This portion seeks to capture and document the impact EL students experience when educators' good intentions are at play. Good intentions does not equate a good impact. In order to ensure educators' impact on EL students are positive and culturally responsive, I show research around our biases and how that affects the way we perceive ourselves and the world around us. This in turn, affects the way educators teach and the inherent messages they are sending EL students, specifically those from oral cultures.

### **Curriculum, instruction and research.**

The intention behind this project is to create two professional development workshops that addresses supporting EL students from oral cultures. The research around current curriculum, instruction and research for ELs and ELs from oral cultures will help guide the planning and implementation of this capstone project. In order to provide a comprehensive professional development, I seek to find the best practices that support oral based EL students as well as my audience of adult learners.

### **Oral Cultures**

In the world of academia there are prescribed terms to use when referring to an idea, concept or theory. In the case of oral cultures, there has been limited research.. Therefore there are different terms used in different ways. To norm this paper I will be using oral cultures synonymously with oral languages to refer to groups of people whose only or main form of communication is through speech or storytelling.

It is worth mentioning that other texts and research may use terms such as 'orality' or 'pre-literate' but this paper will utilizing the terms oral culture or oral language; which may include the terms mentioned above (Ong, 2002; DeCapua and

Marshall, 2011). The term oral cultures was chosen for this paper because it is a way of life for entire cultures. It encompasses more than just a part that is seen in an academic setting. Oral cultures, in this paper, also encompassed languages that have recently created a written portion of their language but is still new enough that the majority of the language users are oral based. Languages such as Hmong and Somali.

### **Hmong oral culture.**

Hmong is a culture and language that is ever growing in the state of Minnesota. By showing some contextual information about the oral culture in this community, we are better able to make connections to other oral cultures in addition to how to better serve Hmong students. Although Hmong now has a written language, most of the culture is still heavily influenced by the oral cultural origins.

The Hmong are an ethnic community without a country. They can be traced back to China but their origins are obscure (Thao, 2006). The Hmong are a peaceful group who make their living through agricultural means and like to keep to themselves. It was when China wanted more assimilation from the Hmong that they fled in order to keep their lingual and cultural independence.

The Hmong culture is infused in oral traditional practices, from everyday use to rituals. The role of speaking and oral traditions are an integral part of the culture. This is demonstrated by Thao (2006) in traditional stories, songs, sacred chanting songs, funeral and wedding songs, legends, rituals and sayings.

Orality in Hmong is weaved into multiple levels in their culture. The elders of the Hmong community use stories to help teach children the ways of their culture and

reinforce this by modeling work ethic, communal living and importance of oral knowledge exchange. Stories are many time used for littler children. On the other hand, songs, poems and riddles are used by the Hmong youth for courting.

Oral language is also prevalent in the religious shaman practices by Hmong elders in the community. Elders say that their rituals are not written down because there are different worlds in which people and spirits exist. It is important that each stay in their own boundaries “in order to balance the living and dead cycle (Thao, 2006, p. 18).” This may have contributed to the continual theme of orality in the Hmong language instead of developing into a written language before.

The chants and songs associated with traditions and rituals are memorized. This means that shamans may memorize up to thousands of different chants and songs that are used in different settings. Some of these are so complex that it may take months or years to fully master. A strategy named in how stories, songs and chants are memorized is through formulas and repetition. The shaman learn from other shaman through guidance and the use of formulas and repetition until they have memorized all that they need to. Young people learn from hearing their elders sing songs and repeat those songs until they are memorized.

### **Somali oral culture.**

Another language population that is growing in Minnesota, is the Somali language. Similar to Hmong, they have created a written language in recent years but the language and those who use it are still mostly oral based. The Somali language had a strong culture associated particularly with poetry.

Andrezejewski (2011) shows that in Somali communities poetry played a vital role and used in many aspects of life such as disputes, weddings, divorces, etc. The entire process of composing, memorizing, sharing and dissecting poetry and its content is done orally; which requires a tremendous amount of memorization skills.

Poets were also expected to abide by practices that are parallel to literary culture. For example, poets creating original poems have an unwritten oral copyright rules regarding how to present another poet's work. The expectation is that you are not producing your own work but that of another poet and must try to deliver that oral piece as close to the original. So even though there were no written rules designating which poems belonged to which poet, members of the community knew who was the originator. This indicates a complex network of understanding oral stories and organization.

The shift in oral Somali language occurred with the use of radios and tape recorders. Although the language was still held similar characteristics to the oral language of Somali it was changing with the use of technology. Andrezejewski (2011) refers to this as "techno-oral literature" in which an informal Somali language is used and written to navigate radio and broadcasting. This in turn changed the way oral language was perceived and internalized. No longer were oral stories, poems and songs required to be memorized with such emphasis because the radio and tape recorders could capture the oral history.

Although technology is continuing to grow, Somali still continues to be oral based and using radio as a form of communication. Although poems are still used, they are being used in a different form via radio. This indicates that although the Somali language

is growing and adapting to the digital world, they are still very much rooted in their oral cultural roots of storytelling and reciting poetry.

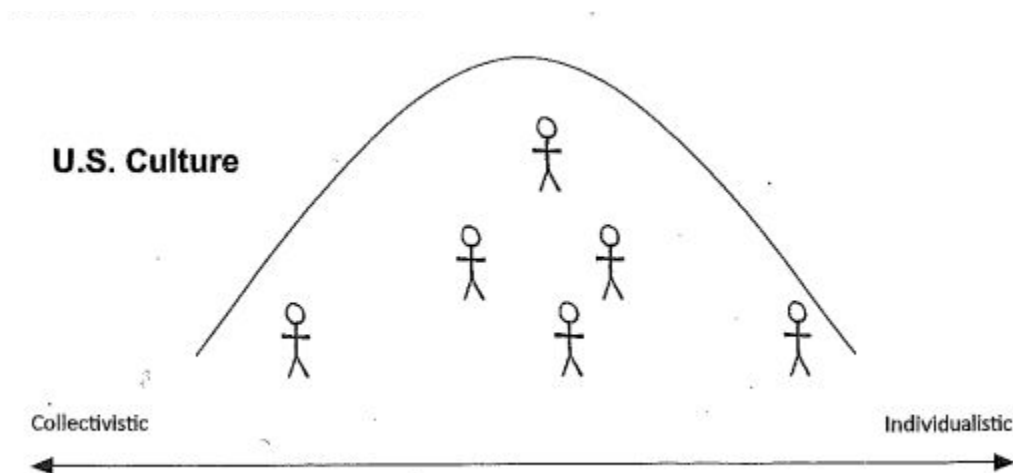
**Students with limited or interrupted formal education.**

In the pursuit to find information pertaining to students from oral cultures, the SLIFE population comes up due to overlap. Although they are not the same population as students from oral cultures, they can both apply to one student. Students with Limited or Interrupted Formal Education (SLIFE) are a unique population that needs a specific set of skills and services (DeCapua, Smathers & Tang, 2009). These students are identified by the type of formal education they have received thus far. Possible indicators may include a lack of previous school records or gaps, students and/or family stating they have not attended school, frequent absences, poor literacy level in native language, and weak understanding of content in their grade level (DeCapua, Smathers & Tang, 2009).

Students with limited or interrupted education thus relies on their oral skills to navigate the world around them, thus honing their oral language and skills. This is similar to students who come from oral cultural languages because they already naturally rely on their oral skills. Both populations can show similar characteristics and patterns in oral language skills and language acquisition.

Many students who are from oral cultures or SLIFE come from collectivistic cultures (DeCapua & Marshall, 2011). This means their identify and how they view themselves is intricately woven into their community as a whole. This differs from the U.S. where it is commonly an individualistic culture; which focuses very much on an individual self instead of a collective culture. Many cultures exist in a range between

collectivistic and individualistic cultures, which DeCapua and Marshall term as the bell curve of culture.



Retrieved from DeCapua & Marshall, 2011

Although it is important to not over generalize when speaking about particular cultures and groups, it is important to keep in mind how cultures operate in order to better serve their needs. The idea behind understanding the cultural background and practices of your students will help teachers understand how to create learning spaces that allow those cultural practices to come into play.

Another population that overlaps with oral culture students are Low-Educated Second Language and Literacy Acquisition (LESLLA) students (Vinogradov & Bigelow, 2012). LESLLA has a worldwide view on language acquisition and oral languages not just concentrated in the U.S. This is important because our EL students come from all over the world and has been shaped by those experiences and languages. It seems fitting to have an entity that exists on a global scale.

A common characteristic of LESLLA learners are that many of them are not print literate, who may or may not come from an oral culture, and existing with high levels of multilingualism. These people, which include oral cultures, do not need print literacy to gain another language. They can rely on their oral skills and acquire the language for their neighbors to communicate and exchange information. The exchange of knowledge is communal through face-to-face interaction, not that of a book or print.

### **Characteristics of oral cultures.**

Oral cultures do not have a sense of shame about lack of print knowledge. But print based cultures do see illiteracy as a stigma. Because oral culture students were not raised to be reliant on print, they do not turn to print as a primary source of information or learning. Instead there is a communal way of interacting and gaining knowledge from one another through oral interactions.

Oral cultures use redundancy and repetition (backlooping) and rhythm as a strategy to better remember information, this is different than print because it can continue to move forward instead of looping back. Oral students have a hard time extracting meaning from print and instead continually turn back to their oral cultural practices of interacting with peer to pull understanding from content/reading (DeCapua & Marshall, 2011).

Characteristics of oral cultural languages have systems which help the speaker remember. This means using tactics such as repetition to help remember. This may mean the speaker must repeat over and over in order to remember, as well as speaking in a



rhythm that has a lot of repetition. Similar to how a poem may have repetition, oral cultures also utilize repetition (DeCapua & Marshall, 2011).

Another characteristic is the use of formulas. Similar to how formulas in math are used to help mathematicians understand the math, they are using and the relationship between numbers, formulas used in language is used to help memorization. This method is used to retell stories, songs, chants and basically any sort of knowledge that is passed on from one generation to another.

### **Second Language Acquisition**

In the Second Language Acquisition (SLA) research bank of knowledge there is very little information on SLA for people who are oral based or have little experience with literacy (Bigelow & Tarone, 2004). Much of the research in which this theory is based on is derived from research with participants that are literate in a first language (L1) and/or second language (L2). This indicates there is a gap in the academic knowledge bank addressing how people from oral cultures or limited literacy acquires another language.

Tarone's research (2009) analyzed the relationship between L1 literacy and oral processing in L2 through elicited imitation. They concluded there is a relationship between the two. For example, learners with a literacy background were more likely to notice complex syntactic patterns and even acquire them. On the other hand, learners with less literacy were less likely to notice certain language structures, such as semantically redundant language. And the chances of them acquiring these skills over time are less likely as well.

## **Mindset and Perceptions**

Conceptualizing oral culture when one is so deeply embedded in print culture is a difficult task. In order for someone from a print culture to understand, they need to refer to something tangible, something within their lexicon of knowledge. This is true for all learners. Ong (2002) best describes this by giving the analogy of explaining modes of transportation. If a person has never seen a horse, someone else may describe it by using a vehicle as an example. For example, they are both modes of transportation but instead of having wheels a horse has hooves, etc. Thus everything a horse *is*, is composed of what it is *not*. “You cannot without serious and disabling distortion describe a primary phenomenon by starting with a subsequent secondary phenomenon and paring away the differences (Ong, 2002, p. 13).”

This is what is happening in the world of educators, linguists and researchers working with EL students from oral cultures. They refer to oral cultures as pre-literate, non-literate, limited literate or semi-literate. They have a negative connotation because everything that is oral culture is referenced in a print culture lens. My goal is to utilize language that speaks about what oral culture *is* by describing and naming the skills that are inherent in this culture.

Instead of focusing on what students are lacking linguistically or academically, educators should instead focus on their strengths and knowledge that they already bring to the class. Students bring linguistic, cultural, experiential, social and emotional assets to the classroom learning community (WIDA). The WIDA Consortium is an organization that is used to support and assess EL students and their language. This organization

believes that students are assets to every classroom, while also having a wealth of potential. The table below breaks down WIDA's Can Do philosophy about EL Students.

<b>WIDA Believes in Language Learners' Assets, Contributions, and Potential</b>		
<b>Assets</b>	<b>Contributions</b>	<b>Potential</b>
<b>Linguistic</b>	Knowledge of multiple languages, varying representation of ideas, metalinguistic and metacognitive awareness, diverse strategies for language learning	Bi- or multilingual practices, abilities which learners utilize to communicate effectively across multiple contexts, multiple ways of expressing their thinking
<b>Cultural</b>	Different perspectives, practices, beliefs, social norms, ways of thinking	Bi- or multicultural practices as well as unique and varied perspectives, ability to develop relationships in a global society, ability to navigate a variety of sociocultural contexts
<b>Experiential</b>	Varied life and educational experiences, exposure to unique topics, diverse approaches to learning and expressing content knowledge	Enrichment of the school curriculum, extracurricular, and community opportunities, success in school and beyond
<b>Social and Emotional</b>	Personal interests and needs, awareness of/empathy for diverse experiences, knowledge and enrichment of community resources	Ability to form and sustain positive relationships, and broker meaningful interactions among peers and others within and beyond school

Retrieved from WIDA

Ladson-Billings (1995) believes in order to be an effective teacher, educators must meet all of the culturally relevant pedagogy criterias. These criteria include: students achieving academic success, a development or maintenance of student cultural competence and developing a critical consciousness that allows students to question the world and systems around them.

Ladson-Billings documents teachers who are identified as culturally competent teachers. With every example there is a certain expectation in terms of mindset. All of the educators have very high expectations of their students and create avenues that cater to

student interest. These students in turn rise to the expectations and experience their own mental shift of what their capabilities are.

All of this is built around a communal space of responsibility and accountability. Every student is responsible for ensuring no one is left behind academically. The family and community are pulled into the classrooms to help guide learning by bringing their expertise and lived experiences to the classroom. A big difference in not only bringing the family and community into the classroom, is that these educators see themselves as a part of the community in which these students live. The sector of school and community are not separate but interwoven and students see how community members can be educators and be both invested in the students' education as well as the wider community. This creates a positive feedback loop that is supportive and healthy for students, families and the community.

### **Curriculum, Instruction and Research**

The best form of differentiation for students is customizing the work to the population of students you have; taking into account linguistic, cultural and other experiences or needs. There is currently a lack of curriculum for oral cultures, but there are models out there that can support oral cultures. For example, many of the curriculum and models that are created for Students with Limited or Interrupted Formal Education (SLIFE) as well as Low Educated Second Language and Literacy Acquisition (LESSLA) at times overlap with students from oral cultures. This means the curriculum, instruction and research that is already out there regarding these two populations can be applied, when necessary, to students with oral cultures.

Although there is a lack of curriculum, instruction and research on oral cultures, I will be covering what is available that can be used to help supplement the support and development of students from oral cultures. These include: learning paradigms, the Mutually Adaptive Learning Paradigm (MALP), program models, approaches and practices.

### **Learning paradigms.**

The paradigm examples given below will be mainly focusing on SLIFE students. It is important to note that although oral cultural students may, at times, fall under the category of SLIFE, SLIFE does not always fall into the category of oral cultures. Given the lack of information on oral cultures, this SLIFE learning paradigm is given as an example and basis to build off of. Many of the methods mentioned are applicable to oral cultures.

The first learning paradigm DeCapua and Marshall (2011) offers is conditions for learning. This means creating a culture that is appropriate for learning. This is especially true for SLIFE students which overlaps with oral cultural students. In order to have that cultural learning space, there needs to be clear expectations set up and agreed by both educators and students. A big part of an educator's expectations are meeting students where they are most likely to learn. This means understanding the importance of interconnectedness and relevancy.

Students need to be able to connect content to their lives and collective community. They need to see the meaning of the content in relation to the world around

them. The content needs to have an immediate relevance to students' lives now, this way students can understand why they are learning the content and how it can be applied.

The second paradigm consists of process for learning (DeCapua & Marshall, 2011). SLIFE and oral cultures identify themselves as a collective part of a bigger community. This extends into the classroom and learning. The students are a community and therefore must learn in one. This is counter to the U.S. American practice of individualism and independence. As a collective, students are able to learn and grow communally in addition to sharing the responsibility of learning together.

A key part of processing for learning for SLIFE and oral cultures is the focus on oral transmission. Since many of these students do not have regular interactions with print culture they do not rely on it to obtain information the way a peer who was raised in print culture would do. Information is shared and gathered through interacting with others, this further affirms the need for communal learning. As a result, educators must provide students with ample time and opportunities to engage with peers about content and explore information through authentic peer interaction. This differs from the U.S. educational method of students engaging and exchanging with teachers. Indeed this would still take place, but there needs to be a specific time and space for students to engage with one another.

The last learning paradigm is providing appropriate activities for learning (DeCapua & Marshall, 2011). As stated above, students need to be able to visualize the relevancy of what they are doing in the classroom to the world outside of the school. Activities that are embedded in content need to show the relevancy but also need to be

*shown*. Using a gradual release method of educator demonstrating and students observing to collaboratively working together to students either independently working together or alone helps foster learning.

**The mutually adaptive learning paradigm (MALP).**

The Mutually Adaptive Learning Paradigm (MALP) combines the learning paradigms to application to create a model that can be used and adapted for SLIFE and oral cultures (DeCapua & Marshall, 2011).. The first component focuses on teachers accepting students' conditions for learning. This is essentially stating that educators need to meet students where the students are at. Educators can show students this by providing content that is immediately relevant and fostering a community in that class. The more connected students feel to the teacher, the more willing they are to take risks in learning.

The second component focuses on combining processes for learning. This will look like a transition from shared responsibility as a collective community to holding each other accountable for learning and responsibility. This is not to say communal learning is no longer possible, but students must also learn to work individually in order to be successful in other contexts. The second component is also about transitioning from oral based to print based. Educators must lead students through repeated modeling how to use print to help understand the world around them. Through print, students are able to develop a stronger relationship with literacy and navigating the print culture of the U.S.

The last component involves the students learning new classroom activities. This involves scaffolding and helping students retain information in their schema. Students have a difficult time recalling information if they are unfamiliar with it and have not been

exposed to it before. Through extended practice, students are able to obtain and retain more information. The practice activities may differ in information and contexts but should focus on the same skill set until students feel comfortable before moving to another skill set.

### **EL program models.**

The first program model that schools can implement is the newcomer program. There are various names for high schools that host such programs but usually known as newcomer high schools, international high schools or academies (DeCapua, Smathers & Tang, 2009). This is usually for older students who has been in the U.S. for three or less years. It is a sheltered class that directly meets the high needs of acquiring English alongside content. The urgency is high due to the age of the students and wanting to ensure they have the necessary skills to transition into mainstream classes and graduate.

Another program model is a pull-out model. This model requires the EL students to be taken out of mainstream classes into another space with an EL teacher. The linguistic and literacy skills are weaved into content to support EL students' learning and understanding of content material. A pull-out model may differ depending on the school.

The last program model is a push-in or co-taught model. This model requires the collaboration and co-planning both the EL and content teacher. By combining both their knowledge in their excelled content they are able to provide an academically accessible lesson to EL students. The actual implementation of having two teachers in the classroom may vary depending on the teachers and their teaching styles.

### **Approaches and practices.**



Reder, Vanek and Wrigley in Vinogradov and Bigelow (2012) show that for LESSLA learners digital literacy is an essential part of their educational process. Providing digital literacy to students gives them skills to exist and be successful in the digital age we are in. They argue that allowing students to interact with the digital world using their primary language (L1) will in turn develop their secondary language (L2). The digital world serves as the basis where both languages can be developed. This also allows students to code-switch between languages and the digital language.

Using digital programs allow for frequent interactions and feedback for students. This is helpful for EL students that are learning how to engage with English. The internet is easily adaptive and can also adapt to student levels quickly. This allows students to learn at the level they are at as well as the pace they are comfortable with.

DeCapua, Smathers and Tang (2009) offer approaches that specifically cater to SLIFE students and their academic and linguistic development. They also cater to the unique needs of SLIFE students who may have very little experience in schools. These approaches I have chunked and labeled as: small groups and communal learning; experiential and project-based learning; and differentiation and scaffolding.

Small groups and communal learning is a practice that provides many benefits to EL students. By enabling students to work in small groups they are able to produce authentic English language and engage with others to practice their language in a relatively safe environment. Students are also able to take on more difficult tasks that they may not be able to do independently. Given that EL students from oral cultures are community based, this allows for students to feel comfort in learning as a community

instead of being tested individually on English that they are still acquiring. This practice validates their cultural experiences while also pushing academic content.

Experiential and project based learning are centered around relevancy and application. Experiential learning is most beneficial in the form of field trips that allow students to get out of the classroom and apply what they have learned to the world around them. Students are also able to experience things they may not have learned or understood in a class but having experienced it can use language to express what took place. On the other hand, project based learning allows students to work together and delegate tasks and responsibilities that fit their ability and pace. Students are more engaged when they are able to see the correlation between what is being done now and the end product of what they are working toward.

Differentiation may look like grouping students based of language levels or skills levels. This allows students to feel safe at the pace they are learning and are able to rely on a peer to help if necessary. Scaffolding is about meeting students where they are at and providing aid that helps them access the content. This may look like visuals, modeling, context for content specific tasks and vocabulary support.

### **Summary**

In summary, oral cultures have a wealth of skills that are not being utilized in the classroom. Bringing students' cultural practices and strengths into the classroom not only is validating but also engaging for students. Although there is not currently enough research out on second language acquisition for oral cultures, we are able to gather information from SLIFE and LESSLA research that at may overlap with oral cultures.

Mindsets and perceptions are important for both educators and students. Not only do educators need to analyze their own mindsets and perceptions, but also be aware of how that is projected onto students that how that is then internalized. To believe students are capable helps students believe they are capable.

The current curriculum, instruction and research on oral cultures is not concrete or very big, but can be pieced together using information from other research. The many models of how to service EL students to effective strategies are created all to help support the whole child and their educational journey. Similar to how educators tailor work specifically for their students and their needs, this literature review was tailored and put together to fill the academic gap of how to serve students from oral cultures.

While I was growing up, my family was financially quite poor. Yet I never knew I was poor. I understood that my siblings and I did not have as many nice things as other kids, but I did not know we were *poor*. It was not until I was older that I learned society deemed my upbringing as poor. The negative connotations attached to the idea of growing up poor made me embarrassed and ashamed as a teen. But it was not until society told me that I was poor and it was not a good way to live, that I felt such a way. When I was much older I realized how my family was poor in money but rich in family, love and support. I am very proud by my slim monetary upbringing that has helped shape me; because even without money my parents taught me the values of a strong work ethic and a will that can literally take me places.

I tell this story not because I seek empathy, but because there is a correlation between living an experience and being aware of the connotations attached to that

experience. I also grew up in an oral culture and never saw it as a negative until I entered school and teachers questioned my lack of reading, my lack of ability and how very much behind I was compared to my peers. What would have made the difference is teachers making the effort to give me and kids like me an opportunity to use our oral skills as a means to demonstrate our knowledge.

It does not have to be seen as negative or lacking. It is what you do with the information you have that can make a student feel like they are contributing to the community or feel completely inadequate. This is for all of the oral cultural students who have been made to feel inadequate, and all the teachers who do not understand what it is like to have skills outside of reading and writing. This next chapter will outline my plans for professional development for educators working with students from oral cultures.

### **Conclusion and Preview of Chapter Three**

The research indicates more work needs to be done in order to support oral cultural EL students' needs. This particular population is unique and not enough information is out there on how educators can support their development and utilize skills they already have. Ong (2002) describes how true consciousness comes from the written word. But I stress to reach consciousness and enter print culture does not mean leaving oral cultural practices behind. I propose that oral cultural skills can be used in collaboration with print skills for a more comprehensive education and set of skills to be active participants in the community.

In the next chapter, I incorporate my literature review ideas and research into planning my project. This capstone project is a two-part professional development

workshops catered to educators in order to best support EL students from oral cultures.

This chapter captures the plans and framework for implementing my professional development workshops.

## CHAPTER THREE

### **Introduction**

This chapter will outline my project in response to my research question: “*How can I create professional development for educators in order to support English Learner students from oral cultures?*” In all of the academic and research work that has been created to support English Learner (EL) students, there is a gap when it comes to students from oral cultural backgrounds. This population consists of communities in which speaking is the dominant form of communication. The relationship they have with print and print culture varies. These oral cultures may not have any written language, may have a newly created written language that they may or may not know and may have a written language, but was never learned.

It is important to understand how to best meet these students’ needs when a teacher enters the class with a positive mindset. These students may have a sporadic or inconsistent experience with school and/or print but they are by no means starting from a blank slate. These students have strengths and skills that can be utilized in the classroom to further content exploration and understanding. The goal of this project is to provide professional development for educators to see the assets these students bring to the classroom and how best to tap into those skills. This chapter will provide a project overview, project description, framework, choice of methods, setting and audience and timeline of this capstone project.

### **Project Description**

This project will be a professional development for educators that work with EL students. Creating and implementing a professional development for educators is the best route in order to have a meaningful impact and an equitable education for EL students from oral cultures. In supporting the development of educators with knowledge, skills and takeaways that can be implemented, students, in turn, are also being supported. The professional development will be a two-part professional development will help develop educators to best support ELs from oral cultures. My hope is this can be a pilot professional development to push for more EL support and have more comprehensive professional development for the district moving forward.

### **Framework and Paradigm**

#### **Adult learning.**

This professional development was created under the framework of Malcolm Knowles (2005) and his work with adult learners. Using his theory of andragogy, this professional development is able to create an environment where the learner is validated for their experience and can contribute to the conversation and work.

Knowles' paradigm for adult learners revolves around six key features that help foster learning. These features are embedded in a collaborative dialogue between educator and adult learner in their attempt to further comprehend information and issues, with the overarching goal to move toward the application of generated ideas.

The first feature is the need to know why learners are learning what is being taught. It is important that adult learners are given context so they can see how such ideas

can be applied. For educators, this is especially important in envisioning planning and the process it takes to create structures that best support student learning.

The second feature revolves around self-directed learning. Similarly to EL students, adult learners have knowledge prior to a professional development or class. Unlike younger EL students, adult learners are able to more clearly articulate those ideas and knowledge and how to apply the new skills with their set of skills already attained. Adult learners must have space in which they are able to direct and process their own learning. This may look like giving a task and allowing learners to work independently and set their own pace.

This ties in with the next feature of experiential techniques. Adult learners come to the table with a large quality of experiences that should be validated and acknowledged. The approach here allows for more collaborative learning to take place than educator giving all the knowledge to the learner. As the experience of adult learners become closely tied to their definition of self-identity, it is essential to acknowledge their experience and identity in their work.

Another feature of adult learning is the readiness to learn mindset. As adults are developmentally at a different place than youth learners, they come prepared to learn what is needed and apply it to real-life situations. This is also prevalent in the following feature of orientation to learning. Adult learners are focusing on life-centered learning, compared to more subject-centered learning from a more youth educational experience. If the information being taught is not catered toward task- or problem-centered issues, adult learners would lose interest.



This leads into the last feature of motivation. Many adult learners have external and internal motivating factors that contribute to their continual search for knowledge. Some external motivations may include better jobs and opportunities or higher salaries. The more pressing motivational factors, though, are the internal ones which stem from the desire to improve oneself, one's quality of life or increase job satisfaction. Courses that are geared toward self-development, relevancy and application foster an effective environment for adult learning. The professional development will be modeled after this method in hopes of creating an atmosphere of experts providing insight, but also learners to gain and apply knowledge to their classes.

My professional development was also heavily influenced by the work of Andrea DeCapua. This particular professional development caters to language teachers and is presented as a way to engage in the academic research of language learners while also reflecting on oneself and one's practice. The professional development focuses on the knowledge base and skills involved in teaching, providing an annotated bibliography for educators to engage with, guiding principles when teaching, a sample unit and planning time.

The last framework that helped shape this professional development is the use of culturally responsive teaching. In the teaching profession, it is imperative that educators understand who they are serving and provide curriculum that meets students where they are at. In order to have a safe and effective learning environment, educators need to co-create the space with students. In order to do so, educators need the tools that will help

them more effectively work with EL and their experiences as well as what is culturally appropriate.

### List of Effective Practices

The following examples are methods and practices gleaned from chapters two and three. The topics and sources vary widely, but are all put together in the hopes of providing a holistic professional development that is centered around oral cultural student support. This section is broken into three parts: EL effective practices, EL oral culture effective practices and equity and culturally responsive teaching effective practices.

#### EL effective practices.

Effective Practice	Source
Opportunities for authentic language production	Zweirs, J. (2008). Building academic language: Essential practices for content classrooms, grades 5-12. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
Visuals	DeCapua, A., Smathers, W., & Tang, L. F. (2009). <i>Meeting the needs of students with limited or interrupted schooling</i> . Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press.
Building context	Vinogradov, P., & Liden, A. (2009). Principled training for LESLLA instructors. <i>LOT Occasional Series, 15</i> , 133-144. <a href="http://dspace.library.uu.nl:8080/handle/1874/297109">http://dspace.library.uu.nl:8080/handle/1874/297109</a>
Relevance	DeCapua, A., Smathers, W., & Tang, L. F. (2009). <i>Meeting the needs of students with limited or interrupted schooling</i> . Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press.
A variety of learning avenues	DeCapua, A., Smathers, W., & Tang, L. F. (2009). <i>Meeting the needs of students with limited or interrupted schooling</i> . Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press.
Using student strengths to guide teaching and learning	DeCapua, A., & Marshall H. W. (2011). <i>Breaking new ground: Teaching students with limited or interrupted formal education in U.S. secondary schools</i> . Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press.
Know students' background	DeCapua, A., Smathers, W., & Tang, L. F. (2009). <i>Meeting the needs of students with limited or interrupted schooling</i> . Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press.

Nurture student confidence	Vinogradov, P., & Liden, A. (2009). Principled training for LESLLA instructors. <i>LOT Occasional Series, 15</i> , 133-144. <a href="http://dspace.library.uu.nl:8080/handle/1874/297109">http://dspace.library.uu.nl:8080/handle/1874/297109</a>
Balance top-down and bottom-up instruction	Vinogradov, P., & Liden, A. (2009). Principled training for LESLLA instructors. <i>LOT Occasional Series, 15</i> , 133-144. <a href="http://dspace.library.uu.nl:8080/handle/1874/297109">http://dspace.library.uu.nl:8080/handle/1874/297109</a>

### EL oral culture effective practices.

Effective Practice	Source
Communal Learning	DeCapua, A., & Marshall H. W. (2011). <i>Breaking new ground: Teaching students with limited or interrupted formal education in U.S. secondary schools</i> . Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press.
Redundancy	DeCapua, A., & Marshall H. W. (2011). <i>Breaking new ground: Teaching students with limited or interrupted formal education in U.S. secondary schools</i> . Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press.
Repetition	Ong, W. J. (2002). <i>Orality and Literacy</i> . New York, NY: Routledge.
Formulas	Ong, W. J. (2002). <i>Orality and Literacy</i> . New York, NY: Routledge.
Weaving content through stories	Watson, J. A. (2017, October). Understanding and integrating traditional education practices of oral cultures as a way of engaging deeply with SLIFE (and everybody else) in the classroom. Presentation presented at the Minnesota English Learner Education (MELED) Conference, Bloomington, MN.
Opportunities for authentic language production	Zweirs, J. (2008). <i>Building academic language: Essential practices for content classrooms, grades 5-12</i> . San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
Celebrate and utilize oral skills (speaking and listening)	Watson, J. A. (2017, October). Understanding and integrating traditional education practices of oral cultures as a way of engaging deeply with SLIFE (and everybody else) in the classroom. Presentation presented at the Minnesota English Learner Education (MELED) Conference, Bloomington, MN.

### Equity and culturally responsive teaching effective practices.

Effective Practice	Source
Windows and mirrors: representation matters	Ladson-Billings, G. (2009). <i>The dreamkeepers: Successful teachers of African American children</i> . San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
Building relationships with students	DeCapua, A., & Marshall H. W. (2011). <i>Breaking new ground: Teaching students with limited or interrupted formal education in U.S. secondary schools</i> . Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press.
Connecting culture and school	DeCapua, A., & Marshall H. W. (2011). <i>Breaking new ground: Teaching students with limited or interrupted formal education in U.S. secondary schools</i> . Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press.
Culturally Relevant Pedagogy	Ladson-Billings, G. (2009). <i>The dreamkeepers: Successful teachers of African American children</i> . San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
Critical Consciousness	Ladson-Billings, G. (1995). But that's just good teaching! The case for culturally relevant pedagogy. <i>Theory into Practice</i> , 34(3). Retrieved from <a href="https://nationalequityproject.files.wordpress.com/2012/03/ladson-billings_1995.pdf">https://nationalequityproject.files.wordpress.com/2012/03/ladson-billings_1995.pdf</a>
Personal reflection and analysis on oneself and practice	Ladson-Billings, G. (2009). <i>The dreamkeepers: Successful teachers of African American children</i> . San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
Bringing community/family to schools and bringing schools to community/family	Ladson-Billings, G. (2009). <i>The dreamkeepers: Successful teachers of African American children</i> . San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

### Summary and Preview of Project Overview

Using a variety of different sources, this professional development will be presented to educators on supporting oral cultural students and their families. It is important educators are including families and the community when teaching because they, too have contributed to the wealth of knowledge that students bring every day.

Through a lens of teaching the whole child, the framework and paradigm seeks to address the needs of students from oral cultures.

The next section will discuss the project overview. This entails the goals of this project capstone as well as more specific information such as setting and the timeline.

The project overview is the basis in which chapter four will be built off of.

## **Project Overview**

### **Description of project.**

This project is a professional development for educators that will help address my research question: “*How can I create professional development for educators in order to support English Learner students from oral cultures?*” Based off the literature review from chapter two, there is limited research on this population, and in order to provide students with an equitable and quality education we must learn how to work with students using the strengths they already have from their previous language(s) and/or culture(s).

This professional development is structured to bracket different times throughout the academic year: beginning and mid-year. This two-part professional development sessions will take place at the beginning of the school year and mid-year with a commitment to finish out the academic year utilizing strategies that support students from oral cultures. The reasoning behind such a structure is to ensure that educators have continual professional development to refine their teaching abilities and ideas. It is important that educators are allowed the time to also be learners and perfect their craft.

My hope is that this professional development will be the pilot for a catalyst of change in EL professional development in this district. The feedback and goal setting

structure of the professional development will help guide the future success rate of not only the professional development but also success with EL students from oral cultures; and in turn many EL students in general.

### **Description of project summary and review of setting and audience.**

The overarching goal is to develop educators, who will then develop EL students. By engaging in a two-part workshop, educators are able to refine their practice and reflect on its effectiveness before implementing it again. This professional development will offer educators small scale implementation skills and tactics as well as pushing for bigger goal setting in which educators can strive toward and develop. This professional development aims to give educators history, context and skills which will enable them to teach content that EL students from oral cultures can connect to.

In the next section, I will address the intended setting and audience for this professional development. In order to provide supports for my target student population of EL students from oral cultures, I must connect to my target audience for this project and align the two.

### **Setting and Audience**

The intended audience for this professional development are educators who come into contact with EL students. This includes educators in both EL and Special Education (SpEd) services as well as educators in the elementary and secondary levels. If we want to strive for a more equitable education for our EL students, we must hold all educators to the standard of knowing how to work with such a population. Not only should educators know how to work with EL students, but further differentiation for students who come

from oral cultures. And in order to do this, I must also gauge where my target audience is in terms of background knowledge and experience, so I can steer them toward a more EL focused and differentiated teaching. This will be done using anecdotal data from the district employees as well as the district data surrounding staff and professional development.

The majority of the educator participants are white, female and from a monolingual a print culture. It is essential when teaching others, especially students of color and EL students, that educators examine their own beliefs, ideology and biases when it comes to working with these populations and what students are capable of. In doing this work, educators must examine themselves in order to better serve the students and families . Being critical analyzers of oneself, how one operates within society and the educational systems, helps us understand, questions and push against the racial and linguistic systems that exist in the United States.

The setting of this professional development will take place in a large urban district that serves the most EL students within the state. Of the 11,287 students, 31% of the student population are identified as EL (Saint Paul Public Schools). Of the 129 languages identified in this district, the top four consist of Hmong, Spanish, Karen and Somali. Two of which are oral based languages.

#### **Project overview summary and preview of project timeline.**

In summary, this professional development project seeks to provide educators a platform in which they are able to build their educational practices in ways that better support EL students from oral cultures. Using dialogue and years of experience,

educators can build an added layer of foundation to this platform and that of the academic and educational knowledge bank of serving EL students; specifically EL students from oral cultures.

This next segment will include an outline of the professional development implementation. It will discuss the execution goals and describe how each workshop will be laid out and aligned to best support educators' learning process. Taking a backward planning approach, this section lays out the actions needed in order to create and provide a comprehensive and overall effective professional development.

### **Project Timeline**

The professional development will be offered through a large urban district office as two professional development workshops that will take place throughout one academic school year. The implementation goal is the 2019-2020 academic school year. This professional development highly encourages participants to attend all sessions in order because it is created to build off one another. These professional development sessions should be implemented at the beginning of the year and mid year. Each session will have a corresponding theme and goals surrounding the support of English Learner students from oral cultures.

The first professional development seeks to educate educators on students from oral cultures. This will be done by introducing educators to EL students from oral cultures through data and anecdotes. Educators will be exposed to a variety of activities that models strategies that support students from oral cultures, such as multiple talking partners. This professional development also seeks to help shape the mentality around



language and oral cultures as a continuum (DeCapua & Marshall, 2011). The students do not come to a classroom with nothing and always has the ability to learn and grow. Educators are given a set of strategies and tools they can explore and utilize in their own teaching. The professional development will end with educators writing a commitment on strategies they will implement to support students from oral cultures.

The second session is checking in about implementation and goals. This will be a continued dialogue based off the first session. Educators will come together to ground themselves in discussion of EL students from oral cultures and how to best support them. Educators will get to come together to reflect and share their implementation practices, data from student surveys and concerns moving forward. This is a time when educators can come and share their accomplishments and struggles in hopes of taking what has already been taught and molding it to be more supportive and transparent for EL students. The session will end with a renewed sense of commitment and action plan for the remaining part of the year.

Implementation goal: School year 2019-2020

Summer 2018:

- Communicate with stakeholders my professional development project idea
- Obtain feedback and next steps
- Perfect project using district specified templates for presentations and distributed worksheets

Fall 2018

- Finish capstone course and submit project to Hamline University

- Show stakeholders my the finished professional development
- Obtain feedback
- Create an implementation timeline

#### Spring 2019

- Finalize calendar dates
- Continue to communicate with stakeholders

#### Summer 2019

- Update stakeholders on any changes with professional development
- Continue to perfect professional development, if necessary

#### Fall 2019

- Obtain background information on participants
- Tailor professional development materials and examples toward audience
- Implement professional development session one
- Collect data/feedback
- Collaborate with TOSA to roll out accountability measures
- Add necessary changes to professional development session two

#### Winter 2020

- Implement Session two
- Collect Data/feedback
- Reflect on how to improve
- Share data and feedback with stakeholders on professional development effectiveness

- Wrap up through reflection, goal setting and lesson planning for next year

### **Conclusion and Preview of Chapter Four**

In conclusion, this project uses a series of frameworks and theories to provide the best comprehensive professional development for adult learners in supporting EL students from oral cultures. This two-part professional development took place in an urban district and seeks to support a high percentage of EL students within a district. Through catering to adult learners, EL best practices and culturally responsive teaching this professional development will encourage educators to continue hone their teaching geared toward oral cultural EL students.

Chapter four will incorporate theory and implementation to create a professional development catered toward educators serving EL students from oral cultures. This chapter will explicitly convey the materials and resources that was implemented, with a reflection for next steps.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### **Context**

The question that drove my capstone project is “*How can I create professional development for educators in order to support English Learner students from oral cultures?*” In order to address this question I have created a professional development (PD) that advocates for students by supporting educators. In crafting a professional development specifically for educators working with English Learner (EL) students from oral cultures, it supports both parties. All educators strive to support their students in the best way they can, and this professional development hopes to provide practical support for educators. This PD offers a series of sessions, along with a resource folder filled with strategies and tools to help educators support their students better.

### **Past Work**

In today’s world, it is very difficult to operate outside of print. Through our education system children are exposed to reading and writing at an early age. With oral cultures learning is based on orally communicating with others to obtain information. It is the relationships that one builds with others that allow them to navigate different systems (Ong, 2002). There is a different appreciation and role for elders in the community as the expert information holders (Walters, 2017). EL students from oral cultures, living in a majority print society, must exist between the two worlds of oral and print culture. There is currently little research on oral cultures as well as how to support them in print-based educational settings.

Through gathering and putting information together regarding oral cultures, second language acquisition, and culturally responsive teaching, I was able to build a sound basis for my project. When looking at second language acquisition, it is important to note that students always bring knowledge to their learning and English language acquisition. Students are able to bring skills from their primary language and transfer skills to the new language they are learning but familiarity with print may not be part of their skill set (Bigelow & Tarone, 2004).

### **Past Research**

The aspects of my literature review that were most influential in shaping my capstone were the works of Walter J. Ong, *Orality and Literacy* and DeCapua and Marshall's work: *Meeting the Needs of Students with Limited or Interrupted Schooling* (Ong, 2002; DeCapua & Marshall, 2011). Both of these works addressed the specific EL population that is the center of my capstone project. Although Students with Limited or Interrupted Formal Education (SLIFE) have separate identifiers and experiences with school, both groups of students have overlapping needs and backgrounds.

They are similar across multiple avenues, but are not completely the same. Students from oral cultures and SLIFE can share the limited experience with formal schooling and print culture. It is possible for SLIFE students to come from a print culture but have limited experience in formal schooling, whereas students from oral cultures exist outside of print culture. Their way of community and family life revolves around oral culture and values that exist outside of a written language. It is also possible for students to be identified as both a student from an oral culture while also identified as

SLIFE. Even if students from oral cultures have been exposed to print culture, their standard are based very much in oral cultural practices, not print. This can be very confusing for educators who do not have experience with or training about EL students from these particular backgrounds.

Since my particular target student population of students from oral cultures is not a well-developed research topic, the aforementioned books really shaped my work and were the bricks that held my capstone project together. The insight and research done by both parties influenced how I shaped my literature review as well as the professional development that I created. Such as ways to identify students, characteristics that students may exhibit and strategies to support students.

### **Research Process**

In my educational journey of becoming an EL teacher, I rarely came upon the population of EL students from oral cultures. When I did come upon them, I would get really excited because I believe, unconsciously, I recognized myself in the information I was absorbing. Since this was never explicitly addressed in my EL teacher education, I wanted to pursue it for my capstone project.

Throughout my capstone project, I was able to apply my teaching experience to this academic pursuit. Likewise, I applied the academics and theories of EL education to my teaching practice, and my professional development encourages other educators to do the same. The target population, EL students from oral cultures, of my capstone project topic is one that is not widely researched. As a result, my research consisted of gathering

related threads of research and theory that I wove together to build a foundation for my capstone project.

My initial plan was to create a curriculum that supports students from oral cultures but realized that creating a PD would be more effective because both educators and students are being supported. A big part of my PD is how it is presented as practical and applicable to what educators already are doing. The PD is structured in a way that models to educators strategies and tools they themselves can utilize in their classrooms. Not only would educators be reading and discussing strategies and tools to use but also see what it live in practice is vital. It is both an honor and privilege to contribute to the current and growing bank of knowledge surrounding EL students and educators.

### **Sharing Results**

The results of my PD will hopefully demonstrate how educators, with the proper support and tools, can support EL students from oral cultures. This PD is meant to fill in the knowledge gaps educators have about this particular population and provide a variety of ways to meet the needs of these students. I believe, my resource folder of strategies and tools will be the most helpful to educators. Like many students from oral cultures, educators like tangible strategies they can utilize and hone. This is an important tool that was intentionally created to support educators in a variety of ways. Such as providing quick strategies that can be implemented the very next day to tasks that involves more time like intentional planning, experiential learning and field trips.

### **Contributions to the Education Profession**

This project benefits the profession by directly providing development to educators who then directly work with students. In creating this PD, I am able to advocate for EL students, even if I am not directly their teacher. My professional development is not necessarily new information; a lot of the ideas I discuss as well as the strategies and tools I offer are things that already exist. Yet this particular topic of supporting students from oral cultures is a newer concept. In doing this capstone project, I had to piece together a variety of research, data and knowledge from different areas due to the lack of research currently available.

Although the research and information that guided my capstone project is not brand new, I hope that my capstone project and the professional development I create helps educators see these students with a mindset that focuses on the assets that students bring to a classroom. With a focus on what strength students bring to the class, students feel validated and educators can see the benefits of supporting students using a variety of ways for students to share their knowledge.

### **Implications**

The EL student population is incredibly complex due to the variety of different languages and needs that students may have when they enter into an English majority school. In order to better address EL student needs, there needs to be specific language in educational policies regarding the identification and support of this population. Having educational policies with specific language allows educators to support their EL students with a measure of accountability in place ensuring students are getting what they need.



It is important to note that even with educational policies in place, educators still struggle with providing the best support for EL students simply due to the amount of varied experiences EL students have with education type and quality, English, trauma, etc. By providing a PD that enables educators to be well-versed in the needs of this EL student population; they are in a better position to advocate for appropriate educational policies.

Explicit language and accountability in educational policies can have profound effects on students' education. The difficult task about using explicit language in educational policies is ensuring that the myriad EL needs are all being properly addressed. The fear is with explicit language on policies, certain populations may be missed and therefore not served.

### **Limitations**

A limitation of my capstone project is the limited amount of research on this particular population. The experiences of students from oral cultures may overlap with other EL students, but they are not necessarily the same thing. This proved to be challenging during my literature review in which I had to piece together research and information to prove my case instead of having a well-established research base from which to build.

As a result, I believe my capstone project is adding to the knowledge base of better serving EL students, especially those from oral cultures, but there is still a lot to be learned and researched. Moving forward, I encourage action research that analyzes the

EL student population that falls under oral cultures as well as educators' teaching practices and their impact on student academic success.

### **Future Research**

It would be interesting to see a research study that collects data on educators who use specific strategies and tools to support EL students from oral cultures; and the ways these students perform academically. Data is a powerful tool when advocating for student needs, especially when it comes to the creation and implementation of policy. Future recommendations include a longitudinal research observing educators who take the PD, apply a series of strategies and collect data on student results. The overarching goal is to build awareness, give educators tools to better support and advocate for EL students.

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