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Makayla Marie Bozoian

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SLIFE STUDENTS AND TEACHER PREPAREDNESS

WEBSITE PROJECT: TEACHING SLIFE MN

Makayla Marie Bozoian

A capstone project submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Masters of Arts in Teaching.

Hamline University

St. Paul, Minnesota

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(Project Collaboration with Mackenzie Burkstrand)

Capstone Project Facilitator(s): Jana Lo Bello Miller
Content Expert: Letitia Basford

Project Description

This project seeks to find and curate materials in the form of a website to provide English Language teachers, administrators and parents with a basis of knowledge for teaching and guiding Students with Limited or Interrupted Formal Education also known as SLIFE. The project aims to bridge the gap in the number of current and quickly accessible resources for educators who work with this unique student base. Our project is in the form of an easily accessible website to help reach as many people as possible and to promote the knowledge of this student base. The target audience is generally, teachers, administrators, and families of SLIFE with my portion of the project being focused on the audience of teachers and more specifically teachers who are new to teaching SLIFE.

Our research focuses on many EL practices that are known in the field. We specifically reference the practices of the Mutually Adaptive Learning Paradigm (MALP) and the Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP) along with culturally relevant methods, with considerations for best practice in areas such as; vocabulary instruction, assessment, classroom culture, professional teacher development and pragmatic instruction. Our research draws on the ideas from many sources in the field of EL research including but not limited to the works of, Beck, Gottlieb, DeCapua & Marshall 2011, Gardner & Darling-Hammond 2017, and Cummins 1999. Based on our research for the tools necessary to teach SLIFE we have created a website that includes the following pages titles linked to our home page that includes information about both myself and my partner. The linked pages include the following topics; Families (links for families of SLIFE), Lesson Plans, Links (to external resources), SLIFE Basics, Teacher Preparation and Trauma Informed Practices.

Rationale

As an EL teacher a scholar and a student who has personally experienced the need for this research and type of quickly accessible access to information needed to teach Students with Interrupted or Limited Formal Education; I was able to team up with another teacher who had experienced a similar situation. We needed immediate access to pertinent SLIFE knowledge that we could use in our respective classrooms to best serve the students who were similar to our other English Language learners but also presented many different knowledge gaps.

We heard similar woes of our peer teachers also being new to teaching and being unable to solve the many different aspects that come with teaching a SLIFE base of students for sole lack of resources. We brought our idea to a professor at Hamline who found the topic to be an area of interest and she prompted my partner and I to look more into the topic to bring forward the issues with the lack of information/ resources in the field.

We then decided to engage in answering the questions, “what do teachers need to be prepared to teach SLIFE at the primary level?” and my partner’s efforts focused on, “what materials are necessary for SLIFE at the secondary level?”

After exploring our questions with research, we came up with the idea to create a website. Our goal for the site being to develop a place where teachers, administrators, families and anyone interested in the SLIFE population can go to access research-based information to guide them in best practices for educating SLIFE.

Link to Project

Please find the below link to our live website via Wordpress.com the website creator. We have chosen to register the site as a .org as we have the intention to grow the site over time incorporating a number of other resources both free and paid. Our site is directly linked to an

email address where we encourage our audience to interact with us via comments section or email. We also have integrated a platform that allows for teachers to drop their SLIFE lesson plans to help provide ideas using a collaborative style of communicating ideas that work for teaching SLIFE.

<https://teachingslifemn.org>

Major Areas of Interest

My portion of the project aims to prepare teachers. That is why under the “Teacher Preparation” page one will find a list of linked pages such as a, *teacher checklist* for guidance on what to know before teaching, SLIFE Qualifying factors from the State of Minnesota, *Quick Tips* that include a list of Do’s and Don’ts as a SLIFE teacher, and school resources for educators to know where to access information that may exist in their schools.

A second area of mention, is the “Families” link where there is a list for teachers to use with families to help engage them. This stemmed from an interview question I received on more than one occasion when I was interviewing for English Language Teacher positions. I was asked several times how I would “engage families” to help them feel part of their child’s education. My research on culturally responsive teaching and the works by Jim Cummins inspired this section of ideas like, surveys, potlucks, translation apps and more to help promote English Learner parent engagement which can be particularly difficult when there are language barriers and when parents themselves lack educational backgrounds they often do not know where to start when it comes to their children.

The final area to direct attention to on our site would be the area for lesson plans. We wanted initially to create our own content but came to understand throughout the project that it was not possible within the current time and scope. Therefore, we chose to focus on the materials

that other teachers could share and provide to each other. We know from personal experience that some of the best lessons come from peers who have tried and refined lessons in their own classrooms. The site lists “drop boxes” or share spaces for Middle School plans and for High School Plans as we learned from the project that there is a higher need for resources at these levels. The site also lists WIDA and Minnesota state standards that are important for consideration when writing lesson plans for SLIFE.

Project References

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