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EL CONSIDERATIONS FOR REFUGEE STUDENTS

by

Kelly K. Palmer

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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Primary Advisor: Jennifer Carlson
Peer Reviewer: Sam Ouk

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I would like to acknowledge the work and commitment of Sam Ouk to this capstone. He allowed me the privilege of reading and using his personal journey as a refugee from Cambodia to America. I used it a length to support portions of key ideas central to the topic, but I also used it to better understand the world from the perspective of those I was writing about. In addition, Sam served as my Peer Reviewer, providing me with essential feedback. As the director of the EL program in my school district, he has been a colleague of mine for years. But now, I am honored to call him my friend.

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CHAPTER ONE

Capstone Project Introduction

Introduction

A year ago, I was having a discussion with the EL director of my school district. This man has been somebody I professionally hold in high regard. I had become more personally aware of his role in restructuring our EL program as well as its successes. I had also learned more of the journey he took upon entering America as a refugee in order to successfully direct the district's entire EL program. During this conversation, he handed me a copy of his book, which was his capstone project, containing his story as well as his theory behind the success of some refugees to resettle successfully while most failed to flourish. Our conversation revolved around my consideration of the refugee experience as a topic for my own capstone project. I was rather surprised at his excitement over my theory that refugee students should be considered in a category separate from other EL students. As I went home and began reading his book, I quickly found the themes I was considering as key components of the refugees' experiences: poverty, trauma, and limited education. This discovery confirmed my choice of capstone topic as well as its general direction. As a result, it was at that moment I determined that the project would aim to answer the question: *What are the effective practices for meeting the unique educational needs of refugees as EL learners?*

The more I thought about it, the more this project made sense. I realized how applicable it was to my journey as an educator, particularly those challenges I had not found answers to. It also related to a lifelong passion of mine as well as a situation our

school district had found itself in years before. In fact, this project could provide strategies and methods to educators faced with the task of teaching EL refugees as well as the pedagogical framework necessary throughout the district for successful implementation.

The remainder of this chapter includes my journey to this final project, particularly the topic of refugees. It then reflects upon how the actual research question evolved, the particulars of project stakeholders and method, and a brief rationale of its purposes.

My Journey

The story of how I became interested in the topic of refugee students encompasses my entire life. My journey has been shaped by beliefs, my interests, and my career choices. As long as I can remember, I have had a heart for the oppressed. This is not something I asked for necessarily, it is merely a part of who I am. As a child, I remember feeling very sad when I realized that a family nearby was extremely poor. One day, the children put a sign up in their yard that read, “Worms for Sale”. I personally hated worms, but I begged my mother to allow me to buy some in order to help them out. I was turned down. Thus began a resolve deep inside of me to find a way on my own to meet the needs of such people.

I am not sure that it has ever really mattered to me what nature of oppression a person experienced because I continually sought out various avenues to reach them regardless. When I was younger, I wanted to be a nurse so I could help those who were injured, however, as time went by, my intentions evolved to help those who had

undergone extreme hardship beyond their control. Usually this hardship was at the hand of another human force although sometimes it was nature. In church, I wept as the missionary showed us pictures of starving children and shared stories of their trials. I became enraged when I heard stories of abuse, neglect, or torture. Unfortunately, I somehow felt ashamed of this passion and therefore avoided pursuing it on a conscious level. My heart was still drawn, however, to the downtrodden, and I often found myself befriending those who were deeply troubled. I took their trials and pain upon me, a practice I soon learned to be rather unhealthy.

When I started college, I decided to become a teacher simply because I loved literature and writing and desired to coach. There really was no drive at the time to teach per se, but rather the inspiration of past English teachers. However, college included struggles to understand teaching practices or excel at carrying them out. Furthermore, a full time teaching job was not offered for a very long time. With my free time, however, I still pursued every opportunity I could to help those less fortunate. For example, my husband and I joined a group in our local church who did painting, clean up, and small repairs for inner city families and homes. Eventually he became a youth pastor, and together we took the youth group on mission trips to Chicago and post-Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans. In addition, our home was always open to those in need.

Eventually, financial and personal situations caused me to look into teaching positions once more. After a part-time job at a private school, I started classes at a nearby college to pursue an Educational Psychology degree which would allow me to counsel within a school setting. The courses were intriguing, and this seemed like the

perfect answer. Nonetheless, at the end of one semester, finances intervened. Searching options, I looked at jobs posted on a board in the college and found one teaching at-risk youth. This changed everything.

I became extremely excited about a job possibility for the very first time. I had never heard of an alternative school before then, but I absolutely knew this was what I wanted to do. It was a way to take my teaching degree and put it to use doing what I longed to do, help those less fortunate. I got the job. The part-time position was at an inner city high school in an alternative program held after school. My prior experience did not include working with youth from this environment or with the African American students who comprised at least 80% of my class. Even though there were a few initial bumps where I questioned my sanity and was mocked by my students, I quickly found my feet. It was everything I had hoped it would be, and I knew I had finally found the path I wanted to pursue.

Other opportunities in the same field followed this initial experience. These positions included working full-time in alternative high schools and included additional roles such as senior advisor, behavior team member, physical education teacher, and chaperone. Those ten years of experiences were amazing. I developed many enduring relationships with fellow staff members as well as students, and I grew as a teacher in methodology and pedagogy. I became an advocate for inner city youth. I informed anyone willing to listen about racial prejudices. I flourished.

Somewhere in the middle of those ten years, our family moved from the suburbs to a small town south of the city. My heart truly skipped a beat when I heard there was an

opportunity to join a team from the local church going to Haiti on a mission trip. I was both amazed and comfortable with my ability to quickly adjust to the rough environment and find a way to reach and interact with the kind, humble, and surprising happy Haitians. I absolutely fell in love with all of it. During our time there, we built a school in a village and went home determined to provide funds for a well. As another trip approached the following year, I began to seek ways to intentionally meet the needs of the children within the village and helped develop a sponsorship program.

However, soon afterwards, relationships with the pastor we served in Haiti dissolved, ending further trips and involvement there. Other situations in life caused me to give up my teaching job along with its one hour commute to be closer to home for my own children. I soon took various part-time and temporary jobs merely to bring in some income and continually looked for chances to make a difference. Sometimes, this meant feeding meals to people on the streets, other times it meant giving someone a home so they could get on their feet. My heart never changed, only the methods.

During this time, however, changes happened within our local community which caused me to rethink my life choices. The civil war in Somali reared its ugly head and soon our small town was receiving refugees from this distant land. I was instantly drawn to their plight and aware of the overwhelming needs surrounding their situation.

Although I had still not been able to travel beyond American borders except for Haiti and Mexico, I began to realize that the same people I longed to reach overseas were now placed in my own backyard. I instantly sought opportunities to connect with the Somali community and although a few relationships were formed, these efforts were short lived.

However, I was inspired to reevaluate my career and soon found myself searching for something more meaningful.

This pursuit led to a return trip to Haiti one year following the devastating earthquake. The land and its beautiful people had never left me and neither had my desire to serve overseas. With the support of my church community, I was able to lead a group of eight people on a week-long mission trip there. I came back home convinced this part of my journey was not over and was determined to keep returning. However, I was at a loss as to how I could possibly pursue this on my own.

While I was contemplating this goal, a new thrift store opened up in town which supported the needy within the local community with its proceeds. I took a job there and eventually became the manager. This allowed me to once again make a personal investment in my career. The store was located downtown where most of the Somali refugees had settled and because they were also usually low income, they began frequenting the store. They quickly became our most loyal and enduring customers, and it was a pleasure to serve them. I also became aware of the many overwhelming challenges they met, the cruel prejudices and treatments they sometimes encountered, and the language barrier. By the time I decided to end my experience at the thrift store, I had found the answer that tied all of these loose threads together: teaching ESL.

It was the perfect answer. As I considered how to return to Haiti or travel to other countries experiencing adversity, I also realized the only skill I really had to offer in this capacity was teaching. I also knew from my experience in Haiti that the people had a desire to learn English. In fact, learning English often led to more job opportunities which

was definitely a concern in third world countries such as this. However, even though I had taught English for ten years, I realized that there was quite a difference between teaching English (or language arts) to students who had grown up reading, writing, and speaking the language versus teaching English to students who spoke another language. At the time, I did not feel qualified in experience or education to pursue this direction.

As I began to consider going back to school once again to gain training in teaching ESL, I realized I could also use this training right where I was. I was well aware of the current situation in town and the overwhelming need to teach English to the Somali refugees settling in our community. By obtaining an EL teaching license, I would be qualified and confident to teach both locally and abroad. No longer had I officially applied and been accepted to the program, when I also obtained a part-time job teaching EL in the local Adult Basic Education program. This position not only provided me with the funds to pay for the rest of my education and the time to complete the work at the best of my ability, but it also provided me with an invaluable opportunity to gain experience in the field as well as practice the methods and techniques I was learning.

Immediately, I felt I had finally found my path. I absolutely loved teaching adult ELs. They did not require the same discipline as high schoolers, and so I was able to focus on curriculum and teaching methods. Several times throughout this period, I would learn something new in one of my EL program courses and then test it out in class. It was the perfect chance to work on techniques as well as develop and refine my individual pedagogy. More importantly to me, however, was learning from my students. I had some students who were immigrants, usually of Hispanic descent or Asian, but the majority of

the students were Somalian refugees. I loved the diversity within the classroom and encouraged my students to learn from each other; however, as time went by, I began to notice a trend. It seemed that some students were learning and advancing more quickly than those from Somali. There were, of course, exceptions, but there was the continual challenge of students who became stuck at one level for a long time. I struggled to find an answer but had little success.

At the same time, a few very sweet ladies from Cambodia joined my EL classroom. I knew these ladies had been in the program for several years, however, what stuck with me the most was their seeming inability to advance in their language ability. I worked with them in depth and at times they would take a little step forward. But they truly seemed stuck and again there seemed to be no apparent reason. I absolutely loved working with them, and as I interviewed one of them, I learned of her horrifying journey to America and the challenges she faced relocating here.

During the time I was thinking about the specific topic for my capstone project, I was also placed in a position working to prepare students for a college level nursing course. This was a great experience as the class size was relatively small and the work with the students lasted for several months. Relationships built were deep. And yet, I began to become very discouraged as I watched many of my best students become unsuccessful in this journey. I knew they were intelligent, I knew they were committed, but I could not understand why they failed while other students succeeded.

The Research Question

The unanswered questions surrounding the success of some EL students versus the struggle of others was one I began to consider as a platform for my upcoming capstone project. Eventually, I realized that a vast majority of students who became stuck in language acquisition or revealed a large gap in learning were refugees. It continually seemed there was a missing piece in their ability to successfully learn English in a manner that transcribed positively to their new surroundings. It didn't matter what their ages were or where they were from. The situation was the same. As I realized this, several things made sense and I began to form more specific questions. I was curious about what commonalities existed among refugees' experiences and how those experiences were possibly different from other EL students. Furthermore, I speculated how much these commonalities led to a shared culture with specific needs and if so how educators could best meet these needs.

It became even more clear to me the need to pursue these questions as I realized their relevance to my previous professional experiences, the growing pains I had witnessed within our community and school district, and the possible benefits answers could provide. The scope of my theory included the unique experience, or even culture, that refugees shared which mandated unique methodology from the educational system as a whole. Ultimately, I concluded that most refugees shared three common situational elements: poverty, trauma, and limited or interrupted education. Not only this, but unlike their fellow EL peers, they were very likely to experience all three. Having this framework in mind, the intention of the research and project was to answer the question:

What are effective practices for meeting the unique educational needs of refugees as EL learners?

In order to answer that question, the purpose of this project became to provide a working framework for teachers. This framework was then designed with the strategies and pedagogy teachers needed to effectively reach and teach refugee students. The motivation behind my project was not only to find answers but to share this information within my own school district. Knowing the changes and challenges faced by my current district when they received a large influx of refugees, I wanted to create a project I could share with other districts experiencing similar transitions. My theory and therefore rationale was that providing educators with some answers and a usable framework for the new classroom needs would make the adjustment period much smoother. My intentions were to provide teachers with a solid foundation as well as equipping them with confidence and certainty beginning on day one. In turn, the knowledge gained and anxiety lost could lead to a more positive experience for the new refugee students and eventually a more successful educational experience. As the effect of such a positive experience transcended into the entire school as well as the community it would therefore affect subsequent and similar circumstances.

People and groups invested in this project were therefore both specific and broad. For the purposes of the initial project, the stakeholders were within the scope of my current school district. The first group of those invested included the teachers themselves. The project was intended as a presentation to teachers providing them with methods, practices, and strategies they could take to their classroom. Since, in most cases, refugee

resettlements are somewhat large, the entire school district is affected. Therefore, the next group invested was the school administration as well as support staff. In order for any new system or pedagogy to be successfully implemented, the teachers need the support of the entire staff. Also, the staff benefits from learning how to best work with the new student population in an effective manner. Likewise, the incoming refugee population and community become partners in the execution of this project's ideals. Not only do they benefit from improved teaching methods and theories, but they become active participants.

Summary

This chapter has served as an introduction to this capstone project. Prefaced within it were my personal journey towards this subject matter and thus the driving question. Finally, this chapter has provided a preview of the basic themes considered in the project's development as well as its presentation and audience. The next chapter includes a literature review in order to answer the question: *What are the effective practices for meeting the unique educational needs of refugees as EL learners?* In order to answer this question, literature reviewed was divided into the three themes of consideration: poverty, trauma, and limited education. Under each theme, the next chapter provides data and background of the relevance each one holds to the overall topic; a review of findings concerning the effect each theme has upon second language acquisition; and finally, the best teaching practices research recommended for each theme.

Chapter Three contains specific information involving the project itself. This chapter provides a detailed description of the project. Included is a rationale for its use and effectiveness according to learning theory and application. Audience, setting, and an outline of the project presentation are given. Finally, the third chapter connects the chosen project with its ability to answer the research question.

The final chapter then consists of the conclusion including reflection on the projects' process and success. Limitations and implications for future consideration and research are discussed. This chapter concludes with a preview of what's next, both professionally for myself and for the topic at hand.

CHAPTER TWO

Literature Review

Introduction

According to the U.S. Immigration and Nationality Act, a refugee is defined as:

Any person who is outside any country of such person's nationality, or in the case of a person having no nationality, is outside any country in which such person last habitually resided, and who is unable or unwilling to return to, and is unable or unwilling to avail himself or herself of the protection of that country because of persecution or a well-founded fear of persecution on account of race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion. (Capps & Newland, 2016, p. 5)

With this in mind, there is a clear distinction between the term immigrant and the term refugee.

Following defined differences, a rationale conclusion could include other differences as well.

These differences exist in the reasons behind relocation and has become the personal history as well as experiences of refugees. Understanding this difference led to the conclusion that refugee students represent a unique subgroup of English Learners within the school systems. This project provided an analysis of the refugee in order to best serve them as educators. The need for such a project was further confirmed by Ouk (2016) who pointed out the performance gap according to standardized testing between Asian refugees in comparison to those who were not refugees as well as stressed the need for educator awareness concerning refugee struggles in order to successfully support them. These unique experiences were described by Ouk (2016) when he reflected upon his personal background as a refugee:

As my sense of family deteriorated, my friends became more and more important to me.

The difficult thing about this scenario was none of us could help pull each other out of this cycle of poverty and struggle. We could only support each other as we went through

it together.... We understood things about each other that our teachers and even our parents struggled to understand. We all came from violent, broken homes where our parents struggled with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). We were poor. Our parents couldn't speak English well.... To sum it up, we were refugee children in need of family. (p. 15)

In order to adequately apply this review, the project aimed to answer the following: *What are effective practices for meeting the unique educational needs of refugees as EL learners?* There were three themes identified essential to answering that question, and each one considered within this section as a factor contributing to the refugee experience. It was the premise of this project to assess each of these contributions separately in order to consider their impact together. The factors considered and reviewed in this paper are poverty, trauma, and interrupted formal education.

Most refugees have come from an experience of poverty or low-socioeconomic status. The first section provides a background for the impoverished refugee conclusion, including statistical data alongside the testimonials. The analysis of the socioeconomic status of refugees is followed by a summary of ways in which poverty affects second language acquisition. Finally, a review of the effective practices for teaching ESL to students from a low-socioeconomic background is included.

The next section introduces trauma as an aspect of the refugee experience. Refugees have usually experienced traumatic experiences in their lives, usually multiple. This section provides statistics and testimonials supporting this conclusion. Following is a summary of the ways in which second language acquisition is affected by trauma and subsequently a review of effective practices to teach ESL to students who have suffered traumatic experiences.

The majority of refugees have also experienced limited or interrupted formal education and sometimes encounter years without any education. The third section provides statistical information regarding the occurrence of interrupted education among refugees as well as testimonials. Similar to the first two topics considered, a summary of the literature concerning how Students with Limited or Interrupted Formal Education (referred to as SLIFE) affects second language acquisition is presented followed by a brief review of the effective practices for teaching ESL to students from an interrupted educational background.

The final section suggests applicable strategies to use specifically with ELs who come from a refugee experience. A summary of the literature considering poverty, trauma, and SLIFE concurrently is first established. Following this is an introduction as to how reviewed research was applied to the final project.

Poverty

Background

A vast majority of refugees came from a low socioeconomic background and/or have continued to encounter poverty once relocated to the United States. The USA for United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees [UNHCR], the UN refugee agency collection of data from 2018 contained statistical information from several countries involving the epidemic of poverty among refugees. Of the 5 million Syrian refugees displaced in London, 70% were below the poverty line. Ninety-three of those seeking sanctuary in Jordan were impoverished. Refugees from Yemen left due to years of anguish trying to meet basic needs. Venezuela experienced one of their biggest exoduses in 2018 for reasons including food shortages and the inability to provide for their families (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees ([UNHCR], 2019).

Poverty was also identified as a central theme within the refugee struggle by Ouk (2016) who explained that refugees often have minimal resources even as they arrive in the U.S. Instead,

refugees become imprisoned by their impoverished situation leading to generational poverty. Poverty such as this, handed down from parents to children repetitively, causes family members to work several unreliable jobs and depend upon government assistance (Ouk, 2016). Beyond the obvious material implications, constant impoverishment has led to further health and family issues. Often, there has been the additional expectation for the relocated refugees to send money to relatives still living in their homeland. In 1993, an article written by McCormick in the Post Bulletin reported the average Southeast Asian family earned a mere \$12,960 per year in comparison to the \$43,200 average of other city residents (Ouk, 2016).

Eurilio, a Venezuelan refugee explained, “When my nine-month-old daughter died because of the lack of medicines, doctors or treatment, I decided to take my family out of Venezuela before another one of my children died” (UNHCR, n.p. 2019). A Sudanese refugee, Valentino, who was beaten severely by robbers, still went to work the next morning after failing to receive treatment for his wounds and obtaining only three hours of sleep. He was driven by the fear of being fired and the reality that he might not find another job. Even those refugees who had higher positions in their homeland were limited to low paying jobs nobody else wanted because of their inability to speak English. Children, such as Nhean, became responsible for their parents and therefore worked several hours a week in addition to attending school (Ouk, 2016). Ouk also reported an ongoing sense of hunger throughout his youth due to his mother’s habit of going to casinos in hopes of trying to resolve their poverty.

Unfortunately, because of their lack of English, most refugees have experienced poverty upon arriving in America as well. They were often resettled in existing low income areas which lack resources and therefore entrapped rather than allowed an opportunity to advance. This tendency is reiterated by Ouk (2016) who stated:

Contrary to popular belief, refugees do not get a free ride to America. We had to pay for our plane tickets to get here. And when we arrived, we struggled to pay bills and put food on the table like every family living below the poverty line. And we had to do this without being able to speak the language, being familiar with the employment system, and understanding appropriate cultural norms. (p. 157-158)

This section has provided evidence relating to the reality of refugees impoverished experiences. This has been imparted through both statistical data as well as the personal reflections of refugees. Next, this paper considers how the matter of low-socioeconomic background affects the ability to acquire a second language.

Effect on second language Acquisition.

As mentioned before, poverty is an integral theme in the refugee experience. Maslow's hierarchy of needs (1943) has been essential to understanding that people without food and shelter are motivated by those basic needs rather than the need for achievement or self-actualization which are often the focus of educational systems. According to Buckingham, Beadman, & Wheldall (2014), children from disadvantaged families were not likely to have experiences which foster development of basic reading skills such as phonological awareness and vocabulary development. It has long been documented and of concern that a literacy gap exists between students of low-socioeconomic status and their peers (Sharkins, Leger, & Ernest, 2017). There was considerable variation of theories and pedagogy pertaining to this topic within the literature, however, the same conclusion was overwhelmingly supported. Buckingham et al. (2014) considered the associated factors of poverty as the influential aspects of cognitive development. Accordingly, there were several circumstances associated with low-economic status such as physical health, the home environment, and motivation to read. Home environments predominantly had an impact on children's early literacy skills. Influences considered within the

home included available literature, parental reading patterns, and various enrichment opportunities. Although not every impoverished home contained a lower learning environment, the tendency cannot be denied (Buckingham et al., 2014).

Phonological awareness has a strong impact upon literacy skills. Although there was a lack of research pertaining to the direct association of lower phonetic skills with socio-economic status, correlations occurred among the studies which assessed this relationship. (Buckingham et al. 2014) A smaller vocabulary was another documented cause of low literacy skills. On this point, there were sufficient studies confirming the connection between vocabulary and socioeconomic status. Finally, physical health was also well established to co-exist more prevently among children from low-economic homes. However, the relationship between health and low literacy was not necessarily established. Nonetheless, both phonetic awareness and vocabulary have been recognized as essential to reading across various models. Regardless of the cause for the issues, whether it be the learning environment at home or the poverty itself, “Children growing up in low socio-economic status families are much less likely to have these crucial early literacy-cultivating experiences.” (Buckingham et al., 2014, p. 12)

Nonetheless, there is ample evidence of poverty’s impact upon the brain itself. Dike’s (2017) summary of this research referred to the effect of poverty upon various parts of the brain associated with language, namely the prefrontal cortex. According to Lipina and Columbo, there is a direct correlation between the length of time of a child’s exposure to poverty and adverse effects upon their cognitive, emotional, and regulatory development (as cited in Dike, 2017). Scientific proof of this association was documented through MRIs of children living in poverty for a long period of time. These brain scans actually revealed a lower volume of gray matter in the frontal and parietal lobes (Hanson, J.L, N. Hair, D.G. Shen, et al., 2013). Other research documented how poverty affects the neurons. According to Jensen, a neuron that is stressed by

factors such as poverty produces weaker signals, oxygen, and connective branches (as cited by Izard, 2016). Long term focus on survival rather than learning eventually impairs the prefrontal cortex. Izard (2016) also added that although the brain is capable of healing from the stress of poverty, the severity and length of its existence can lead to irreparable damage. Sousa additionally explained how these areas of the brain are not only responsible for language but other functions essential to language such as attention, processing information, and memory (as cited in Izard, 2016). According to Woolfolk, observations were made concerning the obvious connection between learning and the brain even in other aspects such as stress and emotional results (as cited in Dike). Dike (2017) concurred with Buckingham's conclusion that low-socioeconomic factors are not perpetually followed by low literacy skills. There are exceptions concerning family involvement and child motivation which can and do lead to literary success.

Sharkins et al. (2016) conducted a study to further determine the relationship between socioeconomic factors and language development. Again, other aspects associated with poverty such as parental education and occupation, were noted as contributors to the correlation discussed. Prior research was referred to by Sharkins et al. (2016) pertaining to the effect of poverty on language. According to Hart & Risley (1995), there was a gap of about thirty million words in the vocabulary of a child from low socioeconomic backgrounds and those of higher ones. One hundred twenty two combinations of children and caregivers within an Early Head Start Program were evaluated in the research project which produced a positive correlation between social-emotional development and language acquisition. Children in this study, coming from lower socio-economic backgrounds predominantly demonstrated this trend. Izard (2016) echoed the result of this study by noting the correlation between the brain's ability to learn and the early experiences of music, reading, and play from their caregivers.

Past studies and research continually supported the connection between poverty and low literacy skills in children. Although it could be argued that other factors associated with a lower socio-economic home are the actual contributors to this trend, it can't be denied that there is a clear effect on the cognitive formation of the brain, the mental capability to learn, or the emotional coping skills of students from this background. Specifically related to this project, the lack of financial resources caused refugees to become exhausted by the constant trials of long work hours, cultural and linguistic barriers to navigating life, and other financial worries (Ouk, 2016). Indeed, "Poverty impacts the lives of students by creating emotional and social challenges, acute and chronic stressors, cognitive lags, and health and safety issues" (Izard, 2016, p. 4). Regardless, all factors considered are under the umbrella of low-socioeconomic status and will therefore be handled as one element. The next section therefore considers the effective practices involved in teaching students from an impoverished background.

Effective Practices

Considering the research correlating low socioeconomic background with lower literacy skills, this section reviews previous research and literature surrounding the recommended teaching practices considered most effective when working with those students. There were many resources available concerning the methods most effective for low-socioeconomic students educational experience. In order to create effective categories and connections, these practices were considered in line with Payne's (2008) "Nine Powerful Practices".

Payne's first suggestion was to foster relationships with students built upon respect which has been acknowledged throughout literature as a necessity to effective teaching overall. With this in mind, one way to demonstrate respect for students is through communication itself, specifically conversation. Conversation not only builds respectful relationships, it also fosters higher student achievement (Barone, 2003). In addition to conversation, Barone, additionally

pointed to the acknowledgement of students' home language as an essential component of the EL classroom. Small-group dialog was one component of Kim's approach which not only promoted learning but established trust (Kim, 2017). In addition, communication served as the primary method throughout Kim's transformative approach. Adults were included in small-groups in order to encourage dialog and build respect while students themselves were required to orally review activities beforehand and reflect on them after their completion (Kim, 2017). A method suggested by Izard (2016) involved allowing students to have a certain amount of choice in areas such as assignment choice, method of completing the assignment, and providing space and time for them to regain emotional control. It is important for educators to realize students aren't merely misbehaving, but rather other factors are contributing to their behavior. In addition to the support this offers, Izard (2006) argued that understanding the reasons behind behavior results in a positive response versus merely punishing students in a way that takes them away from education.

Payne's (2008) second strategy was also relational but more in context of support. By involving students in a collaborative setting where learning happens in interactions with others, a place is developed where conversation could be encouraged and home languages allowed (Barone, 2003). Supporting students demands a pedagogy of capability. In other words, teachers need to view students from low-income homes as capable of learning when given the opportunity rather than focusing upon their deficiencies. By providing opportunities aligned with students' values and personal goals, students were encouraged to dream and thus motivated to learn (Kim, 2017). According to Kim, building upon students' interests and abilities not only motivates students, but also ideally expands their zone of proximal development (ZPD) (Vygotsky, 1978). This theory has become a prevalent practice throughout the EL community as an essential component of ELs educational experience. The ZPD was first defined by Vygotsky as "the

distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers” (1978, p. 86). In using this technique, a teacher begins at the level the student is currently successful and then offers support enabling them to reach the next level. According to Vygotsky, it is through reaching beyond the current skills of students that they best learn. However, it is important to note that this is not so effective if done without support.

Another aspect of support can be offered through safety. Izard (2016) points to the need for a safe learning environment. This may be as simple as greeting students individually or looking them in the eyes. Assuring students they are seen and acknowledging them builds the secure foundations necessary for them to focus upon learning. Izard also advocated a safe place for students to learn from their mistakes. Allowing wrong answers without ridicule is an essential component to learning. Continually using a calm voice with students is one way to offer them security and enable them to relax from the feelings of stress or fear (Izard, 2016).

The need to explicitly teach a formal register was the next practice suggested by Payne (2008). Payne pointed out the correlation between the length of time lived in poverty and use of formal registers. Developing a formal register usually begins with vocabulary building. It has been documented through brain scans that vocabulary builds structure in the brain (Izard, 2016). It was recommended, in fact, that teachers not only ensure that vocabulary becomes an essential component of every lesson, but also allow them opportunities to use new vocabulary (Jensen, 2013). Students from low-income homes may also need assistance understanding abstract concepts. Practice using representations of concrete items such as mental models increased the comfort and ability of students to translate abstract representations. This strategy begins as early as kindergarten when students are learning phonics. The relationship between sounds and letters

as well as meaning gained from books needs to become an essential component of early education (Barone, 2003).

In order to adequately service students from poverty, an assessment of their resources is extremely beneficial. This strategy follows the reality that poverty leads to factors tied to students' literacy abilities as discussed in the prior section. This assessment allows teachers to provide the proper interventions necessary to provide support where ability to access resources is lacking and use those resources which are strong (Payne, 2008). Caution is recommended, however, when providing resources because the total number of services available is less critical than how students can use them. Therefore, students should be taught to access resources and apply what is available rather than become dependent upon them. Furthermore, merely providing welfare was a component of the deficiency approach considered to actually increase dependency rather than encourage achievement (Kim, 2017).

Another often overlooked strategy included educating students about the hidden rules associated with education. The low-income cultural norms learned are often in direct contradiction to those needed for educational success (Payne, 2008). Rather than continually becoming frustrated over the vast difference between students' perspectives, teachers need to understand their causes as well as teach students the behavioural expectations within the school environment and the skills needed to navigate it. In addition to this, teachers can become models for students and show them appropriate responses to situations. Even though these expected behaviors were not priorly taught, students are still capable of picking up social clues modeled by teachers (Izard, 2016).

It is also essential that teachers constantly monitor the progress of each student in order to plan effective interventions (Payne, 2008). This strategy included focusing upon the content areas and standards where students struggle. Assessments likewise help teachers individualize

curriculum and materials rather than teach to the entire class as a whole (Barone, 2003). Running records, as an example, is recommended as an effective assessment measure. However, in order for any assessment to serve its purpose, the results must determine instruction and individual application (Barone, 2003).

Finally, developing relationships with students' parents was also an effective strategy. School must become a welcome and respectful environment for parents within the lower economic threshold. Instead of depending on parents to take the initiative to visit the school, teachers were also encouraged to practice home visits (Payne, 2008). In addition to families, the local community can be accessed which corresponds to the context. Involvement of a student's community provides a learning process that enhances lives and focuses on capability rather than deficiency (Kim, 2017). Listening to students' stories as encouraged by Izard (2016) could easily be expanded to include their families. Overall, any development and positive inclusion of the students' culture, including family and community, allows them to utilize their background knowledge in order to access learning.

The next area of consideration concerning refugees is that of trauma. The next section will first provide background information containing statistics and personal testimony which supports the inclusion of trauma as a relevant topic for this project. How trauma affects the acquisition of a second language will be the next focus followed by what literature points to as effective practices in the education of traumatized students.

Trauma

Background

According to the USA for UNHCR (2019), over 70 million people were displaced from their homeland in 2018. These continual exoduses were the result of violence, warfare, or oppression, not choice. Sadly, the number of refugees has only increased by 2.3 million people

from 2017. Specifically speaking, 2013 began the flight of 3.3 million people from Sudan due to brutal warfare. Countries such as El Salvador, Honduras, and Guatemala experienced growing violence at the hands of local crime cartels resulting in the highest homicide rates there.

Venezuela had over 3 million people flee due to violence (UNHCR, 2019). The Valentino Achak Deng Foundation (2019) recorded that almost 2.5 million people were killed during the Sudanese War and another six million were displaced leading to the existence of the Lost Boys, a group of young boys who made the journey to refugee camps by themselves. In Cambodia, the period of the Killing Fields caused the death of approximately two million people due to murder, starvation, or illness (Ouk, 2016). The results of such trauma are overwhelming. Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) one of trauma's common results, is known to occur in people who have experienced a terrifying, disturbing, or threatening event, horrifying, or alarming event (Ouk, 2016). An example of the profound impact of PTSD upon refugees occurred among Cambodians. Reportedly, 55% of Cambodian mothers suffered from PTSD while 30% of the fathers suffered as well (Kiang, Lin, & Suyemoto, 2009).

The traumatic experiences often begin upon the actual departing journey of the refugee. Ouk (2016) further explained how refugees do anything they can to stay alive. According to one asylum-seeker, Angelica, her family felt extremely unsafe after her brother's life was threatened (UNHCR, 2019). Many Cambodian refugees witnessed horrible atrocities such as brutal murders, starvation, and houses burning down. Still others were captured by the Khmer Rouge and forced to become torturers and murderers themselves (Ouk, 2016). Ouk's mother also experienced trauma that haunted her for years. She retold the tragic story:

The most difficult job I had was rationing out food for infants and small children, knowing that no one had enough to eat. One day I heard that my father was sick from being beaten by Khmer Rouge soldiers. For a week, I would take food away from my

youngest sister's mouth and other kids and carried it over at night to the fields where my father worked. It didn't take long before my youngest sister became ill due to lack of food. Her last words to me was that she wanted to eat fish. I told her to wait until night came so I could sneak out and find her some. She smiled and fell asleep. In the night, I snuck out to find fish for her. When I came back, I tried to wake her up. But she wouldn't wake up. Until this day, I blame myself for killing my own sister (Ouk, 2016, p. 125).

The route to safety can be equally dangerous for refugees, exposing them to kidnapping and sexual crimes along with other dangers. Many children from Sudan disappeared as they were either attacked by lions or taken to become soldiers for the rebellion. Valentino remembers five of his own friends being killed by lions (Ouk, 2016). Trauma leads to more trauma, even within the home. Ouk's grandfather was forced to destroy his own home and leave his military position to become a rickshaw driver and homeless. Because he was not able to deal with this along with prior traumas he experienced on the battlefield, he beat his own son to the point of death.

A number of refugees unfortunately have little choice but to live in a refugee camp. On top of the trauma already experienced, the camps often manifest violent environments which only serve to increase their trauma. Events such as robbery, sexual abuse, and further violence put youth at risk for even more developmental delays (Vossoughi, Jackson et al. 2018). There is often more violence within the refugee camp. Darina experienced this treatment first hand when she and her brother were forced to sleep outside the camp in the mud. The Thai soldiers kicked and beat on the refugees, loaded them on a bus, and dropped them off at the edge of a mountain to fend for themselves. (Ouk, 2016).

Unfortunately, this trauma often continues once refugees are relocated in America as they experience even more violence. For Valentino, he was robbed while in his own home in Atlanta (Ouk, 2016). Additionally, further trauma can take place even within the family as its members

are trying to overcome the impact of PTSD. For Ouk (2016), this occurred with his grandpa who began to drink in order to forget. When he became drunk, he either fell asleep or took it out on his family, subjecting them to beatings. Once, he even attacked his own wife with an axe. The other children were able to get the weapon away from him while Ouk called the police. His grandfather was imprisoned and Ouk was left to accept responsibility for that event at the age of ten. This section has provided evidence concerning the traumatic experiences surrounding most refugees. Statistical data has been provided to support this connection along with the reflections of refugees. Following, this project considers how the matter of traumatic background affects the ability to acquire a second language.

Effect on Second Language Acquisition

Trauma is yet another factor in the refugee experience that affects literacy and therefore the ability to acquire a second language. As defined by Herman (1997), trauma is “an affliction of the powerless” (p. 33) Whereas the usual system of care in place will enable children to have a sense of control and meaning, traumatic events overpower those systems (Herman, 1997). Furthermore, “children’s learning is hijacked by the social and familial insecurities and stresses associated with war, famine, poverty, and disease; and fragmented because of physical and environmental losses” (Willis and Nagel, 2015, p. 44).

Sitler’s (2009) study took a close look at two students who lived with trauma in their life as an example of how it influenced cognitive skills and behavior. Some of the behaviors likely to manifest themselves in the classroom included lack of concentration, frequent absences, verbal and/or physical eruptions, and turmoil. Behavioral reactions to trauma, however, look differently from one student to another. The two students discussed by Sitler (2009) demonstrated the spectrum between passivity and aggression which require a teacher to become aware and modify their pedagogy. Passivity is ultimately seen in freezing reactions in which the student gives up

and contributes no energy to learning. Often, this reaction is due to the student's cognitive skills being consumed with coping. Aggression, however, demonstrates itself by fighting. This can be as simple as confrontational attitudes and stance, include argumentative and combative language, and ultimately lead to violent behavior.

Another tragic outcome of war was having children forced into a situation teaching was tactics rather than literacy. Additionally, these children witnessed people being killed on a regular basis while others were actually forced to do the killing. Other factors resulting from war added to the level of trauma experienced by children within the environment. Some of these factors, according to research noted by Willis & Nagel (2015) included severe changes to routines, death and/or separation from family, lack of education, and becoming responsible for their siblings. As a result, energy was focused upon survival rather than learning and development causing gaps. These factors as well as other forms of trauma led to chronic absences, rude behavior, and loss of interest.

The effects of trauma upon the brain have been backed by scientific studies as well. Stress has been known to activate the hypothalamus-pituitary-adrenal axis. As a result, steroids are produced which can ultimately damage their ability to be regulated (Lupien, McEwen et al. 2009). Studies have confirmed a rise in glucocorticoid levels with young children separated from their parents throughout the day resulting in a poor level of care. On the other hand, more traumatic experiences such as abuse or neglect cause lower levels of glucocorticoid levels. Throughout adolescence, the brain becomes especially sensitive to elevated levels of steroids in their brain. Due to changes in the prefrontal cortex during this time, the cognitive and emotional processes are affected often leading to increases in depression and anxiety. In addition to this, repercussions from earlier trauma become noticeable. Other research concluded that trauma led to impairment in self expression as well as language acquisition (Willis & Nagel, 2015).

Likewise, severe trauma can become evident through PTSD behaviors and reactions even into adulthood. One specific trauma familiar to many refugees is war. Post traumatic stress syndrome has been acknowledged as one of the psychological effects of war. Many children were displaced due to ongoing war causing even more behavioral issues (Willis & Nagel, 2015). Depression, chronic anxiety, relationship difficulty, memory loss, and concentration issues were some of the negative complications often experienced by survivors of trauma (Stone, 1995).

Survivor guilt also occurs with those who have lost family members and/or friends. On the other hand, those who were captured and tortured, might blame themselves for this experience and believe they actually deserved such harsh treatment (Stone, 2014). The entire physical development of the brain and the effects of trauma on its development were beyond the scope of this project. However, it is important to note the complex range of neurological responses to trauma throughout various sections of the brain as determined by the person's age when it occurred as well as how long it lasted (Lupien, 2009). Considering the many well documented outcomes for students who experienced trauma, the next section examines some of the effective practices supported by previous research concerning educational methodology.

Effective Practices

It is encouraging to note that educators make a profound difference in the lives of students from a traumatized background. Willis & Nage (2015) based their study upon the idea that teachers have the position of influencing rehabilitation processes for students who have suffered trauma. The pedagogy influencing this realization was that of Vygotsky (1978) who saw learning as more of a social process than merely mental. In actuality, literacy and language are essential components of healing in that they enable students to express and understand their experiences. In doing so, teachers may reshape the cognitive formation of their students (Willis &

Nagel, 2015). Unfortunately, Stone (2014) acknowledged the lack of training and information prevalent among teachers which would best assist these students.

Sitler also offered solutions in her analysis of two traumatized students. In confronting the passive student who has more or less given up, it was recommended for the teacher to adjust perceptions of these students. Rather than assuming the student is merely lazy, teachers need to consider the underlying reasons for this behavior and realize their numerous unmet needs. Some of the needs that can be addressed by the teacher include safety and belonging (Sitler, 2009). In confronting the aggressive student, however, it was recommended that teachers become supportive and flexible. Often, these students have lost all belief in their own ability to change their situation or succeed. Teachers need to acknowledge small improvements and progress in order to convince students they have worth. Flexibility can be demonstrated by allowing students chances to revise their work or turn it in late on occasion allowing them to focus on the actual project or assignment and become successful within their situation. Regardless of the student's response to trauma, a pedagogy which understands the manifestations of trauma and likewise perceives the individuality of students and their needs is strongly prescribed (Sitler, 2009). According to Maslow's (1987) hierarchy of needs, a person must first meet their physical needs, followed by safety and belonging, in order to develop their self esteem and best potential or self-actualization.

Stone (2014) advised educators to become informed about the backgrounds of their students. This provides teachers with awareness concerning specific factors of trauma which can affect healing such as how long the trauma took place and the type of trauma. It has been noted that tragedy caused by humans is much more difficult to recover from than natural disasters. One of the outcomes of such severe trauma includes their response to flashbacks. Defenses and anxiety are naturally produced when students encounter any experience associated with the

traumatic event/s. Additionally, information concerning the cultural norms surrounding students is beneficial. For example, some cultures feel it is inappropriate to show emotions (Stone, 2014). Knowing such information enables educators to become prepared in advance as well as develop strategies.

Other effective strategies were suggested by Stone (2014) including listening. Students gained assurance when listeners validated their stories. Students should be encouraged during conversations revolving around their past by acknowledging their strength and resilience. Providing a safe environment, support, and positive feedback are also essential components of the learning environment. Students who experienced trauma need to be able to take risks in order to learn and develop, and they need to develop the capability of self expression thus enabling them to gain some sense of control. Finally, educators were advised to develop empathy for students, especially those in the EL Classroom and especially those with traumatic experiences. Stone also(2014) summarized that empathy is necessary for teachers to effectively communicate with students.

Having considered both poverty and trauma as prominent factors of the refugee experience, this project now examines the theme of interrupted education. As with the first two themes, this section initially provides the statistical and realistic background of its relevance to the topic. Once this is established, literature will be reviewed which reflects how lack of education affects second language acquisition. Finally, previous research completed surrounding the practices recommended in the education of these students is examined.

SLIFE

Background

Refugees have experienced a different reality than other EL students. One of these realities is their journey once they are displaced. According to the UNHCR data from 2019,

children who were refugees were five times less likely to be in school than other immigrants. Over half of school-age refugees did not attend school, while an alarming 76% of secondary students remained out of the school system. They were not only taken away from their home, their culture, and sometimes their language, but they were often taken away from education as well. During the French control over Cambodia, literacy was not encouraged; education was not supported. The government feared that the ability to read would cause Cambodians to become influenced by nationalist causes. Even within the refugee camp, educational opportunities were limited. The report compiled by Capps and Newland (2015), acknowledged that some refugee camps actually restricted their ability to obtain employment or education. Whether this was due to genuine safety concerns or fear of integration, the outcome was still the same.

DeCapua & Marshall (2015) acknowledged the reality that the majority of refugees were likely to drop out of school in stark contrast to their English speaking counterparts. Additionally, Students who have had an interruption in education were even more at risk. The factors associated with Students with Limited or Interrupted Formal Education (SLIFE) include the following: lack of formal education, content knowledge two or more years behind, and little or no literacy skills. Many of the Cambodian refugees fall into this category. As defined by the state of Minnesota, these students also usually speak another language other than English at home and may not even have literacy skills in their own language (Ouk, 2016).

Ouk's grandfather was one of the fortunate ones who was allowed an education at the temple being taught to read and write. However, the French did not support the further education of Cambodians, and thus, his grandfather was sent to the capital where he built landing strips for Japanese use. With the Vietnam War, came more hardship. His grandfather became a target of the Khmer Rouge due to his prior military position. In order to save his family, he burnt down the family home, all that was in it, and took on a new identity. Eventually, his mother was taken away

from her parents by the Khmer Rouge and rather than educating her, they made her their soldier, and forced to beat and torture her own people (Ouk, 2016).

Once relocated in the U.S., the educational gap became compounded. As students were struggling to maintain grades, their parents were unable to offer any assistance. Davy's parents often thought her low grades were due to her lack of effort (Ouk, 2016). Others missed a lot of school because of other priorities such as having to work or take care of their siblings.

Acknowledging the reality of the limited and/or interrupted education most refugees experienced is overwhelming. Therefore, in order to determine methods to enable the overcoming of this educational gap, the following section provides an overview of its effect upon second language acquisition.

Effect on Second Language Acquisition

English learners who have limited or no formal education have several additional barriers to second language acquisition. These barriers include knowledge of the general content, critical cognitive abilities, and the awareness of basic ideas (DeCapua, Smathers, & Tang, 2007). It was documented that on average, EL students took five to seven years to become proficient in English while a student with limited or no formal education (SLIFE) required at least 7-10 years to accomplish this same proficiency (Collier, 1995).

One aspect of the influence SLIFE has had on language learning is cultural. By definition, their educational experience was lacking causing them to depend upon oral rather than written information. Additionally, some refugees originally came from a culture with an oral tradition (DeCapua & Marshall, 2015). This background coupled with deficiencies in education caused many refugees to lack literacy skills even in their own language (Montero, 2014). Dooley (2009) relayed specific experiences when students did not know how to hold pencils or handle books due to an entire lack of literacy skills.

Another commonality among these students included more informal learning environments in comparison to the assessment driven education in the U.S. Learning environments from their past tended to be collaborative in contrast to the individual focus of American education (DeCapua & Marshall, 2015). It is of importance to note that although their lack of education often puts them below grade and/or age level, “their life experiences are often well beyond” (DeCapua, 2007).

Lastly, because SLIFE have less if any formal education background, they do not understand the rules and expectations of the school systems (DeCapua & Marshall, 2015) and content area knowledge (Dooley, 2009). Ouk (2016) personally remembers often misinterpreting gestures coming from other students as hostile. Because he was not able to understand the social norms of American culture and was unable to express himself verbally to them, he responded physically and got into several fights.

As with the previous two themes of poverty and trauma, there are practices recommended and supported by prior research. The next section presents a review of this literature as it pertains to those EL students from a background of little or interrupted formal education.

Effective Practices

Adjusting pedagogy for Students with Limited or Formal Education (SLIFE) is another essential consideration when servicing refugees. According to DeCapua & Marshall (2015), this created a unique challenge involving not only the need to master content and language, but also to establish basic literacy skills needed in formal education. Because students who lost out on part of their education need to learn subject matter as well as the English language, there have been achievement gaps between them and other EL students. DeCapua (2007) acknowledged the need for extremely committed teachers willing to build relationships as well as ELL aligned curriculum.

DeCapua & Marshall (2015) promoted culturally responsive teaching throughout their study. The five basic elements laid out in this framework were used to discuss effective practices for teaching SLIFE. The key belief central to this approach was that students' cultural background is different rather than flawed. By incorporating this belief, teachers become more aware of students' cultures and develop culturally inclusive curriculum and activities. Together, the five principles of CRT (culturally responsive teaching) made up an instructional model called the Mutually Adaptive Learning Paradigm (MALP).

The first aspect of the culturally responsive teaching paradigm suggested by DeCapua and Marshall (2015) was that of cultural competence. Developing cultural competence means understanding that much of culture is hidden and therefore becoming more aware of concealed yet basic differences. The MALP concluded that the conditions for learning are based upon relationships as well. These relationships develop into a community within the school room where students feel like they belong. Ouk (2016) pointed to influential home visits by various teachers which enabled him to feel accepted. The school itself had the Cambodian students share their culture with the student body in a positive manner by performing songs in their home language.

Developing competence is essential to the next culturally responsive teaching element, which is a culturally relevant curriculum (DeCapua and Marshall, 2015). Such a curriculum does more than an occasional mention of people, holidays, or traditions. It stretches the entire curriculum to contain cultural elements. The MALP framework also advocated that in order for learning to become relevant to students, the teacher needs to consider what the students believe is relevant. Incorporating relevance also enables students to overcome the future reward system barrier of the US. "When students' own knowledge and personal experiences are acknowledged, students become empowered" (DeCapua and Marshall, 2015, p. 365).

One method which addresses the need for cultural relevance is guided reading promoted by Montero (2014). In fact, the basic skills approach often used in the ESL room could fail to place value upon students' abilities to comprehend the world and therefore distance them from formal education within the classroom. Dooley (2009) also remarked that EL curriculum is often irrelevant to its intended audience as well as not collaborative across disciplines or appealing.

Another aspect of culturally responsive teaching is a supportive learning community (Decapua and Marshall, 2015). Included in this notion was developing a safe place for students to learn. This meant they were allowed mistakes, they were understood, they were respected, and they were encouraged to succeed. Expanding learning processes was one way the MALP method incorporated respect and support into the EL classroom. In doing so, teachers included the processes more familiar with SLIFE such as oral skills and shared responsibility. These processes are not meant to replace the written and individual processes promoted in American schools, but rather serve as a way to transition students. Oral and literacy skills can be developed simultaneously. Opportunities for both individual work as well as collective work can become part of the classroom experience. This combination of processes not only allows students a safe way to adjust while learning, but it also provides scaffolding.

Sheltered instruction is one method which would provide a safe learning environment. In this methodology, teachers modify content materials appropriately for language learners. Learning often takes place within these classrooms through collaboration, projects, demonstrations, and group activities (DeCapua, 2007). Collaboration is especially effective for SLIFE because teachers use groups to provide students opportunities to take on different roles. In addition, relationships are facilitated in which newer students are paired with those who can help them navigate school. It also allows a natural environment for discussions.

Pedagogy becomes affected by culturally responsive teaching as well. Culturally congruence established different methodology in teaching. Teachers practicing congruity include varieties of teaching approaches in the classroom and realize SLIFE may learn differently than other students (DeCapua & Marshall, 2015). Approaches recommended in the MALP model included allowing students opportunities to practice academic thinking skills. This is not a common skill developed in students with interrupted education. Using familiar content, or that which is culturally relevant as discussed previously, allows students to focus on language development. Likewise, using previously mastered language features can allow students to build academic skills. Adjusting activities to include these elements demands scaffolding.

On the opposite side of congruity, Dooley (2009) noted that some teachers may have ignored the background of refugees that contained strong educational experiences or literacy skills in their first language. The sheltered instruction model, recommended by DeCapua (2007) recognized the need for different approaches to learning. Teachers using this model rely on visuals to teach content and utilize activities over lectures which are more conducive to the oral and cooperative learning styles familiar to most refugees.

The final element included in culturally responsive teaching is effective instruction. In order to make curriculum accessible to SLIFE, teachers should scaffold learning rather than simplify the content. Students are not best served when content is watered down. Rather, teachers need to model literacy and thinking skills (DeCapua & Marshall, 2015). Montero (2014) addressed the need to build and develop the print literacy skills of SLIFE by means of a guided reading approach. This framework included the teacher modeling reading strategies to their students and then providing further opportunities to practice various skills after careful observation. Teachers were able to analyze the reading skills of their students by using running records. Running records allowed teachers to document specific skills such as decoding, word

stress, and self-correction and therefore provided students with adequate support in areas of deficiency. Additionally, the study conducted by Montero (2014) supported the use of guided reading by demonstrating a gain of 8.3 reading levels in contrast to the 1.2 reading level gain typical when such instruction was absent. Dooley's (2009) research revealed actual criticism of some EL programs for not providing the grammatical foundation necessary to comprehend complex texts, as well as lowered expectations in content knowledge.

Summary

This chapter provided a broad review of relevant literature concerning the topic of this capstone project. Each section was critical to the answer of the research question: *What are the effective practices for meeting the unique educational needs of refugees as EL learners?* For this reason, the three themes of poverty, trauma, and interrupted education were considered separately. Within each theme, the following components of literature were reviewed: statistical background of the theme's relevance to the refugee experience; prior research concerning its known effect on second language acquisition; and effective practices suggested for teachers encountering students from the given situation.

The following chapter discusses the research project and framework of the presentation. This description of the actual project comprises several components: professional rationale for its determination and use, a summary of its intended audience and setting, and an outline of its delivery. In order to adequately analyze the literature reviewed in Chapter Two, Chapter Three considers components of each theme which overlap. The final proposal and project focuses upon those aspects which are familiar with all three key themes.

CHAPTER THREE

Project Description and Rationale

Introduction

The goal of this project was to provide a framework for educators who are faced with the task of teaching English Learners to refugee students. In the previous chapter, three key components of the refugee experience were analyzed through the review of literature in each area. The three themes determined to be essential to this project were poverty, trauma, and SLIFE (students with limited or interrupted formal education). Within each theme, two factors were considered. These factors were the effect each theme has on language acquisition, mainly second language, and effective practices argued to be most effective in teaching language skills. By analyzing research in each area stated, this project should be able to answer the question: *What are the effective practices for meeting the unique educational needs of refugees as EL learners?*

The following chapter summarizes the findings of the prior literature review. First, a description of the project itself is outlined as well as an explanation of how the project aims to answer the question in mind. Next, this chapter presents a rationale behind the final project discussing the frameworks used along with reasons for the chosen framework. The next section of this chapter contains a description of the intended audience and setting in which the project takes place. The final section outlines the project and its timeline.

Project Description

Project

The overall goal of the project was providing a framework for teachers to utilize in teaching ESL to refugee students. This framework contained the three themes considered are poverty, trauma, and SLIFE, all of which have been determined as key factors within the refugee experience. In order to determine the effective practices for teaching refugee students a second

language with those three factors in mind, the project first summarized the findings from the literature review focused upon the effective practices for each theme. Those findings were then analyzed to determine overlapping components, that is, effective practices which are common in two separate themes and ideally all three. Those practices listed across all three themes together provided the framework.

Framework

The specific framework chosen for this project was staff development. Since the ultimate goal of this project was to provide educators themselves with an effective method to teach English to refugee students, it needed to be accessible to them. While curriculum might provide some tools, what was more essential for these purposes was to provide a workable framework teachers could take back to their classroom and build upon to meet their specific classroom needs. Staff development also provides a more personal and interactive experience for teachers allowing them to participate in its key components.

Rationale

Justification

It was the premise of this project that refugee students have a unique experience and background in comparison to their EL peers. As noted by Ouk (2016) overcoming numerous barriers is extremely challenging for refugees to accomplish without help. Furthermore, educators stand in an influential position allowing them to serve as compassionate mentors to those refugees in need of their support. As many school districts experience waves of refugees moving into their community, they are often unprepared (Ouk, 2016). By providing a professional development workshop, a presentation of the project becomes available to any school district trying to meet the needs of large refugee settlements within their district. Often, this experience is overwhelming for the staff as well as the students. By providing this framework to teachers who may not have prior

preparation for this situation, they are given effective tools to use, support from administration and across educational roles, and additional confidence. Teachers who have been prepared can not only be affirmed through this project, but will be able to serve as a consultant to their peers. Application of the framework throughout the EL classroom as well as content classes provides all staff with common terms of discussion and troubleshooting and ultimately a more positive and successful experience for the refugee students.

Theory

The professional development presentation was built upon the learning theories of both constructivist and transformative learning as prescribed by Daley & Cervero (2016). By combining both theories, the learner gains new information as well as adjusts their perspective in line with prior experiences. The outcome of such learning results in transformation of practice which was the desired outcome of this project.

Constructivist theory advocated the integration of context, knowledge and practice. For the purposes of this project, the context was an educational institution most likely encompassing an entire school district. Incorporating new knowledge was designed to be practiced within the context of the classroom first of all and then within the administrative offices and buildings as well. This context provided much of the past experiences in which the learners link new information learned from the PD. (Daley & Cervero, 2016).

This pedagogy was further promoted within the ideology of intercultural education (Lupu, Anghel, & Vilciu, 2104) which became important considering the vast backgrounds of educators representing several cultures. Furthermore, the success of this project relied on teachers' ability to communicate and effectively educate the predetermined culture of refugee students entering the doors of their schools. As part of this theory, the learners and teachers were encouraged to interact in a meaningful way which thus had attitudinal effects far beyond the

cognitive level (Lupu et al., 2014). As noted by Lupu et.al. (2014), the objectives pertained to the incorporation of diversity and tolerance as well as optimizing interactions and decreasing conflicts amongst various cultural groups.

Transformative learning added to the knowledge component of professional development by adding the element of reflection. Reflection by participants established how the new information linked to prior experiences, whether it be added, changed or replaced. This learning theory was also considered foundational among adult learning theories which targets the audience of the staff development presentation. The work of Hogan (2016) offered a definition of transformative learning which categorized it as more of a metatheory encompassing several individual theories. This definition, used for the purposes outlined, concluded that, “Transformative learning refers to processes that result in significant and irreversible changes in the way a person experiences, conceptualizes, and interacts with the world” (Hogan, 2016, p. 17). Using familiar metaphors, the term “experiences” referred to the heart of the learner and thus their personal lives and feelings. Conceptualizing referred to the head of the learner and thus the understanding and interpretation of the content. Finally, interacting referred to the hands of the learner and thus the behavioural outcomes and implementations as a result of the training. Furthermore, transformative learning prescribed the outcomes of depth, breadth, and stability. In other words, learning resulted in real change concerning world view or teaching pedagogy in this case. Breadth indicated how far these changes reached and how many contexts within the educational institution were affected. Also of consideration with breadth was how far it impacted each personal learner. Finally, stability referred to permanent change (Hoggan, 2016).

Audience and Setting

Audience

This project was initially designed for a midwestern school district in a small town about thirty minutes from suburbs surrounding a larger city. The purpose behind the use of this district included the motivation behind the entire project. This school district underwent massive challenges and changes several years ago when the small town surrounding it was resettled by Somali refugees. Information gathered from census reports between 2005 and 2017 showed that 78% of the residents there were white, followed by 10% Hispanic and 8% black. Economically, 44% of the household income remained under \$50,000 and 20% of children under 18 years of age were considered below the poverty line. Of particular interest to this study was that by 2017, only 75% of children between five and seventeen years old spoke English-only at home. This was most likely due to the fact that 10% of the population was foreign-born, 45% of them born in Africa (Census Reporter, 2017). This would reflect the influx of Somali refugees experienced by this district. Data from the 2019-2020 school year Public School Review (2019) reported almost half of the current enrollment consisted of minority students while 24% of the total student population was Hispanic and 21% was Black.

It was the ultimate goal of this project to provide a framework available to the educators and staff in current systems experiencing influxes of refugees in their community. Having information upfront, before all the trials and troubles begin in this situation, enables the staff to develop a common pedagogy and culture amongst themselves. This platform also gives teachers a solid foundation and confidence when it comes time to prepare curriculum, develop the classroom setting, and interact on a daily basis with the new refugee students. With confidence comes positivity. Students quickly pick up on the optimistic and welcoming emotions coming from the staff and most likely respond positively themselves.

Setting

The setting of this project takes place during staff development workshops. Ideally this workshop would take place at the beginning of the school year allowing teachers and support staff on the same initial page rather than making changes in the middle of the year. However, if need be, this could take place during another workshop opportunity. For example, if a large number of refugees settled in the community over the fall, there could be a workshop in between semesters.

Since the information contained in the project is most likely new to most of the staff as well as broad, the ideal workshop would take place over three days. This allowed the teachers and staff to learn material in sections and bring that new knowledge to the next section. It would also allow time for reflection and assignments. Day One of the workshop offered an introduction and review of the three basic components of the project: poverty, trauma, and SLIFE. Day Two then started building the framework using diagrams plotting how effective practices for the three components intersect. A final framework was also developed and outlined. The final day, Day Three, provided a review of each framework element as well as specific methods and tools used to implement it. During this time, groups developed a method or tool for one aspect of the framework and shared it with everyone.

Project Outline

Following is an annotated outline of the project including power-point presentations for each day of the workshop, handouts and worksheets, and activity descriptions. Each section of the outline also contained a general timeline. The effectiveness of the project was determined by the culminating group activity on the last day as well as the survey completed by participants.

I. Day One:

A. Starter: Handouts given as participants arrived with instructions

1. Prior-knowledge assessment: a brief quiz which assesses how much the audience already knows about the topic and activates their thinking
(Handout)
 2. Personal attitude evaluation: a brief survey revealing individual emotions concerning the topic such as fears, concerns, bias, etc. (Handout)
- B. Introduction: Introduce speaker and topic
- C. Rationale: Provide reasons for the presentation
1. Current district/community situation: influx of refugees
 2. The refugee as a unique student (Power-Point)
 - a) Unique needs and experiences compared to other ELs
 - b) Unique educational approach
- D. Today's goals:
1. Obtain a general understanding of each factor as well as how it affects secondary language acquisition.
 2. Obtain a clear understanding of practices recommended for each factor.
- E. Three areas of consideration (Power-Point)
1. Poverty: Define and provide statistical data
 2. Trauma: Define and provide statistical data
 3. SLIFE: Define and provide statistical data
- F. Poverty (Power-Point and handout)
1. Effect on secondary language acquisition
 2. Effective practices recommended
- G. Trauma (Power-Point and handout)
1. Effect on secondary language acquisition

2. Effective practices recommended

H. SLIFE (Power-Point and handout)

1. Effect on secondary language acquisition
2. Effective practices recommended

I. Review and Preview

1. Review key components of the presentation: have participants share what they learned
2. Preview: give a brief overview of tomorrow's presentation

II. Day Two

A. Starter Activity: Participants receive a small colored circle and are divided into groups with the same color.

B. Today's Goals:

1. Determine areas of commonality between the three themes
2. Develop a working list of effective practices in teaching English to refugees

C. Use of Graphic Organizer: Introduce the circle diagram, colors used, and how it reveals areas of commonality (Power-Point)

D. Circle One: Poverty/ Color: Yellow (Power-Point and activity)

1. The Yellow groups will work to create a list which summarizes the effective practices recommended for students from low-socioeconomic backgrounds.

2. Yellow groups share this list which is added to the Power Point

E. Circle Two: Trauma/ Color: Red (Power-Point and activity)

1. The red group will work to create a list which summarizes the effective practices recommended for students from traumatic backgrounds.
2. Red groups share this list which is added to the Power Point

F. Circle Three: SLIFE/ Color: Blue (Power-Point and activity)

1. The blue group will work together to create a list which summarizes the effective practices recommended for students from traumatic backgrounds.
2. Blue groups share this list which is added to the Power Point

G. Putting it Together (Handout and Power-Point)

1. Overlap circles to find the common practices
 - a) Find the sweet spot: the practices that are recommended for all three
 - b) Use this to create the working list

H. Review and Preview

1. Review key components of the presentation: have participants share what they learned
2. Preview: give a brief overview of tomorrow's presentation

III. Day Three

A. Starter: Give each participant a paint can with one of the following words on it and instruct them to break up into groups with the same word (Communication, Background, Safety & Freedom, Skills, Methods)

B. Today's Goals

1. Create a detailed framework for teaching English to refugee students
2. Develop and share specific strategies for the classroom

- C. Framework: The working list created on day two is used to create the framework with a house analogy and visual (Power-Point)
1. Supplies/ Components: Basic parts of the house being built representing various practices
 2. Tools: Specific tools used to build the house representing specific strategies of implementation.
- D. Build a house: Each practice is reviewed along with suggested strategies to implement it. Groups brainstorm other strategies (Power-Point and activity)
1. Practice one: Know and use their background
 - a) Review: Understand reasons behind behavior, build upon prior knowledge, and promote individual cultures
 - b) Implement: the specific methods recommended
 - (1) Home language
 - (2) Home visits
 - (3) Use of students' communities
 - c) Brainstorm: groups come up with some strategies for this practice
 2. Practice two: Provide safety and freedom
 - a) Review: students need environments of safety as well as freedom
 - b) Implement: the specific methods recommended
 - (1) Allow mistakes/ learn from them
 - (2) Allow choice with assignments, timing, and self-control
 - c) Brainstorm: groups come up with some strategies for this practice

3. Practice three: Communication

- a) Review: communication and therefore language become powerful tools
- b) Implement: the specific methods recommended
 - (1) Listening and awareness
 - (2) Collaboration/ dialog
 - (3) Ability to express themselves
 - (4) Relationships with parents and communities
- c) Brainstorm: groups come up with some strategies for this practice

4. Practice four: Content

- a) Review: specific content needs to be explicitly taught
- b) Implement: the specific methods recommended
 - (1) Formal register/ vocabulary
 - (2) Abstract concepts
 - (3) Rules of school
 - (4) Academic skills/ thinking skills
- c) Brainstorm: groups come up with some strategies for this practice

5. Practice five: Methodology

- a) Review: certain methods are known to be effective across the three areas considered in this project
- b) Implement: the specific methods recommended
 - (1) Collaboration

- (2) Access language through oral skills, use of visuals, and projects
 - (3) Focus upon struggles in design and success in feedback
 - (4) Individualized instruction
 - (5) ZPD, scaffolding, and modeling
- c) Brainstorm: groups come up with some strategies for this practice
- E. Culminating activity: groups share strategies they came up with during brainstorming to develop with detailed information of application (Activity and handout)
1. Group work time
 2. Group share: each group presents their specific strategy with details. The audience is encouraged to take notes
 3. Question, answer, participate: all participants are given time to ask questions to the presenting group and offer positive input
- F. Final Comments
1. Thank the audience for participation
 2. Provide them with contact information as well as reference list and link to the presentation Power-Point
 3. Have them complete a feedback sheet before leaving

Summary

This chapter provided a description of the final project. This description began with the rationale behind it as well as the framework chosen to present it. Theories supporting this choice were given. Finally, this chapter presented more detailed information concerning the audience,

setting, and actual project outline. In the next chapter, the final project as a whole is reviewed and evaluated. Areas of consideration for this review include a summary of the literature and key aspects learned throughout the project's development. The evaluation includes limitations and implications of the project as well as recommendations for future research areas. Following the review and evaluation is a reflection of personal growth throughout the process and future research plans.

Chapter Four

Reflections on Capstone Project

Introduction

This project has centered around the topic of refugee students specifically as it pertains to teaching them a second language. The first chapter contained the background of how I personally came to the decision of this topic for my capstone project. It then further looked at how this topic was developed into the question *What are effective practices for meeting the unique educational needs of refugees as EL learners?* Since the goal of this project was to provide answers to this question, the second chapter provided a summary of literature surrounding the themes of poverty, trauma, and SLIFE, which were considered as central elements relating to the backgrounds of refugee students. Additionally, each of these sections presented statistical information and testimonies which backed up the topics relevant to this project. Then, each section considered how second language acquisition is affected by element, and finally, what are effective practices recommended. The third chapter focused upon the actual research project designed to implement the findings throughout this capstone. This final chapter now turns to my personal reflections now that the project is complete. Mainly, I will consider what I have learned through this process, a revisit of the literature, limitations and future implications.

Lessons Learned

As I first began working on my capstone project, I titled it “Capstone of Joy”. This was never intended to be my final title but rather self inspiration and encouragement throughout the process. Similarly, I have found that the capstone is much more about the journey taken rather than the final destination. It is during these journeys and throughout these processes that we learn and grow as human beings. And so, throughout this experience, I encountered bumps in the road

as well as spectacular views. More importantly, though, I grew along the way as a researcher, a writer, and a learner.

As a researcher, my growth occurred mostly in discovering new techniques. One of my favorite methods I learned was cross-referencing. I found many of my best resources by searching through sources cited within another reference I was already using. It may sound simple, but I had never thought of that too much before. However, it makes sense to look up the sources used to develop an article or book found to be beneficial. In addition to this, I also discovered a tool that allowed me to find other sources that cited the resource being used. In other words, when I found a good resource, I would carefully consider both where this source got its information as well as what works used this source. Most importantly to me, however, was learning as a researcher to always dig deeper. It was very rarely the first article read pertaining to a given topic that provided me the best information. It was very rarely my first understanding that was enough to reach a conclusion. I guess that truly, just like the traveler, I find myself on a continual journey. The research will never be complete. I will never learn it all. But I will keep advancing and hopefully making meaningful advances along the way.

Writing has always been something I rather enjoy and find myself fairly competent doing. However, this experience has truly stretched me. I do not think I ever really struggled with the length of the assignment, but the breadth of it became overwhelming at times. I am a pretty singular thinker, and completion of a capstone project requires a very broad net in which you must gather together several different aspects and then weave them together in a coherent manner. In one phase, I was synthesizing prior research, theory, and computed information concerning portions of my project. In another section, I was discussing my own personal journey. And throughout it all, I was thoughtfully considering how to have it all make sense.

I must admit that I hit a lot of personal pitfalls in the writing experience, which is truly odd for me. I am used to being able to just write, edit a little, and have it be just fine. But this was not the case. I found myself editing and editing and editing. I would think it was good and get some feedback and then have to edit and edit and edit again. The biggest growing pain, however, was not merely revising my work so much but rather the self doubt that grew as a result. I found myself many times thinking that maybe I wasn't a good writer, maybe I don't know what I am talking about, or maybe I shouldn't even be trying to do this. I am grateful that I did not choose to quit. Although most of the time the decision to continue was largely because I was so close to being done, it was well worth the trials. I could equate it to exercise. There are many times exercise is painful and feels impossible to complete. But it is by persevering through the pain and struggles that the body improves, becomes stronger, and develops stamina. This is what happened to me through this writing experience. By pushing myself to pick up the computer and try one more time, I have developed strength as a writer by finding better ways to word things and make logical transitions. I have developed stamina and the ability to continue and know I am capable of completing what I started out to do. And I have improved.

Learning has been the most enjoyable aspect of this process. It is probably not a surprise to discover that as an educator, I truly love learning. Additionally I was learning about a topic I chose, a topic that I am very passionate about and is very important to me. I entered this capstone hoping to find answers, particularly to answer the question, *What are effective practices for meeting the unique educational needs of refugees as EL learners?* I was hoping to find the connections I believed were there. Each topic served its own purpose and held endless information. I found it fascinating for the most part. I learned incredible amounts about poverty, trauma, and SLIFE. I learned about how these things have an effect upon learning and more importantly language acquisition. Additionally, it was truly breathtaking to find those

commonalities I was searching for. It was like finding the buried treasure. I truly would have loved to keep going on with some of this and find even more. There were many more promising resources to consider and study. Nonetheless, I did find some answers throughout completion of the project and what I learned as a result of this process is invaluable to me.

The areas in which I gained new understanding and made connections became the center of my project. After exploring each topic individually, I took time to make lists and find areas of commonality. This was really the point of the entire capstone. Interestingly, I truly was not able to answer the question *What are effective practices for meeting the unique educational needs of refugees as EL learners?* without this process. I must admit, that it took a few attempts to come up with a final list I felt best represented the results gained throughout my research. I eventually came to the conclusion of five basic principles which are recommended as effective practices in the education of refugee students. The five practices are: 1) Know and use your students' backgrounds; 2) Provide an environment of safety and freedom; 3) Use communication as a powerful tool; 4) Teach specific content and skills; 5) Utilize suggested methods. Under each of these practices are more specific ways to carry them out.

The next section will summarize the key aspects contained in my review of relevant literature. Within each topic of research, I will provide that which proved to be most influential to the purpose of this capstone as well as reflect upon what I learned.

Literature Review Revisited

My literature review contained three broad areas that I determined to be the key aspects of refugees' backgrounds, especially as it pertained to my capstone project. The topics of poverty, trauma, and SLIFE were each individually considered and reviewed. For each of them, I also looked into statistical information of that topic's relevance to refugees as well as personal testimonies. Then I looked at what the literature revealed concerning how that particular topic

affects the learning of a second language. Finally, I summarized effective practices associated with each topic. The following is an overview of the key take-aways from each section.

Poverty

Buckingham (2014) proved to be extremely beneficial in summarizing the impacts of poverty upon literacy skills. There is much back and forth concerning whether it is the actual poverty or the situations surrounding poverty which affects literacy. Nonetheless, Buckingham confirms many correlations between low socioeconomic status and important literacy skills such as vocabulary and phonemic awareness. Also of crucial importance to this section was Dike's (2017) summary of scientific data revealing the influence of poverty upon actual brain development. Although some of this information is extremely technical, it does much to confirm the reality that impoverished children are more likely to have low literacy skills as a result.

The topic of poverty was the first topic considered in the literature review and was fairly familiar to me. As I mentioned before, I have taught in urban alternative high schools for seven years. Within that experience, I learned a lot about teaching students from low socioeconomic backgrounds. One of the key influences upon me at that time was Ruby Payne. I had the privilege of attending one of her seminars as a teacher. So much of what she said rang true to me in that situation. It is no real surprise to me that she was also the key influence upon my research for this portion of my capstone. Although she has been criticized for focusing upon student deficiencies, I was happy to see that she adapted her material to contain portions which contradict the deficit approach. I found much literature in support of her Nine Powerful Practices (Payne, 2008). The predominant ideas concerning effective practices to teach ESL to impoverished students were that of relationship and support. Having genuine relationships with such students which are built upon mutual respect is essential in order to build a platform in which they are motivated to learn. Likewise, the literature advocates teacher support in areas of weakness.

Kim's (2017) transformative approach provided several strategies educators could use to meet these needs. Such strategies included collaborative learning, small group conversation, and building upon student interest.

Trauma

The effects of trauma upon second language acquisition proved to be mental and emotional. Nonetheless, these effects are profound and need to be taken into consideration. I found Sitler's (2009) study to be extremely beneficial to this project. He demonstrates through the study of two students, that not everyone responds to trauma the same way. It is crucial to understand that while for one person, being aggressive is the mode of protection, another person becomes passive. The key take-away, however, is to look beyond behavior. This is an echoed response from the poverty section as well. Often, the behaviors of students go far beyond discipline issues and are clues to something bigger underneath. Lupien et al. (2009) also added impactful information concerning the impact trauma has upon the brain. Again, similar to poverty, this is profound research. It takes an abstract concept like trauma and makes it concrete. Wills and Nagel (2015) further confirmed not only this but that trauma can affect areas of the brain responsible for language acquisition.

Sitler (2009) also provided essential practices concerning teaching traumatized students. There is no one-size solution, since, as mentioned beforehand, each student may respond differently. However, for the most part, Sitler advocates an approach of safety and belonging for the passive students, while the aggressive student may need more of a supportive and flexible approach. Stone (2014) also offered effective strategies such as empathy, validation, and the freedom to make mistakes. Each of these strategies have profoundly positive effects upon students who have experienced trauma as they provide things they were denied previously. It is a logical conclusion that since the effects of trauma show up on mental and emotional capacities,

that it is through mental and emotional considerations educators will be able to reach them most effectively.

SLIFE

Decapua & Marshall (2017) were extremely beneficial to this project concerning the issue of SLIFE. Students with limited or interrupted formal education are at a clear disadvantage. Compound with that reality trying to learn a 2nd language and then add the entire refugee experience. Decapua & Marshall summarize the two-pronged effect SLIFE can have upon language. The first influence comes from their general background and culture. These students tend to come from environments in which an oral tradition was relied upon for learning rather than a written one. Additionally, their cultures are far more likely to be of a collaborative nature rather than the independent one we champion here in America. With these two realities in consideration, most SLIFE students come to the classroom with low literacy skills in their first language, let alone a 2nd one. The second influence revolves more around their situation. Most often, there are outside situations which make it impossible for SLIFE to receive education. Lack of being in school leads to a lack of understanding basic content as well as expectations within the school building.

A culturally responsive approach was advocated by Decapua and Marshall (2017) with key elements echoed throughout other research. As such, their MALP (Mutually Adaptive Learning Paradigm) became the backbone of effective strategies in teaching SLIFE a second language. Some of the key elements of this theory include cultural competence, relevant curriculum, and support. Competence includes a knowledge and awareness of students' backgrounds and cultures. Including these aspects of students' lives into the classroom as beneficial does much to empower them. Relevant curriculum must reach far beyond the occasional book centered around a different ethnic group or the acknowledgement of a holiday.

Daily considerations of ideas, topics, and concerns, as well as diversity will do much to interest and motivate students. Support includes making strategic classroom choices such as allowing for collaboration, giving students choice, and scaffolding assignments and lessons.

Throughout the literature review, the one thing I was looking for was overlap. If they were all three separate areas that did not share any commonalities, then I would not be able to adequately answer the question *What are the effective practices for meeting the unique educational needs of refugees as EL learners?* Fortunately, I did find many effective practices that were shared not only between two of the topics but between all three. These shared practices, which will be reviewed in the next section, are the heart of this project.

Limitations and Future Implications

Limitations

The limitations surrounding this project are due to its depth. As I conducted the literature review, I realized very quickly how much more there was to research. The final connections and answers provided as a result of this research are scratching the surface. I began to see several connections that in and of themselves would have been beneficial areas to further research. With this ability to further look into that which was unearthed throughout this process, I feel the answers could become more specific and refined. Similarly, the strategies and specific methods of implementations provided could be further developed. There were many times I wished I could put a halt to the actual capstone project so that I could have the time to dig deeper. Nonetheless, there were answers provided from the completing the project and these limitations lead to the areas of future research I would like to pursue personally or recommend for future avenues of development.

Implications

The implications of this project are at the forefront of awareness and therefore advocacy. There are a lot of misperceptions concerning refugees. Furthermore, lack of knowledge has often been linked directly to fear. These misperceptions and fears can lead to further bias and even intolerance. Educators, especially EL teachers, are meant to support and advance our students, not do that which could hold them back. Most educational professionals are likely not biased against refugees. However, like most people, they might remain uninformed. This project and ultimately the staff development produced as a result will do much to provide this information to those educators. Ultimately more information and more informed staff could lead to changes throughout the entire educational system. So many advances have been made concerning EL students. It is not beyond the scope of this project to hope that this project and such projects similar to this will lead to advances for refugees. Surely, there are not only changes that need to be made in the classroom such as suggested throughout this project, but there are also changes that need to be made throughout the system as a whole and within educational policies. Such policies which could be affected could be those pertaining to testing, interventions, and graduation standards. It seems that there has to be better ways to service EL students. I am aware that it is an entirely different topic to some extent. But I truly hope that this project will in some small way start this process.

Recommendations

This project was never intended to be an end in and of itself but rather a platform to dive off of into deeper understandings. As this was originally written and designed with a specific school district in mind, one of my main recommendations is that this project be adapted for other similar school districts. The possible outcome of conducting the staff development piece to other staff members across multiple districts is the only way true reform is possible. The methods utilized throughout the project were created to be relevant across multiple situations and

communities. It is my hope that any school district encountering an influx of refugees in their community would use this as a resource to empower their teaching staff as well as support staff. Furthermore, the staff development presentation would also be of great benefit to those districts who had an influx of refugees in the past. In this situation, it could serve as a refresher of areas that need attention as well as affirmation of things done well.

The other recommendation is that each school district which does utilize this project, individualize its outcome. This somewhat correlates with the first recommendation, but it is more specific. The final portion of the staff development piece offers time for coworkers to collaborate on specific strategies to use. This was meant to allow teachers an opportunity to not only provide very specific methods, but also to build methods which are most conducive to their environment. Although the broad answers to the research question *What are effective practices for meeting the unique educational needs of refugees as EL learners?* are somewhat universal, specific application may not be. In addition, as advocated with other forms of learning, participants are more likely to not only become motivated to learn when their opinion is a part of it, but are also more likely to remember.

Future Research

As mentioned in the limitations of the project, there are areas that began to come to light for me that I truly only touched upon. With that being said, I would love to further research these areas to find out if there is further literature supporting some of the connections I made from the review of literature. For example, I began to see a thread of commonality between the three areas of poverty, trauma, and SLIFE regarding communication. There were several different aspects surrounding communication mentioned throughout the research as well as in this project such as respect, validation, relationship, and awareness. I feel that this is one area that has huge implications especially for refugee students. There was other literature I read that mentioned the

aspect of voice as a benefit to refugees. Accordingly, through the teaching of language an educator is also able to provide the very tools needed for refugee students to overcome many of the hardships, traumas and trials they have endured. It seems like the perfect solution. This is definitely an area I would love to personally pursue.

Other areas of future research that would be beneficial in the area of teaching ESL to refugee students would be to develop more specific strategies. For example, on many ends, collaboration was suggested as a method to use in the classroom. Such methods like this could be further researched to provide specific suggestions, activities, and even lesson plans centered around collaboration. Furthermore, additional research could provide more information pertaining to the type of collaboration which would be best for the refugee or if there are any which would be in fact more harmful than beneficial.

Summary

Overall, this chapter has reviewed my own personal journey throughout the process of this capstone project. In reflecting over this I have taken into account my own personal growth, the knowledge I have gained from the literature reviewed, and implications of the project. Both limitations and recommendations were additionally considered.

In conclusion, I will reiterate what I wrote towards the beginning of this chapter. “The capstone is much more about the journey taken rather than the final destination. It is during these journeys and throughout these processes that we learn and grow as human beings” (Palmer, p. 46). With this in mind, I now find myself further along in the journey but in no way at the end. There is much more road to travel and many more lessons to learn. My desire is to continue to read, research, listen, and learn further about refugee students and how we can best serve them as educators. My desire is to find out what is over the next hill and beyond the next turn. My desire is to travel, to progress, to not stand still.

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