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PROVIDING EFFECTIVE CAREER-READINESS INSTRUCTION FOR HIGH
SCHOOL IMMIGRANT AND REFUGEE ENGLISH LEARNERS

By

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A capstone project submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages

Hamline University

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I would like to dedicate this project to the kind and hard-working students who inspired it.

“Your purpose in life is to find your purpose and give your whole heart and soul to it.”
-Buddha

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

Introduction

Immigrants and refugees with limited English proficiency (LEP) experience a number of serious career-related linguistic, cultural, and socioeconomic barriers. As an English language (EL) teacher who is passionate about doing all I can to support students in their goals, my research question is: *what do effective high school career-readiness teaching practices look like for refugees and immigrants with limited English proficiency?*

In this chapter, I will discuss my personal journey toward this research topic and its subtopics. I will also discuss the significance of this research to LEP students and families, as well as educators and policy makers. I will provide the context and rationale for doing this project, and I will summarize the chapter and provide expectations for the next chapters in this work.

My Personal Journey

I had the opportunity to complete some of my English as a Second Language (ESL) student teaching experience in a high school in a small town in North-Central Wisconsin in the fall of 2018. Many of these students came from East African refugee families that had originally been attracted to the area because of the availability of low-skill jobs at the local Jennie-O turkey processing facility. Because I heard some of these students talk about their own jobs processing turkeys, and saw how resigned they

sometimes seemed to that work, I began to want to start a classroom dialogue about other employment options available in the US. As I talked about jobs and careers with them casually before or after class, I noticed that these students didn't seem to have a lot of knowledge about the types of work that are available. Further, often they seemed unenthusiastic about their futures or had goals for the future which seemed to be based not on their own reality, but on what they thought they should say their goals were. These conversations and observations made me realize that there is the potential for educators to play a huge role in informing immigrant and refugee LEP students of the possibilities that exist for them to choose jobs that will allow them to utilize and build upon their own personal, cultural, and language-based assets. I realized that I wanted to be one of those teachers, but that I really didn't understand anything about teaching career readiness skills.

During this experience, I spent a lot of time thinking about, developing, and implementing curriculum to help Somalian, Ethiopian, and Nigerian immigrant high school English learners think about the potential career paths available for them here in the United States. The two-week curriculum I presented to them combined reading first-hand accounts of a wide variety of jobs, from movie monster to restaurant owner, stunt pilot to subway driver, and documenting and discussing some of the advantages and disadvantages of the jobs. Students also evaluated how the potential jobs fit with their personalities and financial goals. Student teaching can be a whirlwind of an experience, particularly as the EdTPA demands completion, and before I knew it, I was moving on to the elementary school to complete the K-12 student teaching experience.

Since then, I have had those high school students and that career-focused curriculum on my mind, and I have been considering some of the additional factors that might affect immigrant and LEP students the most when it comes to preparing for the future. I decided that I wanted to put time, energy, and research into learning more about career readiness curriculum, including how that curriculum can be modified and/or expanded to best serve immigrants and refugees learning English.

The first area of research that I decided to pursue was the wide field of career readiness education. I asked myself the question, *what are the main components of a successful career readiness initiative?* I wanted to understand what were viewed as essential parts of career readiness and how they were being utilized in schools. I learned that the field is vast, but that essential components have been distilled. I learned that there is no single “best practice” curriculum, but that this is a discipline that demands a high amount of differentiation and a focus on individual student needs.

The second area of research that I pursued was the challenges that immigrant and refugee English learners face. I believed that I knew implicitly that these students often have career-related difficulties, but what exactly are they? I asked myself the question, *what career-related challenges do immigrant and refugee English learners face?* I learned that there is a very wide range of challenges faced by these groups, and that they can often be viewed as vicious cycles.

Third, I looked into theoretical perspectives offered in the literature of the field of career counseling. I wanted to know, *what theoretical perspectives can be useful in deciding how to approach career readiness education for immigrant and refugee English*

learners? Reading through career counseling journals was an illuminating experience, and I learned that much work has been done which considers how we can approach career readiness work with these vulnerable but resourceful and strong groups. I believe that effective teaching is always grounded in well-considered theories, and that any number of theories can be pieced together to create coherent, useful worldviews. I learned that among others, for me, two very valuable theories are self-efficacy and decent work. These theories will be useful to consider when developing a toolkit for educators to use as they work with immigrant and refugee English learners on career readiness.

Significance to Stakeholders

This research project, which will culminate in an educator toolkit of modules to utilize when teaching career readiness skills to immigrant and refugee English learners, will be significant to teachers who wish to better prepare these students for the transition from school to work. That crucial transition is a huge topic at the forefront of many educators' minds, especially at the high school level. It can be frustrating for teachers to feel that some students are missing out on information, skills, and experiences that could benefit them, and this toolkit will provide both helpful theories and discussion topics, as well as concrete activity ideas with optional scaffolding in order to best meet student needs.

Ultimately the goal of the project is for immigrant and refugee English learners to receive career-readiness education that addresses their challenges and strengths. Students whose teachers choose to incorporate toolkit ideas into their career readiness curriculum will benefit from being able to build knowledge and skills about the world of work. It is

my hope that toolkit modules will help students to situate themselves as valuable individuals and members of their communities, as well as help them to gain a broad spectrum of career-related skills, and that doing so will help them to build genuine hope and realistic, positive goals for their futures. Of course, if this outcome can occur, students' current and future families will be positively impacted by this project as well. I believe that decent work opportunities can truly be a key to break multigenerational cycles that do not serve the individuals or their communities. If students can build a strong framework for understanding employment options and paths to those options, they should be more likely to pursue an option that is appropriate for their personal, social, and financial goals.

I also believe that the modules included in the toolkit are able to be useful for students who are not immigrants or refugees. While immigrants and refugees are my target population and the impetus for research, the fact is that there are many native students who are also trapped in vicious cycles such as trauma or poverty. Additionally, while intensive English language instruction is clearly not needed for every student, couldn't we all benefit from explicit practice in an interview scenario? The ideas in the toolkit will be adaptable for a wide range of students, and for that, I feel grateful to our immigrant and refugee students for inspiring this dive into some of the more subtle aspects of career readiness.

Summary

In this chapter, I have discussed my personal journey to my research topic, and how identifying my own significant knowledge gaps inspired me to attempt to learn how

to be more effective in preparing immigrant and refugee learners for their futures in the United States. I have shown that this topic is of utmost importance to immigrant and refugee English learners and to their futures, as well as to the futures of their families and communities. Further, I have shown how this curricular research can be helpful to all teachers who wish to give all students strategies for success in the transition from formal schooling to employment. In chapter 2 I will discuss how my review of the literature helped me to begin to fill some of my gaps in knowledge and to answer the key questions that I outlined above. In chapter 3 I will describe my project, which is a career-readiness toolkit for educators, and in chapter 4 I will reflect on my project and share the conclusions I have gathered.

CHAPTER TWO

Literature Review

Introduction

The research question being pursued in this capstone project is *what do effective high school career-readiness teaching practices look like for refugees and immigrants with limited English proficiency?* In the following four sections of this chapter, I will be discussing salient points pertaining to this important topic that emerged out of the literature I reviewed. The first section will discuss resources that teachers can use to establish a framework based on career development initiatives. The second section will look at career-related barriers for refugee/immigrant English learners. The third section will give an overview of some of the major theoretical approaches that can be considered in designing a career-readiness curriculum for refugee/immigrant English learners. The fourth section will discuss important skills to include in a career readiness curriculum for refugee/immigrant English learners. Finally, a summary will be made regarding the literature reviewed, and chapter 3, which will discuss key components of the curriculum project, will be anticipated.

Establishing a Framework Based on Career Development Initiatives

As teachers, one of our greatest hopes is to see our students transition from school to adulthood in well-thought-out ways that will satisfy them and bring them happiness throughout their lives. As professionals who have gone through extensive career planning

and development ourselves, one might think that we would be naturally adept at providing career readiness tools to our students, many of whom need these tools the most: immigrants and refugees who are learning English (Yakushko, Backhaus, Watson, Ngaruiya, & Gonzalez, 2008). However, it would behoove many of us to educate ourselves more deeply on the field of career planning in order to best support our students. It is appropriate to start by looking at the components of successful career readiness programs.

The American School Counselor Association has developed a selection of competencies related to career development that “provide the foundation for the acquisition of skills, attitudes and knowledge that enable students to make a successful transition from school to the world of work, and from job to job across the lifespan” (American School Counselor Association, 2004). These standards include:

- developing career awareness;
- developing an awareness of personal abilities, skills, interests, and motivations;
- developing employment readiness;
- employing strategies to achieve future career goals with success and satisfaction; and
- understanding the relationship between personal qualities, education, training, and the world of work (American School Counselor Association, 2004).

Within each of these standards are more specific competencies which, although written by and for school counselors, can offer guidance to teachers who wish to provide meaningful transition and career readiness development opportunities in the classroom. These standards address the learner throughout the span of their K-12 career and are fairly broad. For example, under the standard “Develop Career Awareness,” we see included in the list of competencies “learn to make decisions,” “learn how to set goals,” and “understand the importance of planning.” For secondary teachers who wish for guidance more specific to their target 9-12 age group, additional resources may be helpful.

Another way one may establish a working framework for teaching transition and career readiness is to reference Grade Level Expectancies (GLEs), such as those created by the Missouri Center for Career Education (2006). These GLEs have been reproduced in textbooks such as *Career Counseling in P-12 Schools* (Curry & Milsom, 2013), which is where I originally came across them. The GLEs are, as the name suggests, broken up by grade, which can help teachers maintain grade-level and developmental expectations throughout their lesson planning and instructional processes. The GLEs feature natural stepping stones and opportunities for development and growth from grade to grade, as is seen in my reproduction of a small selection of GLEs from 9th and 10th grade below.

Domain 7: CD 7 Applying Career Exploration And Planning Skills In The Achievement
Of Life Career Goals

Cluster	Grade-Level Standards, Grade 9	Grade-Level Standards, Grade 10
Integration of Self-Knowledge into Life and Career Plans	Compare current strengths and limitations with the individual's career and educational plan and adjust the plan as necessary	Revisit current career and educational plan as it relates to evolving and/or new interests, strengths, and limitations.
Adaptations to World of Work and Technology Changes	Recognize the sixteen (16) career clusters within the six (6) career paths for exploring and preparing for careers now and in the future.	Evaluate a variety of resources to aid in career exploration and planning now and in the future.
Respect for All Work	Analyze and evaluate school and community contributions as they relate to one's career and educational plan.	Analyze and evaluate school and community contributions as they relate to life career goals.

Adapted from the Missouri Center for Career Education (2006).

These GLEs are another helpful guiding tool for teachers who want to provide developmentally appropriate instruction in career and transition readiness. When teachers are looking for more specific, useful resources to use with students in the classroom, they will find that, indeed there is absolutely no shortage of career-planning information available online.

In fact, when one begins to research best practices in the field, it quickly becomes easy to be bogged down with the sheer number of acronymed initiatives. Luckily, the National High School Center developed the College and Career Development Organizer, which is the result of the analysis of hundreds of career readiness programs with the goal of mapping the career-readiness initiatives of many state and local, as well as independent organizations. The Organizer consists of three strands:

- 1) Goals and expectations for college and career readiness;
- 2) Pathways and supports for college and career preparation; and
- 3) Outcomes and measures for college and career success (National High School Center, 2013).

Each strand has three threads, along with components and examples. For example, in Strand 1, which summarizes goals and expectations for college and career readiness, we see the thread entitled Lifelong Learning Skills. Within that thread, we see that one of the components is Social and Emotional Skills, and that some examples of these include self-management, responsible decision making, and relationship skills (National High School Center, 2013). While potentially overwhelming in the number of distinct learning topics related to transition and career readiness, this collection is a valuable resource because it comprises a full database of resources for the wide spectrum of career readiness topics. Career and transition instruction is best approached within the consideration of individual difference variables (Gysbers & Heppner, 2014, p. 61), so this wide collection of resources allows teachers to make the best decisions for their students as they seek to better prepare students for the school-to-work transition.

To round out the list of resources already discussed, we can visit the US Department of Labor. According to the US Department of Labor (n.d.), the three major components of career planning include self-assessment, learning about careers, and planning for a career. Self-assessment includes interest assessments, skills assessments, and assessment of work values. One resource that teachers and students can use to facilitate the self-assessment process is the National Career Development Association (NCDA). The NCDA has compiled a list of high-quality online resources for career planning. For example, the “Self-Assessment” section of the website contains eleven links to personal and interest profilers, career cluster exploration tools, and other self-assessment-related tools. Other sections include links to industry and occupation-specific information; topics in education such as free training opportunities, financial aid resources, and information about international education; various links to resources discussing state employment trends; and websites that provide job search functions. Notably, the NCDA also provides resources geared toward special populations, including immigrants. This section contains resources for undocumented students, resources regarding specific work visas, and links to organizations serving immigrant and refugee students such as Higher Advantage, Upwardly Global, and the U.S. Committee for Refugees and Immigrants.

The NCDA also has compiled resources relating to learning about and planning for careers, including general occupational information, industry and occupation-specific information, education topics, employment trends, job searching, and special populations. All of these resources are valuable and help to establish a solid framework of the

components involved in effective career readiness pedagogy. Establishing these components at the outset of the project is important because career readiness education for immigrant and refugee English learners must include these essential components, while also providing direct, scaffolded instruction in areas that directly pertain to the career-related challenges they often face.

In the upcoming section, we will turn our attention to the focus population of this work: immigrant and refugee English learners living, learning, and planning futures in the United States. We will see that there are a number of significant career-related barriers for this population which necessitate special considerations regarding career-readiness curriculum at the high school level. Moving forward, we will seek to elucidate theoretical positions that may be effective in building more culturally competent career readiness instruction. We will also highlight skills and strategies that immigrant and refugee English learners should learn via direct instruction in a career readiness curriculum in order to maximize transitional success in the United States.

Career-Related Barriers for Immigrant/Refugee English Learners

Although there has been a recent downturn in refugee acceptance on the part of the United States, tens of thousands of refugees are still settled in the country every year (Blizzard & Batalova, 2019). More than 44.5 million immigrants resided in the United States in 2017 (Migration Policy Institute, 2019). Immigrants and refugees are highly visible groups in many public education settings, across age levels and across the country, although there is variation on the resettling patterns of different immigrant and refugee groups (Blizzard & Batalova, 2019).

Many teachers of immigrant learners know well the valuable perspectives that these learners often bring to the educational experience. They also know, from interacting with students and parents and their personal and family narratives, that the paths of immigrants and refugees are often anything but smooth. Before we continue into further discussion of the specific challenges faced by immigrant and refugee learners, we can identify the similarities and differences between these groups in order to understand why within this work we will talk broadly about best career-readiness educational practices for both groups, as one.

Using language based on international law, the United States defines a “refugee” as “a person outside the country of his or her nationality, who is unable or unwilling to return to that country because of persecution or a well-founded fear of persecution based on his or her race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion” (Cepla, 2019). Although they may not meet the legal criteria to qualify as refugees, many immigrants also have entered the US due to adverse living conditions in their home countries. Both groups face substantial career-related barriers as they acclimate to life in a new country, which can be distilled to themes of economic constraint, acculturation, and health disparities (Massengale, 2019).

It is incredibly difficult economically to relocate to a new country, and being in such a situation can lead to cycles of poverty that can directly impact one’s choice of occupation. Immigrant children have significantly higher rates of poverty than do native children (Borjas, 2011). Not only do immigrant children experience poverty at higher rates than native children do, but it seems that post-immigration poverty can become

multigenerational (Massengale, 2019), which means that one need not be a recent immigrant or refugee to feel that financial effects of relocation. It is possible that this cycle of poverty is connected to a lack of appropriate career-readiness education for immigrant and refugee groups. Developing more holistic career readiness units with the needs of these specific groups in mind may be an important step in breaking this cycle, and for teachers this should be a primary concern.

Our immigrant and refugee students are not islands in and of themselves: they often come from close social and family networks of people for whom they take financial responsibility. This is to say that poverty is relative and for some immigrant/refugee students and their families, the need to send money to relatives abroad may mean that they feel forced to accept menial work. While in the short term, doing so obviously maintains the financial survival needs of their local or even international family members, this situation of familial financial support can cause people to forego the process of searching for a more meaningful, better-paid career in a new country (Massengale, 2019). Clearly, the immediate financial needs of those close to them are a primary concern to our high school immigrant and refugee English learners, and these needs can affect their career choices. Career-readiness curriculum which allows for discussions about planning for the future and balancing individual and community needs may be helpful in helping students evaluate and organize their priorities and goals as they prepare to transition out of school. Moving forward, we will see that financial challenges often coexist with other barriers to career readiness for immigrant and refugee English learners. An important barrier is the challenges associated with acculturation.

There are many challenges associated with acculturation for immigrants and refugees in the US. These include contextual factors in immigrants' lives, such as fleeing one's country of origin, political oppression, historical circumstances, and violence. All of these factors have the potential to significantly influence decisions about work, and Stebleton (2007) writes that uncertainty about the future may actually cause immigrants to intentionally avoid making long-range plans.

Aside from these contextual factors, a major and glaring acculturation challenge for immigrants and refugees is having limited English proficiency (LEP) status in a country wherein the dominant language is English. Approximately 48% of 44.5 million, or more than 21 million of these people self-reported as Limited English Proficient in 2017 (Migration Policy Institute, 2019). This language disparity is obviously a huge factor in acculturation, as it affects every level of learning about and obtaining employment. Building career-related language skills for LEP students is clearly a primary goal to be integrated into an appropriate career readiness curriculum for these groups.

It is worth noting that language proficiency has been strongly associated with career self-efficacy (Miranda & Unhofer, 1998). This will be discussed further in the upcoming section regarding helpful theories to consider when providing educational content to refugee and immigrant populations.

Because of the conditions they may have faced in their home countries, refugee persons often suffer physical health issues as well as mental health issues, which include major depressive disorder, generalized anxiety disorder, and post-traumatic stress disorder, all of which can be significant barriers to overall career development

(Massengale, 2019). These are serious mental health issues that should be handled by qualified professionals, but it is important that teachers of these populations understand the possibility that these issues may be present.

Understanding the fact and nature of the many career-related barriers for immigrants and refugees can lead us to an understanding of why career readiness content may deserve differentiated practices, which can include underlying theories as well as specific areas of language and acculturation focus. These issues will be addressed in the rest of Chapter 2.

Theoretical approaches to consider in designing career readiness educational practices for refugee and immigrant ELs

Career counseling is a vibrant field with much to teach educators about theories that can contribute to career-readiness education appropriate for immigrant and refugee English learners. Indeed, in their textbook on career counseling, Curry & Milsom state that a “collaborative approach” between teachers and school counselors can be beneficial for students’ future success (Curry & Milsom, 2013, p. 213). A grounding in some of the theories that underpin the field of career counseling, then, is useful and relevant for all teachers working with students of transition age.

Some of the most prominent such theories encountered in a review of the literature include Social Justice Theory (O’Brien, 2001), Critical Consciousness Theory (Diemer & Blustein, 2005), Social Cognitive Career Theory (Lent, Brown, & Hackett, 1994), the Psychology of Working Theory (Duffy, Diemer, Blustein, & Austin 2016), and asset-based approaches (Smit, Wood, & Neethling, 2015). Curriculum development

can benefit greatly from a grounding in these theories, as they demonstrate different ways of conceptualizing issues at the heart of the matter of work for these students, including respect, self-efficacy, and human dignity.

One such approach is well-known in educational circles: social justice can be defined as “actions that contribute to the advancement of society and advocate for equal access to resources for marginalized or less fortunate individuals in society” (O’Brien, 2001). Indeed the founder of vocational psychology, Frank Parsons, is considered by many in the career counseling intellectual community as a tireless advocate for youth, women, the poor, and the disadvantaged. Within this context, career counseling, career psychology, and career education have at their roots strong underpinnings of social justice (O’Brien, 2001). Providing immigrant and refugee students with the best possible career readiness opportunities is a practice grounded in the notion of social justice.

Closely associated with social justice is the notion of critical consciousness, which is the capacity to recognize and overcome sociopolitical barriers (Diemer & Blustein, 2005). Diemer and Blustein (2005) found that this capacity has a statistically significant relationship with progress in career development, and that the urban high school participants their study with greater levels of critical consciousness had “greater clarity regarding their vocational identity, were more committed to their future careers, and viewed work as a larger part of their future lives” (p. 220). Massengale et al. (2019) echo this idea when they state that career counselors may want to consider encouraging their clients to develop a political voice. Taking these two ideas of social justice and critical consciousness together, we can see that appropriate career-readiness practices

entail both advocacy on the part of the teacher and also a building of critical consciousness in the mind, spirit, and outward actions of the student.

Another helpful approach which comes up in career counseling literature is Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT). SCCT posits that career self-efficacy (an individual's belief that they are capable of overcoming obstacles) and outcome expectations (an individual's beliefs about what will happen if they choose a particular career) are the two primary mechanisms through which career interests and possible choices are developed (Lent et. al., 1994). Feelings of self-efficacy can be built by utilizing a number of strategies, including planning moderately challenging tasks, using peer models, teaching specific learning strategies, capitalizing on student choice and interest, and reinforcing effort and correct strategy use. Additionally, teachers can encourage students to try new academic activities, stress recent successes, and give frequent, focused, task-specific feedback (Margolis & McCabe, 2006). It is believed that "as students experience success, they develop self-efficacy beliefs that lead them to persist even in the midst of challenges" (Curry & Milsom, 2013, p. 205). Further, programs that increase confidence in performing tasks, such as the Upward Bound program, are effective in increasing confidence in performing tasks related to investigating, selecting, and implementing a career choice. Students who feel more confident may engage actively in the career exploration process, may seek volunteer or internship opportunities to investigate career options, and may commit to nontraditional careers that match their abilities and interests (O'Brien, 2001). So we can see through SCCT that building student feelings of self-efficacy is an incredibly important aspect of career development for all students. This

is an area that may need careful pedagogical consideration as we seek to build the self-efficacy of immigrant and refugee English learners. Because of their political and economic situations, within which they may have experienced extreme feelings of helplessness, they may tend to find their own feelings of self-efficacy rooted in areas of their life other than American ideas of “success.” Scaffolded instruction which helps these students to build career-related language skills is another area of opportunity to build feelings of achievement and self-efficacy within the context of career-readiness education.

Another helpful theory is the psychology of working theory (PWT), a thorough and empirically testable model of career development (Duffy et. al., 2016). The core of PWT is the concept of *decent work*, which is the notion that work should earn income but should also fulfill other needs such as a safe work environment with basic benefits such as health care, time afforded for rest and recreation, and the incorporation of pertinent social values of employees. Barriers to decent work for refugees include economic constraint and marginalization (Duffy et al., 2016). This theory is helpful for teachers who wish to contribute to the career readiness of their immigrant and refugee students, because it takes into account the honest evaluation of value systems regarding work. We’ve all heard so often that immigrants and refugees do the jobs that “no one else wants to do,” and as a culture we seem too often to accept the exploitation of these groups’ labor. PWT’s focus on decent work provides a framework within which explicit conversations about exploitation, workers’ rights, and related issues become possible. These issues are important for everyone, but essential for immigrant and refugee English

learners, as work-related values and expectations can vary greatly between cultures and regions of the world.

One more notion from the career counseling literature that may be helpful to teachers working to build career readiness in immigrant and refugee students is the idea that an asset-based approach to life planning can help students to develop resilient coping (Smit et. al., 2015). Smit et al (2015) explain that the asset-based approach “enables the learner to identify protective factors, which can be used as resources to strengthen their coping abilities” (p. 124). Everyone has a wide variety of strengths and protective factors, and an asset-based approach to career readiness education should help students to discover, value, and creatively utilize them. A helpful aspect of the research of Smit et. al. (2015) is that they show that participatory visual strategies such as mind mapping and photo voice, visual representations of students’ values and day-to-day lives, are tools which can be utilized in the classroom to facilitate the development of students’ perceptions of their own strengths and assets.

In recent years, there has been some criticism of certain “tenets” and “myths” that are claimed to be endemic to the field of career counseling. Notably, Gysbers & Heppner (2014) challenge the notion of the importance of the individual as well as what they call the “tenet of affluence.” Gysbers & Heppner state that individualism and autonomy, while perceived as a central assumption within Western career development fields, are simply not valued by members of groups with collectivist values (Gysbers & Heppner, 2014, p. 54). They say that, for members of these groups, vocational planning and decision making may be made in consultation with the community, or even made *by*

members of the community, such as elders. This fundamental difference between individualistic and collectivist cultures is undoubtedly important to consider when discussing career options and possibilities with students. Gysbers & Heppner also criticise what they consider to be the “tenet of affluence,” which they describe as the core assumption that “individuals have the economic means to pursue their career interests and goals.” It is realistic and necessary for the teacher of LEP immigrant and refugee students to recognize this assumption and the fact that this is not true for the majority of the world’s population, nor for many individuals in the United States. They state that, “For many individuals from lower social classes, career decisions are made based on the need to provide the basic necessities for the family. Thus, finding a job—*any* job—that pays for shelter, food, and clothing is what is important” (p. 55). As teachers, we want students to have as many skills and opportunities as possible, and this makes career and transition education important. However, we must be careful not to project our own assumptions about the world onto students. We must let students lead the process with their own evaluations of their personal and collective values and needs, as well as hopes and dreams.

While these theories do not represent an exhaustive list of mindsets useful in career-readiness teaching practice, they do provide a wide variety of perspectives and resources to bring teachers a more nuanced mindset when working with immigrants and refugees. This is a crucial step in the struggle to break problematic cycles for these populations. Next, we will be discussing some of the specific career-related skills that are important for immigrants and refugee students to learn.

Skills to include in a career readiness curriculum for refugee/immigrant ELs

There are many skills necessary for immigrant and refugee English learning students to learn in a career-readiness context. They range from procedural skills—such as learning about research strategies that can help to build knowledge about career options—to the reading, writing, speaking, and listening English competency skills necessary to apply and interview for a job. They also include more elusive, pragmatically-oriented “soft skills.”

According to Yaskhshko et al. (2008), it is important for immigrants and refugees to build knowledge about career options. It may be necessary to help students build technological skills so that they can build knowledge about career options from accessing local and national databases, such as those curated by the National High School Center, as discussed at the beginning of this chapter. Beyond accessing these kinds of databases, other research options will be necessary. One such option that is important for building knowledge is the informational interview, wherein students can connect with someone knowledgeable about a specific job or career to ask questions in order to learn more about that job (What is an informational interview?, 2018). Students who are LEP will need direct instruction as well as opportunities for practicing the various linguistic and pragmatic aspects of such information gathering procedures as the informational interview. The informational interview is an excellent goal as a culmination of a career readiness unit, as it allows students to make useful community connections and provides them with a skill that they can utilize in future employment-related conversations.

Yakushko et al. (2018) also state that immigrants and refugees need to discuss how to obtain and maintain a job, explore cultural norms about work, and develop work-related intercultural competence. Direct classroom instruction regarding this topic could include many different subtopics, such as where and how to search for job openings, how to write a resume and cover letter (Writing resumes and cover letters, 2018), how to prepare for interviews as well as being interviewed (Ronennevig, 2019), how to deal appropriately with interpersonal work-related challenges, how to build an understanding of cultural norms surrounding work, and how to build relationships at work, as examples. These skills are both acculturation skills and language skills, and which to teach may depend on student needs and language abilities.

Connected to the idea of learning how to obtain and maintain a job is the idea of Work-Based Learning (WBL). According to Showalter & Spiker (2016), it is important to connect disconnected and at-risk youth to high-quality employment and training opportunities. They state that programs like WBL help to ensure economic opportunities for these groups, and that WBL for youth should include paid work-based learning opportunities, strong partnerships with businesses and other community stakeholders, positive youth development and continued support services, and linkages to career pathways either through future employment opportunities or future education and training opportunities. It is clear that these kinds of WBL programs could be very beneficial for immigrant and refugee students who are thinking about the transition from high school to work, post-secondary education, or a career. In addition to providing immigrant and refugee students with opportunities to experience being part of a workforce, WBL

programs also provide experiences for students to add to their resumes and speak about in interviews.

Finally, Yakushko et al. (2018) state that immigrant and refugee students need to discuss their own opportunities for work and education. This is a topic that is very much dependent on not only the individual students' abilities and aspirations, but also often dependent on the geographical region where they are living and learning. Immigrant and refugee students will need direct instruction and, if possible, to build first-hand knowledge about regional employers and continuing education opportunities.

Linguistic soft skills can be defined as “self-awareness and cultural awareness as well as interpersonal skills, including verbal and nonverbal communication, that follow or reflect expected polite behaviour, especially in the business or workplace context” (Bartel, 2018). Soft skills for employability that, according to studies, have a positive effect in job-related discourse include handshakes and the willingness to engage in small talk (nonverbal skills) and making small talk and asking questions (verbal skills) (Bartel, 2018). According to Riddiford and Joe (2010), these soft skills, which represent sociopragmatic competence, are best learned when three conditions are present: a) opportunities to receive explicit pragmatic instruction and feedback in a classroom context alongside a sustained work placement with high levels of support; b) access to classroom materials based on authentic workplace interactions; and c) sufficient time to develop awareness of the significance of contextual features. These three conditions can be as closely met as possible by teachers of immigrant and refugee students by relating

them to authentic situations in the students' lives, even if they are not employed at the time of instruction.

What emerges out of this examination of the skills that may serve immigrants and refugees, especially those learning English, is a wide array of areas for teaching and learning.

Summary

Research has shown that immigrants and refugees are two groups of people who experience significant career-related barriers. For teachers who want to do all we can to assure that students are prepared to make successful school-to-adulthood transitions, it is useful to look toward information available about the components of successful career readiness programs, as well as literature from the field of career counseling for applicable theoretical perspectives. When these theories are considered alongside an understanding of some of the procedural, linguistic, and pragmatic skills that are necessary for immigrant and refugee learners as they build their own career readiness, we can see that a wide scope of exciting potential successful classroom practices begins to emerge.

Moving forward, chapter 3 will explain the nature of the capstone project to emerge from careful consideration of the research presented above: a career-readiness toolkit for educators geared towards meeting the unique needs of immigrant and refugee English learners preparing to transition from school to employment.

CHAPTER THREE

Project Description

Introduction

This capstone project is the culmination of research into the question: *what do effective high school career-readiness teaching practices look like for refugees and immigrants with limited English proficiency?* In order to answer this question in a comprehensive way and apply the body of knowledge discussed in chapter 2, I will be creating an online toolkit for educators who work with immigrant and refugee English learners on developing career-readiness skills. This research-based toolkit will comprise modules which address a variety of basic career readiness components with the special needs of immigrant and refugee English learners in mind. The toolkit will be explicit about its theoretical perspectives and will offer supporting information so that teachers can explore significant research avenues as they relate to their students. This project, which will be published on a Wordpress website, will be an important resource for teachers who want to provide immigrant and refugee English-learning populations with career-readiness education that meets their specific needs. As this chapter progresses, I will give an overview of the project and the research framework that supports it. I will also discuss the potential audience for the toolkit, describe aspects of the project in further detail, and provide a timeline for the project, before providing concluding remarks.

Project Overview

For this project, I intend to design a toolkit which teachers of immigrant and refugee high school English learners can use to best facilitate the development of career readiness skills. Modules will be rooted in the theoretical frameworks discussed in chapter 2, and will also include appropriate linguistic and metalinguistic supports which teachers can use at their discretion, depending on the needs of students. I intend for this project to comprise a wide variety of activities which teachers can use to augment existing curriculum, or to piece together to create a unit appropriate for their learners. For example, a potential drop-down menu module included in the toolkit will be titled “Building Soft Skills,” and will include a rationale for explicit instruction on linguistic soft skills as well as a number of lesson suggestions, including “Written Communication: Sending Professional Emails” and “Verbal Communication: Requesting and Providing Clarification.” When necessary, graphic organizers, language supports, and ideas for modification and scaffolding will be provided within lessons. I plan to address a range of job and career-readiness topics, and to integrate suggestions for discussions and extensions based on theoretical perspectives discussed in chapter 3, such as decent work theory and self-efficacy, for example. This project will be published online on a website, which will make it easily accessible not only to teachers within my own learning community but also to other teachers looking for ways to better prepare their immigrant and refugee English learners for smooth transitions from high school into the working world.

Research Framework

As I researched in the field, it became clear that an appropriate main research paradigm for this project is to take valuable career-readiness information published by the field of career counseling and apply those lessons to helping immigrant and refugee students in the ESL classroom. Among others, Bartel (2019) says that teaching “soft skills” to immigrants and refugees can be helpful for their employability, and these skills will be integrated into the unit. The toolkit will also focus on building feelings of self-efficacy, as this has been shown to correlate strongly with greater career readiness by Duffy et al (2006). In order to tether instruction to English learners, and in order to best consider lesson modifications for students at different English proficiency levels, I will be referencing the WIDA Can-Do Descriptors Key Uses Edition for Grades 9-12 (Board of Regents of the University of Wisconsin System, on Behalf of the WIDA Consortium, 2016). I will also be utilizing the Universal Design for Learning (Novak, 2016) curriculum model, which is a model embraced by the school district in which I work, and which will serve the students who come into contact with the unit because of its focus on engagement, scaffolding, and assessment.

Setting/Audience

The modules that I develop for this project will be designed with the needs and assets of immigrant and refugee English learners at the high school level in mind. That being the case, though, it is my hope that the toolkit will be useful and adaptable for other learning communities as well, such as immigrant and refugee Adult Basic Education

students, or even native English speakers who may need explicit instruction in these aspects of career-readiness.

The toolkit which will be the ultimate product of my efforts will be designed for use and reference by all teachers--EL and otherwise--who work with these students on topics relating to career and transition readiness. I understand that the trend is for English learners to be educated in mainstream classrooms as much as possible, and that entire classrooms dedicated to ESL instruction are becoming less and less common. It is my hope that reviewing the activities included in this unit might serve to inspire mainstream teachers looking to build career readiness to strive to include culturally responsive, communication-centered lessons in their curricula, as these skills are beneficial for all learners preparing for the transition out of public schooling.

Project Description

Initially I wished to create a unit of curriculum that, in my mind, was based on that classroom of EL students that originally inspired my desire to learn more about immigrant and refugee career readiness. However, as I read the research and learned more about the inherently individual learner-based nature of transition and career readiness, I realized that creating a career readiness unit wasn't going to be a project that would be able to be utilized by the wide range of teachers and students, in a variety of geographical and cultural spaces. I realized that a toolkit for use by a wide range of teachers across a variety of contexts, however, would have the potential to be more useful in educational communities.

This project will be a toolkit for educators to use when designing and implementing lessons on career readiness to groups that include immigrant and refugee English learners. The toolkit will be organized in a way which makes it accessible to teachers, and it will include justification or elucidation of theoretical underpinnings when applicable. The goal of the toolkit will be to inspire, inform, and provide concrete classroom ideas for teachers who care deeply about ensuring that all students are able to have opportunities to approach their futures with hope and the necessary skills to make their goals a reality. The toolkit will be designed for ease of use and accessibility.

Timeline

This project will be completed throughout the summer of 2020. As I move forward with the project, a very important step includes reading and evaluating the basic theory as well as the critical details of the Universal Design for Learning framework, using a variety of perspectives. I plan to design activities which support the career-readiness learning goals which I have outlined above. I have investigated online toolkits that I find useful, and as I continue to do so, I will continually ask myself the question, *what is it that makes this toolkit easy to use, helpful, or otherwise a success?* I will be considering and recording the answers and thinking about how my own educator toolkit can be designed to maximize ease of use and effectiveness.

I have obtained a website through Wordpress.com, and plan to watch multiple video guides that will help me to find the most effective design tactics to suit the needs of my online toolkit. When I have finished a preliminary design for this toolkit, I will share it with a variety of educators familiar with transition planning for feedback. I will

integrate feedback into a final toolkit design, and the website will be available for use by teachers. I will also identify ways to share this curriculum with other educators, such as through a district newsletter or an in-service introduction to the work.

Summary

In this chapter, I have shared my research question and my chosen project which will attempt to answer the question, *what do effective high school career-readiness teaching practices look like for refugees and immigrants with limited English proficiency?* This project, a toolkit for teachers working with immigrant and refugee English learners in the area of career readiness, will strive to build student perceptions of their own self-efficacy, develop communication-based “soft skills,” and build knowledge about potential career paths as well as help the learner situate him/herself in a meaningful social context involving work. In the next chapter, I will reflect on the process and outcomes of the creation of this toolkit.

CHAPTER FOUR

Reflection/Conclusion

Introduction

My student teaching experience at a rural high school in a town with a high immigrant and refugee population allowed me to work with a group of students who often demonstrated that they were somewhat unhopeful about their adult futures and career possibilities. I found myself wanting to integrate career-readiness content into an English language development course, but struggled to find content created for this unique group of students. It was with this experience in mind that, as I prepared to complete a capstone project for my Master's degree in TESOL, I decided to pursue my research question: *What do effective high school career-readiness teaching practices look like for refugees and immigrants with limited English proficiency?*

In this chapter, I will be discussing the major learnings that I gained from the capstone process as a researcher, writer, and learner. I will also revisit my literature review, discussing what parts of the review proved to be most important to my capstone project as well as the new connections and understandings I have made to the literature review. Next, I will share my thoughts on potential policy implications of my project, limitations I experienced during the creation of the project, and potential avenues for future research. Additionally, I will discuss methods for sharing my project with others as well as my thoughts on how my project benefits the TESOL profession. Finally, I will conclude with a summary of the chapter in order to review what has been covered therein.

Major Learnings

The capstone project process was a learning experience for me as a researcher, writer and learner. As a researcher, one major learning involved literature sources. At the beginning of my research process, I was very focused on looking for work published in education journals. This seemed natural to me, and I was soon frustrated by the lack of material on career and transition education available there. It was when I came across the field of career counseling that I found the information that I was looking for. Within this field, which I had never before investigated, I found many of the theoretical underpinnings of transition and career education as well as practical applications and suggestions for teaching the demographic group of immigrant and refugee English learners. This experience showed me that as researchers we must sometimes look beyond expected fields and instead seek to build bridges between disciplines. Producing the capstone paper was a great learning experience as a writer, and I learned the importance of being organized when dealing with a large number of sources. As a learner, a major takeaway from the capstone project process was that it is empowering and interesting to build new skills. I began the project feeling excited but nervous about creating a website. Using the Wordpress platform involved a bit of a learning curve, but after going through it I now feel confident and would welcome the opportunity to build another website or help someone else to build a website.

The Literature Review

The parts of the literature review that proved to be most important to my capstone were *Theoretical Approaches to Consider in Designing Career Readiness Educational*

Practices for Refugee and Immigrant ELs and Skills to Include in a Career Readiness Curriculum for Refugee/Immigrant ELs. While all aspects of my literature review were important and informative, these two parts, taken together, formed the basis for my project, which blended traditional career-readiness curricula with known areas of need for immigrant and refugee English learners. The reading that formed the section of the literature review titled *Establishing a Framework Based on Career Development Initiatives* was also a very important starting point for me as a teacher with little experience in the area of career development. I learned that there is an avalanche of information available about career development processes, and I was able to identify certain resources that exist as reviewed compendiums of best practices and tools for students.

The process of completing my online toolkit helped me to make new understandings of my literature review. One new understanding was the role of various rubrics and guidelines as tools for reference during the process of writing lesson ideas and recommendations. In particular, I found the Universal Design for Learning Guidelines (CAST, 2018) and the WIDA Can-Do Descriptors (Board of Regents of the University of Wisconsin System, on Behalf of the WIDA Consortium, 2016) to be strongly complimentary to the Missouri Career Development Grade Level Standards (Missouri Center for Career Education, 2006), which helped me to form my initial framework of career development initiatives. Both of these documents helped me to build ideas for career development instruction within the context of the needs of English learners who are refugees or immigrants.

Implications

Potential policy implications of my work could include more differentiation of career readiness curriculum for English learners who are immigrants or refugees. I believe that any of the topics in my online toolbox are not only helpful for this particular demographic group, but would also be helpful for many different secondary learners. For example, explicit instruction in soft skills involved with the job interview process, as well as practice using these skills, would be useful to many high school students.

Limitations

A major limitation of my work is the very broad scope of transition instruction. The potential options for transition from high school to the working environment are infinite, and every student has different interests, abilities, and needs. For this reason, I attempted to make my lesson and topic suggestions highly customizable and I focused on what I saw as the more basic and universal areas of career readiness instruction.

Future Research/Projects

Future research based on my findings could include studies which measure the effects of explicit language instruction based on transition content on the long- and short-term employment outcomes of immigrant and refugee students. This could be done with students who are English learners living in the United States, or even in countries where other languages are spoken and taught to immigrants and refugees, as the basic concepts are fairly universal. In addition, I believe that there are further topics that could be included in my online toolkit, which I plan to develop and publish there. These topics include instruction on researching and making decisions about post-secondary education,

exploring unusual careers, utilizing and contributing to community resources, and additional topics under the umbrella of “soft skills.”

Other types of projects could be created utilizing the idea of explicit transition instruction for English learners who are immigrants or refugees. For example, professional development training for English language teachers, guidance counselors, and other professionals who work with students on transition-related instruction could help to highlight the specific needs and strengths of this group. Another potential project that could utilize this idea is

Communicating Results

I have already begun sharing my website to colleagues and friends in education, some of whom have passed the link on to their professional contacts. I believe that this “word of mouth” method is appropriate for sharing this project. Another way that I plan to share the website is by posting the link on relevant social media such as Reddit teaching forums. My website has a traffic tracking feature, so I will be able to assess the efficacy of my outreach efforts by monitoring that.

Benefit to the Profession

When I decided to pursue my research question, *What do effective high school career-readiness teaching practices look like for refugees and immigrants with limited English proficiency?* I did so because my efforts to include transition content in my English language class led me to recognize a major gap in knowledge in the area. My teacher preparation program did not include content in this area, and it seems to be considered to be largely within the purview of school guidance counselors, as I

discovered during the research process. Because of this, I feel that my work has benefited the English language teaching profession by building a bridge between the two disciplines.

Summary

In this chapter, I have reflected on the process of pursuing my research question: *What do effective high school career-readiness teaching practices look like for refugees and immigrants with limited English proficiency?* First, I discussed the major learnings that I gained from the capstone process as a researcher, writer, and learner. I then revisited my literature review, discussing what parts of the review proved to be most important to my capstone project as well as the new connections and understandings I have made to the literature review. After that, I shared my thoughts on potential policy implications of my project, limitations I experienced during the creation of the project, and potential avenues for future research. Additionally, I discussed methods for sharing my project with others as well as my thoughts on how my project benefits the TESOL profession.

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