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BEST INSTRUCTIONAL PRACTICES FOR HIGH SCHOOL SLIFE:
A NARRATIVE CURRICULUM FOR A SHELTERED EL CLASS

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

Hamline University
St. Paul, MN
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“Education is neither eastern nor western. Education is education and it’s the right of every human being.”
- Malala Yousafzai

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

Introduction

Being a teacher is more than having extensive knowledge in a specific content area. Teaching combines building relationships, content area passion, student advocacy, and facilitating learning in a classroom. It requires constant growth from both the teacher and the student. I have been drawn to teaching for as long as I can remember. Through my journey of going through school, teaching internationally, and working with immigrant families in a school setting, I found my passion for working with English language learners (ELLs). While working with ELLs at the secondary level, I taught students who did not have access to a lot of prior formal education. These students had needs that I was not properly equipped to meet. It pained me as I knew these students deserved a high quality education that met their unique needs. This all leads to the research question: *What are the best instructional practices for high school students with limited or interrupted formal education (SLIFE)?*

This chapter narrates some of the memories that led me to a career in teaching. Important relationships that pushed me to higher academic success and fostered a love of teaching will be examined. This chapter also discusses the international experiences that gave me a passion for learning about other cultures and teaching English. It narrates the professional experiences that provided insight into the world of immigration in the United

States and some of the struggles that I saw students face in the education system. This leads into the rationale for completing this project.

Teaching Memories

Ever since I can remember, I wanted to be a teacher. I have memories of daycare and playdates where I pretended to be a teacher and taught my “students” how to read and write. I loved going to school and learning new things. In fourth grade I had a teacher who took the time to get to know my interests. She built a relationship with me, and in turn I felt like I could trust her and be open about my personal life. Once she got to know me, she would recommend books that her daughters read that she thought I would like. I remember always trying the books that she offered me, even if they were difficult, because she had put so much time and effort into helping me find books that she thought I would like. It made me feel special and motivated me to want to learn more in class. This was the first experience I remember that a teacher got to know me and used our relationship to encourage me to have greater academic success.

It wasn't until high school that I felt the encouraging type of relationship again. My high school Spanish teacher spent a lot of time getting to know students at the beginning of the year. I remember she learned every student's name by the end of the second class period and made sure to have the correct pronunciation. Her diligence to learn our names was an incredibly important part of affirming the identities of students and making us feel like we were cared about. Then, she had one-on-one conferences with students to build relationships with each one of us. She not only invested time into knowing our personalities, but she also gauged our level of Spanish. I remember I would

talk to her about the teaching program she went through and she recommended books in Spanish that she thought I would be able to read. By her showing confidence in my abilities and taking time to care about me outside of academic life, I worked harder in her class and went on to pursue education. These experiences led me to want to learn more about how student-teacher relationships affect motivation for students.

International Experiences

As I settled into college and started classes, I quickly realized that I loved learning about different cultures. I began broadening my horizons and taking more Spanish classes, classes about Latin America, and classes about other cultures. I also took international communications and found so much beauty in cultures that are vastly different from the culture in the United States. I studied abroad in Costa Rica and Nicaragua and volunteered in schools to learn more about their education system. Through these explorations, I started learning about the inequities that different cultures face while coming to the United States. These inequities fired up a passion for wanting to create change for marginalized groups. I wanted to combine my love of education and learning about different cultures so I decided to focus on teaching English. These two interests culminated in my undergraduate capstone project of pathways to higher education for undocumented immigrants. I wanted to continue working with groups that were marginalized, so I decided to travel to Peru to teach English.

I spent 4 months teaching English in Peru while working for an organization that provided supplemental education for students kindergarten-ninth grade. I worked in both the public schools teaching English and in the school run by the non-profit. The students

lived in extreme poverty and the public schools that they attended lacked many resources. Many classes didn't have textbooks, had limited paper and pencils, and the teachers talked about not having an effective curriculum to teach. Students would only attend school for about 4 hours each day, so the education that they were receiving was limited. Students attended public school in the morning. In the afternoons, a small group came to the non-profit where I taught them supplemental English, math, and Spanish lessons.

While working with this group of students, I learned how much informal education they were receiving outside of the classroom. Students knew how to cook, they would help with their parents' small businesses, they went to the store to get things for their parents, and more. This experience gave me insight into what the United States considers limited formal education. It also taught me the value of informal education and the positive and bountiful skills that students possess. I loved working with these students and decided that teaching English and working with students with similar backgrounds was what I wanted to do for the rest of my life. I wanted to be able to advocate for similar students in the United States educational system while finding a way to utilize their knowledge from their informal education to help them succeed in the classroom.

Professional Experiences

After coming back from Peru, I knew that I wanted to go back to school to teach English as a second language. While applying for schools and going through the education program, I worked with a non-profit organization in which my role was to support families in the school system. This experience gave me valuable knowledge of working with parents with limited education and experience with the school system in the

United States. It helped me learn some of the key components of the system that would help students and families succeed that families needed to be explicitly taught when they entered the education system in the United States. This experience helped me realize how much I took for granted that I grew up with parents that knew the education system, the processes to enroll me in schools, how to contact my teacher, where to look for communication from school, and everything that isn't explicitly taught when students are enrolling in school. This made me think about different components that I would want to include in my future classroom to ensure equity.

This job also gave me an inside look into the complex experiences of immigrants. I worked with many recent immigrants and undocumented families. I heard about the anxiety with all of the court appointments, hardships finding work, and home life that immigrants experience when coming to the United States. My eyes were opened to the multitude of experiences and stressors that immigrants experience while trying to focus on getting an education. This fueled my fire for wanting to learn more about how to help bridge the gap for cultural differences once students come into the United States education system.

Rationale

After earning my teaching license, I started working as an ELL teacher at a high school in a large, diverse city. I work in a program called that language academy, which serves newcomer immigrants for their first 1-5 years of coming to the United States. The amount of time they spend in the program depends on their level of English and the age in which they come to the United States. The class I teach which has inspired me to learn

more about best practice for SLIFE is designed for students who have been in the United States for 2-5 years. It is the first class in which they earn high school English credits. This class is a sheltered class with students around the same English proficiency level. During my first year teaching, I realized that about a third of my students were SLIFE. It was very clear that the methods and scaffolds that worked for the formally educated ELLs needed to be modified even more for SLIFE and I was ill prepared to teach early literacy skills to high school students while also meeting ninth grade standards. I felt like I was failing my students and not meeting their needs in the ways they needed me to. While I created relatable assignments connecting to their past experiences, I struggled meeting their unique needs. It was clear that I needed to do research and find the best practices to serve these students.

There were two people who supported me and pushed me to want to create this project. Anna Parvi and Gina Popa are two ELL teachers who worked with the same group of students as I did. Anna would sit with me and put things in perspective about the educational background of SLIFE. She reminded me that SLIFE are not used to a text-based culture, so I needed to treat each text type as if I was looking at it for the first time and teach it as such. Both Gina and Anna talked me through creating activities and units that would connect to student backgrounds and use skills that SLIFE were familiar with. While I created assignments connecting to their past experiences and made assignments relatable, I still struggled with differentiating for their needs while supporting students with a background in formal education. As students deserve education that meets their needs and supports their academic growth, it was clear that I

needed to do research and answer the question: *What are the best instructional practices for high school SLIFE?*

I also realized that there were very few resources compiled for teaching SLIFE. It was difficult to find reading materials that matched both the correct reading and maturity level. I ended up creating a lot of my own materials and graphic organizers, and spent hours looking for texts to support their needs. For this project, I have provided a unit plan that other teachers of SLIFE will be able to use in their classroom. The unit plan follows best practice and is a resource that will save other teachers time from having to search through resources to piece together a unit plan.

Summary

This chapter described important life experiences that led me to the research question: *What are the best instructional practices for high school SLIFE?* My journey started from wanting to become a teacher and advocate for others at a young age. Throughout my education, I experienced how strong relationships with teachers motivated me to strive for academic success. These relationships taught me the importance of building a strong bond with students and making them feel safe and accepted. It was also important for me to see a setting in which students experienced limited education because it gave me an appreciation for children learning through informal learning experiences. This fueled my passion for teaching SLIFE in the United States. My passions led me to working with immigrant parents and helping them through the education system to get a better understanding of some of the hardships that

immigrant families face when coming to the United States. Finally, teaching in a classroom with many SLIFE pushed me to want to find the best practices to teach them.

The following chapters will outline the research, curriculum plan, and reflections for my capstone project. Chapter Two provides a literature review which focuses on the common experiences of SLIFE, adolescent motivation, and frameworks for teaching SLIFE. Chapter Three provides a context and plan for the curriculum development. It describes the paradigms that were used, the context, and a rationale for the curriculum. Chapter Four reflects on the creation of the unit plan and its usefulness.

CHAPTER TWO

Literature Review

Introduction

The goal of this research was to answer the research question: *What are the best instructional practices for high school SLIFE?* This section provides a summary of the literature used to build my knowledge base about the needs of SLIFE. The research is focused on three main themes: common experiences of SLIFE, adolescent motivation, and supporting frameworks for teaching SLIFE. These themes build on each other to lay a foundation for the best instructional practices for SLIFE.

The first section discusses the common experiences of SLIFE. It gives a definition and lays out the formal criteria for SLIFE in the United States educational system. It also describes cultural similarities for students who are SLIFE as well as the barriers they face when entering the education system in the United States. The urgency for teachers to understand SLIFE needs is described as they have a high dropout rate (Potochnick, 2018).

The second section discusses student-teacher relationships and motivation both generally and with a focus on ELLs. Due to a lack of available research on SLIFE motivation specifically, broader research had to be looked at. As SLIFE are coming to the United States at an older age, their social-emotional needs must be met in the classroom as well as their academic needs. This section explains the benefits of positive student-teacher relationships on motivation as well as the importance of harnessing those

relationships to set social and academic goals. Motivation is essential to understand if teachers want to encourage these students to stay in school.

The last section discusses frameworks for teaching SLIFE. Two main frameworks are analyzed: Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT) and Mutually Adaptive Learning Paradigm® (MALP®). Both of these frameworks address the needs of culturally diverse students in a classroom. MALP® is a modification of CRT to focus on SLIFE and address their specific needs. This section also briefly discusses the need to teach early literacy skills. However, there is not a lot of research behind frameworks to address this need, so some of the information is pulled from early literacy teaching at younger levels that is modified for older students.

Who Are SLIFE?

This section explores what it means to be SLIFE in the United States education system. While SLIFE may be present in countries across the world, this paper specifically focuses on SLIFE from the United States. It addresses the definition, common background experiences, and barriers to success in the education system. It was estimated in 2000 that 20% of high school and 12% of middle school ELLs had missed 2 or more years of schooling (University of Wisconsin-Madison, 2015). Since 2000, the number of refugees taken into the country has fluctuated. The number of new refugees in Minnesota from 2016-2018 is at a historical low due to a national policy of accepting fewer refugees (American Immigration Council, 2020; Minnesota Department of Health, 2019). However, the data trends from the Minnesota Department of Health (2019) show numbers fluctuating up and down since 1979, so it can be assumed that numbers will

increase again in future years. Thus, this is an important population to understand and acknowledge in the United States education system.

Definition

SLIFE are a subset of the growing ELL population. There are multiple definitions available in literature, but the definition used in this paper is the definition from the Minnesota Department of Education, as Minnesota is where the curriculum is primarily focused. According to the Minnesota Learning English for Academic Proficiency and Success (LEAPS) Act, a student is considered to have limited or interrupted education when they meet three of the five following requirements:

1. Comes from a home where the language usually spoken is other than English, or who usually speaks a language other than English.
2. Enters school in the United States after sixth grade.
3. Has at least 2 years less schooling than the English learner's peers.
4. Functions at least 2 years below expected grade level in reading and mathematics.
5. May be preliterate in the English learner's native language (Minnesota Department of Education, 2011).

While the definition from the Minnesota Department of Education (2011) is used in this paper, DeCapua and Marshall (2015) defined SLIFE more broadly and consider SLIFE as students who:

- (1) have not had the opportunity to participate in formal education previously or have experienced significant time periods when they were unable to attend school,
- (2) are at least two grade levels below their peers in subject area knowledge, (3)

have low or no literacy and numeracy skills, and (4) are, with some exceptions, members of collectivistic cultures (DeCapua & Marshall, 2015, p. 357).

The definition from the Minnesota Department of Education (2011) is used throughout this paper because it is more specific and dictates specifically which English Language Learner service model students receive in districts around Minnesota. For example, St. Paul Public Schools laid out a pathway students may take in which students graduate in 5-6 years. The first 1-2 years, based on language proficiency, consists of only elective credits and their content classes are sheltered with other ELLs at their similar language level. The 2nd or 3rd year consists of sheltered classes with a teacher licensed in ELL and a content teacher in which students receive credits. After this sheltered program, students are put into a mixture of classes taught by a content teacher and co-taught classes with an English Language (EL) and content teacher depending on their language proficiency. SLIFE typically receive more co-taught classes than their formally educated peers (Office of Multilingual Learning, 2018).

Common Background Experiences

The definition for those who qualify as SLIFE leads to analyzing and understanding some shared experiences of this subset of ELLs. While teachers should never assume the background of each student is the same, one can draw from research to understand some common experiences of SLIFE. Teachers who understand student experiences are able to create lesson plans and supports that meet their unique needs. The 1974 Supreme Court case *Lau v. Nichols* mandated that all ELLs receive equitable public

education, and understanding student background is one step educators must take to fulfill this duty (Dávila, 2012).

One common experience of all SLIFE based on the definition is they are ELLs. The definition used states that one of the criteria was that students came to the United States after sixth grade (Minnesota Department of Education, 2011). Although students only need to meet three of the five criteria, it can be assumed that students were at least upper elementary school to meet at least three of the criteria. Therefore, most SLIFE had at least 9-12 years of life experience in a different country before coming to the United States. They either came to the United States as an immigrant or a refugee. Many immigrants and refugees come to the United States with past trauma, which hinders their ability to focus on academics (Hos, 2016b). While the main focus of this paper is not trauma-informed educational practices, it is important to note that teachers of SLIFE must acknowledge that there may be mental health needs that must be addressed.

Informal Education. Many SLIFE have had a lack of access to formal education due to armed conflict, displacement due to being a refugee, living in rural areas without schools, or schools that charge high fees for uniforms or materials (Hickey, 2015). Formal education may have also been limited due to the laws and regulations in various countries as well. In Mexico and other Central American countries, laws recently changed to make schooling until ninth grade compulsory. However, many students stop attending at sixth grade because they either need to work or their families cannot afford the necessary materials (Potochnick, 2018). It is important to note a lack of formal education doesn't mean that these students have not learned anything. Instead, they

primarily have experienced many types of informal ways of learning such as mentoring, modeling, and side-by-side approaches (DeCapua & Marshall, 2015). These students gain valuable skills while being informally educated through jobs, taking care of others, cleaning, cooking, etc. However, these informal ways of learning directly contrast with formal education in the United States. The United States has a standards-based curriculum with formal assessments, which is opposite of the informal and experienced-based learning of SLIFE (DeCapua & Marshall, 2015). Teachers must see informal learning experiences as assets and harness them in the learning process.

Limited Literacy in Home Language. Because SLIFE have limited or interrupted formal education, many have limited literacy, or the ability to read and write, in their home language. Many SLIFE learn through oral communication or storytelling versus print. In order to build literacy, students must learn literacy skills. Some of those skills include phonics, concepts of print, decoding strategies, fluency, vocabulary comprehension, and many more (Hos, 2016a; Montero et al., 2014). For native English speakers and formally educated ELLs, these skills are learned and practiced in primary school. By secondary school, it is an expectation that students are able to read and write. Therefore, there is no formal early literacy skills education and many secondary teachers are not prepared to teach these skills (Hickey, 2015). For formally educated ELLs, there is a large transfer of literacy skills into English. Students with literacy in the first language have an easier time learning a second language and content in that language (Potochnick, 2018). However, many SLIFE come to the United States without basic literacy skills, and they must learn these in conjunction with learning a new language

(DeCapua & Marshall, 2015). For example, many Haitians, Hmong, and Somalis come from oral-based traditions and may be learning through print for the first time in the United States (DeCapua & Marshall, 2010). Therefore, teachers must be able to bridge literacy and content gaps while providing meaningful and relevant content and language instruction (University of Wisconsin-Madison, 2015).

Cultural Dissonance. Another common experience of many SLIFE is that many encounter cultural dissonance at school. DeCapua and Marshall (2015) defined cultural dissonance as not understanding the expectations, discourse styles, and the school-based ways of thinking in the United States. This has to do with cultural differences when coming to the United States. While not in the definition of SLIFE by the Minnesota Department of Education (2011), DeCapua and Marshall (2015) included in their definition that SLIFE primarily come from collectivist cultures, which are categorized under high-context cultures. There is a spectrum of cultural norms in which high-context culture is on one side, and low-context culture is on the other. These contexts help describe the values and norms of different cultures. The United States is considered a low-context culture. Low-context cultures emphasize the importance of time, planning, and sticking to schedules. These cultures are also generally more direct in communication styles, value individual performance, and have less extended family networks. In contrast, high-context cultures value relationships, are collectivistic cultures where people value social relationships and see themselves as interdependent with others, and have more fluid timetables. Many high-context cultures value oral communication and storytelling. Knowledge in low-context cultures emphasizes categorization, classification,

and other abstract concepts, while knowledge in high-context cultures focuses on immediate relevance and application (DeCapua & Marshall, 2010).

As the United States has a low-context culture, the education system in the United States is based on those values. For example, students are given individual assessments and final grades, they are expected to be in class and at school on time, and classes focus on abstract concepts (DeCapua & Marshall, 2010). The way of learning is completely different from high-context cultures, which creates cultural dissonance and confusion for SLIFE (DeCapua & Marshall, 2015). Especially in secondary school in the United States, there are norms that students are expected to follow which are not explicitly taught in the classroom, which further cultural dissonance and create very clear cultural barriers to learning for SLIFE.

Cultural dissonance is created by a number of systems in schools, one being the individualistic culture of the school system. Students are expected to participate individually by raising their hand and listening to others in an individual and orderly manner, completing individual tasks, and quiet individual work time. They are also expected to show mastery through individual formal assessments, which is very different from the informal nature of their previous education (DeCapua & Marshall, 2015). This is not only different from their culture, but it is expected that they understand the norms and follow them immediately. As SLIFE are not accustomed to formal education centers, the discourse of the education system is unfamiliar as well. For example, students are expected at the secondary level to be on time when they change classes and teachers, raise their hand to ask and answer questions, participate effectively in group work, and

much more. These skills are assumed to be learned in the earlier grades, so SLIFE that arrive at the secondary level have even greater barriers to face because they are learning the discourse as well as the language and content (Dávila, 2012). Before learning can occur, teachers must take time to allow SLIFE to establish a level of comfort and familiarity of “doing school” to break down the barrier of cultural dissonance (Decapua & Marshall, 2015).

Programs for SLIFE

There was conflicting data on the best practice of including SLIFE in the education system. While the definition of SLIFE states that they may come to school after 6th grade, many SLIFE come as students in high school. In some districts, students are placed in a grade that matches their age level. This allows students to interact socially with peers and gives them access to content that meets their maturity level. However, conflicting research showed that Somali Bantu refugees placed in age-level classes feel a larger gap because they do not have the language skills nor background content knowledge to be successful. This research showed that academic and language needs are more important than socially being with their age-level peers (Roxas, 2008). To meet those needs, many districts have a newcomer program which is specifically designed for newly arrived refugees and immigrants to allow them to acclimate to school, the culture in the U.S., and learn some English language and academic concepts. Students are grouped by English language proficiency, not by age. These programs are sheltered and consist of only newly immigrated or refugee students and generally last 6 months to 2 years (Hos, 2016b). This type of program attempts to meet best practices and satisfy the

needs of newly arrived immigrants. These programs are intended to meet the best practice guidelines that were set by the University of Wisconsin-Madison (2015) to meet the needs of SLIFE by providing initial literacy instruction, bridge academic gaps in knowledge, and integrate content and language. However, because SLIFE are learning early literacy skills, filling content gaps, and learning English, they are usually in the program for longer than 2 years. While these programs intend to provide a basis for students to get acclimated to the United States, they usually do not grant high school credits towards graduation, which keep ELLs in high school longer, and many SLIFE do not earn enough content credits to graduate high school (Hos, 2016b). SLIFE coming at the high school level have even less time than their native English speaking peers to master the discourse, content, and language to earn enough credits for graduation before age 21. An alarming number of SLIFE end up dropping out of school, resulting in a higher dropout rate for SLIFE than their English speaking peers. National research in the U.S. showed that the dropout rate for SLIFE is around 70% while students who speak English at home have a rate of 10% (Potochnick, 2018). The U.S. education system promises future rewards from education, such as earning a higher wage, but these promises are less than credible due to racial, ethnic, and income inequalities (Decapua & Marshall, 2015). It is essential that educators and educational systems break down these barriers and create classrooms for SLIFE to find success and earn a diploma. To do so will take more than acknowledging that barriers exist. Teachers must find ways to empower and motivate these students to continue their education so that they will graduate.

Student-Teacher Relationships and Motivation

As the previous section described, it is essential to provide education that serves the needs of SLIFE to encourage graduation. One of the factors when thinking about graduation that needs to be addressed is adolescent motivation. There was limited research for motivation of English language learners and there is almost no research for SLIFE motivation. Therefore, much of the research cited synthesized ideas from ELL motivation and adolescent motivation, as SLIFE fall into both categories. Motivation is defined as the beliefs, values, needs, and goals of an individual. When an activity aligns with an individual's beliefs, values, needs, and goals, they will have an increased motivation to complete it (Groenke et al., 2017). Based on this definition, a pillar to understanding what motivates students is knowing them and having a relationship with them.

ELLs and SLIFE that are new to the country are especially reliant on teacher relationships. Teachers and schools are usually one of the first systems that students come in contact with when coming to the United States (Dávila, 2012). Studies showed that positive student-teacher relationships correlate with academic competence and achievement (Henry & Thorsen, 2018). Research even suggested that positive student-teacher relationships result in higher self-esteem and lower drop-out rates for students (Flint et al., 2019). As SLIFE enter the United States education system at least 2 years behind their peers, it's important for teachers to do all that they can to increase academic competence and achievement (Minnesota Department of Education 2011).

Theory of Connective Instruction

One way that teachers can increase academic competence and achievement is through building relationships with students. The theory of connective instruction states that relationships are the basis of student motivation, engagement and achievement, so teachers that base their instructional practice in relationships have more motivated, engaged, and higher achieving students (Martin & Dowson, 2009).

Research behind the theory of connective instruction supports higher motivation and achievement for students. As SLIFE have higher dropout rates than their English speaking peers, it is important to look at the theories behind student motivation to motivate them to continue education and receive their diploma (Potochnick, 2018). Connective instruction focuses on three types of connection: substantive connectedness, interpersonal connectedness, and instructional connectedness. Substantive connectedness includes students being connected to the subject matter and tasks through meaningful tasks that students find challenging and engaging. Interpersonal connectedness refers to the student-teacher relationship in which teachers value student views, affirm all students, and accept individuality. Instructional connectedness refers to the elements of effective instruction, such as providing feedback, explaining things clearly, and encouraging a growth mindset (Martin & Dowson, 2009). These three interrelated connections can be used to increase motivation in the classroom.

Specifically looking at interpersonal connectedness, positive relationships provide a space for students to receive instructional help, emotional support, and provide companionship while negative relationships provide unhappiness and distress. Students

who feel like their teacher cares about them believe they learn more and have higher emotional, cognitive, and behavioral engagement in class (Martin & Dowson, 2009). For ELLs, positive student-teacher relationships are especially important. Interpersonal communication is key in a successful language learning classroom. When learning a new language, students rely on coming together and mutual engagement between themselves and the teacher (Henry & Thorsen, 2018). Relationships increase motivation through emotional wellbeing, which in turn increases academic success. Successful student-teacher relationships include getting to know the student to be able to support them with proper language scaffolds at their level, material that interests them, and activities that harness their strengths and interests. This builds self-confidence, motivation for learning and aligns with collectivist cultural norms (Hos, 2016a).

Student-teacher relationships can be directly related to motivation and reading achievement. As SLIFE are building their early literacy skills and learning to read, teachers of SLIFE must be especially in tune with their motivational practices. Groenke et al. (2017) described the importance of learning the topics that students like to read about and their outside interests to motivate adolescents to read. Specifically for SLIFE, teachers need to build relationships with students in order to link reading to the students' life experiences. They must link literacy activities with real life application, use diverse texts that mirror student experiences, provide authentic reasons to read, and use collaborative activities to increase motivation for reading (Cho et al., 2010).

While Hos (2016a) supported positive student-teacher relationships and acknowledged the positive motivational benefits, she also acknowledged the potentially

negative effects that student-teacher relationships can have on motivation. Teachers may have the best intentions for caring about their students, but failure to understand cultural differences in the classroom leads to an increase of cultural dissonance. Teachers must not only care about their students, but strive to acknowledge the cultural differences in the various cultures in their classrooms to motivate SLIFE (Hos, 2016a).

Teachers must also build relationships that encourage student autonomy.

Student-teacher relationships are more successful when teachers give students autonomy, because too much interdependence can hinder the motivation of students (Martin & Dowson, 2009). A study by Vallerand et al. (1997) showed that students who dropped out described that they had a less positive student-teacher relationship. These relationships were described as the teacher being more controlling and giving them less autonomy. They also described feeling less competent and autonomous at school activities (Vallerand et al., 1997). Conversely, those who felt autonomous had greater motivation, curiosity, and desired more challenging activities (Martin & Dowson, 2009). This shows the importance of being conscious about the type of student-teacher relationship to ensure that the relationship is increasing motivation for students.

One theory that supports student-teacher relationships that encourage autonomy is the goal theory. The goal theory focuses on the meaning that students attach to achievement and the purpose of their education. Students create three types of goals: mastery goals, which are intended to affirm their competence, performance goals, which relate to their desire to demonstrate superiority, and social goals, which relate to social reasons for achievement (Martin & Dowson, 2009). Many of these goals are created on

the subconscious level, so teachers should encourage students to create and write down meaningful goals to work towards throughout the year. Studies showed that individuals pursue goals as long as the person believes they can do it and it engages their emotions. Without those two factors, a person loses motivation for achieving their goal (Wentzel, 1999). To increase academic motivation, students should create all three types of goals and revisit them throughout the year to reflect on their competence and reinvigorate their emotions. The creation of goals fosters student-teacher relationships as well as autonomy. Goals allow teachers to get to know their students while giving students the autonomy to meet their individual needs. Shared goals also foster a positive classroom community and create common expectations to lower cultural dissonance (Hos, 2016a). The learning environment should be structured to highlight personal and shared goals. Ideally, classroom activities combine social and academic goals to increase motivation and achievement (Wentzel, 1999). To increase motivation, teachers should use positive relationships while using frameworks that specifically meet the instructional needs of SLIFE.

Frameworks for Teaching SLIFE

SLIFE have diverse backgrounds with different needs than their native English speaking peers. Because of this, it is important to use the best instructional practices to meet these specific needs. This section explores the frameworks of culturally responsive teaching (CRT), Mutually Adaptive Learning Paradigm[®] (MALP[®]), and addresses some practices for literacy instruction. As there was limited research on teaching basic literacy skills to SLIFE, the research used was created for primary grades and adapted for

secondary students. As SLIFE are at a higher risk of dropping out of school, it is especially important that teachers structure their classroom in a way that affirms and motivates students as well as supports academic achievement.

Culturally Responsive Teaching

Culturally responsive teaching is a framework initially designed to serve the needs of African American students, but it addresses the lack of academic success of all marginalized populations in the United States public school system (DeCapua & Marshall, 2015). It celebrates student diversity and includes teaching characteristics like empathy, compassion, and flexibility (Flint et al., 2019). The central belief in culturally responsive teaching is that students' cultures should be seen as an asset and not a deficit. There are five basic tenants that are present in a culturally responsive classroom: cultural competence, culturally relevant curriculum, supportive learning community, cultural congruity, and effective instruction (DeCapua & Marshall, 2015). Thus, to have a culturally responsive classroom, teachers must put in the work to meet these five basic tenants.

Cultural Competence. Culturally responsive teaching was developed to serve culturally diverse students. In the framework, teachers need to develop cultural competence by learning about the cultures of the students they are serving (DeCapua & Marshall, 2015). Teachers must dig deeper than just knowing about the holidays, food, and visible parts of students' cultures. They must also be willing to get to know the subtleties, which can primarily be done by building a relationship with the students. Cultural competence requires teachers to engage in learning to understand as much about

their students as possible (Flint et al., 2019). As not all people from a country are the same, teachers must be careful not to assume all those who come from a certain culture have the same beliefs and ideas.

Culturally Relevant Curriculum. Cultural competence leads directly into a culturally relevant curriculum. One factor of a culturally relevant curriculum is having texts that reflect the cultures in the classroom (Flint et al., 2019). However, culturally relevant curriculum not only includes materials about other cultures, but also includes culturally relevant elements in the teaching practice. This type of curriculum includes activities and projects that harness the unique skills of diverse students. Teachers must see students as having funds of rich knowledge from their culture that they can bring into the classroom to enhance their own learning and the learning of others. Specifically for SLIFE, teachers must find content that is familiar to them so that SLIFE can practice new ways of thinking and learning (DeCapua & Marshall, 2015). For example, multiple ways of communication should be used, such as visuals and audio to support texts, and scaffolds to support literacy development should be used to build background and increase comprehension (Flint et al., 2019).

Supportive Learning Environment. As learning a language can be stressful for many students, a culturally relevant teacher creates a supportive learning environment in which students are psychologically safe and students are valued, respected, and encouraged to have high academic achievement (DeCapua & Marshall, 2015). This basic pillar directly supports research about the importance of positive student-teacher relationships. Teachers who have built positive relationships with their students are able

to support their needs through material that interests them, scaffold their language needs through differentiated instruction, and provide meaningful activities that build on their strengths (Hos, 2016a). Not only will this increase motivation, but it addresses the social and emotional needs of SLIFE.

Cultural Congruity. While maintaining a supportive learning environment, teachers must also establish cultural congruity in which the classroom promotes different ways of teaching and learning. Teachers cannot assume that all SLIFE learn and process the same way as they do because cultural differences result in different cognitive development. As SLIFE have more experience with informal ways of education, their learning paradigm is different than those without interrupted schooling, and must be taught as such (DeCapua & Marshall, 2015). As outlined in the first theme, many SLIFE experience cultural dissonance, which is a barrier to their educational success. By treating the teacher as a mentor in the ways of schooling in the United States and using the strengths that students have from their culture, cultural dissonance can be minimized. Instead, SLIFE will be slowly introduced to a new culture while also feeling familiarity in the classroom (DeCapua & Marshall, 2010).

Effective Instruction. The last basic tenant of culturally responsive teaching is having effective instruction. Specifically for SLIFE, that means making language and texts accessible so that students are able to delve into the content. This framework supports the idea that literacy and school skills need to be explicitly taught while teaching grade level content. This results in a need for content to be scaffolded, not oversimplified, so that students are gaining both literacy skills and content knowledge (DeCapua &

Marshall, 2015). Although culturally relevant teaching is one framework to base instruction off of, Decapua created another framework specifically designed for SLIFE instruction, called the MALP[®].

Mutually Adaptive Learning Paradigm[®]

MALP[®] was developed by DeCapua and Marshall (2015) and is directly related to culturally relevant teaching. It is an instructional model based on the five basic tenets of culturally responsive teaching. However, it takes the basic tenets and specifically aligns them to the needs of SLIFE in the classroom. This framework attempts to address this cultural dissonance and allows a smooth transition into a classroom in the United States. As a result, the teacher will need to understand and use key elements and priorities from SLIFE culture and integrate them with the education style of the United States. This framework takes the responsibility away from SLIFE to completely adapt to the education system in the U.S. and instead expects mutual responsibility for both teachers and students to adapt and understand both cultures (DeCapua & Marshall, 2015).

In order to successfully use the MALP[®] framework, there must be conditions already established in the classroom. One is interconnectedness, which means that the teacher must be dedicated to establishing strong reciprocal relationships with students and families. There must also be immediate relevance of the material in the classroom. This looks different in a SLIFE classroom, because a teacher must think about the relevance in context to the students' prior experiences and existing knowledge, which are generally informal educational experiences, not in terms of formal educational backgrounds (DeCapua & Marshall, 2011).

In addition to conditions, a MALP[®] classroom must have processes, which are the ways that students choose to interact. These processes are essential to validating the cultures of SLIFE. One process is that teachers should combine oral language with written language. While formal education in the United States has a large focus on literacy, in informal education, literacy is not required nor necessary. Because of this, teachers must utilize the oral capabilities and skills of SLIFE while building literacy skills to scaffold their learning. Even in the United States, literacy instruction hinges on using oral skills while teaching literacy in primary school, so this must be harnessed and adapted for secondary students (DeCapua & Marshall, 2015). Another process that teachers should utilize is giving students a shared responsibility and individual accountability. This means that SLIFE work together in pairs or groups in which they share responsibility which is comfortable in the collectivist cultures, while also making sure this work provides individual accountability which satisfies the individual grading system in the United States (DeCapua & Marshall, 2011). Before working in groups, teachers must remember to teach the necessary social skills that are needed to interact productively. These types of skills include forming groups, taking turns, and encouraging one another. Explicitly teaching and practicing these skills provides a common basis and will lead to higher-order thinking in group work (Robertson & Lafond, 2008). This scaffolds the transition into the formal school setting in the United States (DeCapua & Marshall, 2015).

The tasks and activities in the classroom must also follow the MALP[®] framework. Traditionally, English language instruction builds on both content and

language acquisition. For SLIFE, there needs to be an added component of practicing academic ways of thinking that are expected in a classroom in the United States. As SLIFE experience different ways of thinking during informal education, it is important to explicitly teach the types of thinking expected in formal education to set them up for academic success. This requires a large amount of scaffolding and setting up students to use different thinking skills in familiar language and content contexts. This allows SLIFE to use their funds of knowledge and focus solely on the academic tasks and later apply those skills to new content and language. Robertson and Lafond (2008) recommended using the SIOP (Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol) which is where the teacher starts with concrete material that students are familiar with and builds up to more abstract thinking. This builds on culturally relevant teaching because the teacher must first use content that is familiar and culturally relevant to these students to allow students to master the academic task. Once the task is familiar, it can be applied to new content and language objectives (DeCapua & Marshall, 2015). The frameworks of culturally responsive teaching and MALP[®] lend themselves to be applied in SLIFE classrooms when thinking specifically about literacy instruction.

Literacy Instruction that Follows MALP[®]. Literacy instruction is defined as instruction designed to teach students the skills they need to listen, speak, read, and write. SLIFE are developing language and content knowledge as well as acquiring literacy skills. Research shows that secondary students who are emergent bilinguals in the United States have higher dropout rates and class failure (Menken, 2013). Because of this, it's extremely important to address teaching these skills. As many secondary teachers are not

equipped to teach foundational literacy skills, teachers that work with SLIFE must build their repertoire to include a greater knowledge of literacy skills (Montero et al., 2014).

One way to teach literacy is through guided reading, which uses a balanced approach of focusing on the reader's skills and not the text specifically. When thinking about guided reading as an approach, it should be one part of a literacy program. It allows teachers to model reading skills to students, observe students as they practice and process new texts, and slowly releases students to become independent readers with more difficult texts. A study showed that when teachers integrate early reading instructional methods into teaching practices, students gained three to thirteen levels, with an average gain of 8.3 levels in 5 months (Montero et al., 2014). As SLIFE enter school in the United States reading at a significantly lower level than their grade level peers, it is especially important to utilize a research based program that allows them to grow at a fast pace.

Texts that reflect cultures and lived experiences are the most effective when motivating students to read (Flint et al., 2019). For example, to connect reading and writing skills, a teacher could find texts on migration stories. Then, once students are familiar with the layout and content of migration stories, they can create their own using a mix of pictures, audio, and writing to support their language and literacy. This could be done through photo essays, graphic novels, or other multi modal options (Flint et al., 2019). Collaborative writing and sharing stories with peers throughout this process supports students' needs as well. Along with peer support, teachers should be conscious of giving one-on-one support during learning (Newcomer et al., 2020) This type of

activity directly builds on students' background knowledge and can be scaffold based on student needs, which directly follows DeCapua and Marshall's (2015) MALP[®] framework.

Models of writing instruction that use the students' home languages and use a gradual release model are the most successful (Menken, 2013). Allowing students to utilize their knowledge of multiple languages allows students to practice translanguaging. Translanguaging describes the fluidity of language and using all languages in one's repertoire to create meaning (Menken, 2013). When building writing practices and literacy, it is important for teachers to acknowledge students' funds of knowledge and allow students to communicate in a way that they are comfortable. Translanguaging could be used in discussing a text with a group of students who have shared home languages. SLIFE could also use translanguaging when learning a new skill of critical thinking. This would allow them to practice the academic skill without language being a limiting factor (Flint et al., 2019).

Translanguaging can also be used to build student-teacher relationships to support motivation and confidence in the classroom. Linares (2019) suggested using a dialogue journal with students to assist in building a supportive classroom. A dialogue journal is a notebook in which students and teachers write back and forth to one another. Students can ask questions, answer prompts, or free-write about the topic of their choice. Students can write in any language, draw a picture, or use any means to communicate. The teacher should use a gradual release model and demonstrate how to write a journal entry before expecting students to do so. This is effective for SLIFE because it meets their

social-emotional needs, allows them to ask questions in a no-pressure environment, and allows for differentiation based on student needs (Linares, 2019). This type of activity builds literacy skills by practicing skills that could be taught in mini lessons while lowering the affective filter of language learners.

While teaching literacy skills in all modes, teachers should scaffold and differentiate based on student needs. Teacher-created differentiated materials allows for increased academic language development as well as content understanding. Some of these scaffolds and differentiated support include graphic organizers, visual aids, and bilingual support (Cohan & Hoingsfeld, 2017). Teachers must also be willing to explicitly teach mini lessons that support literacy and language development. Some explicit lessons should be on phonemic awareness, oral language development, vocabulary, phonics, fluency, and comprehension (Hos, 2016a). Teachers should use the gradual release model and use the MALP[®] framework of isolating either content, language, or skills. Teachers must also limit the amount of new vocabulary so as to not confuse and overwhelm students (Robertson & Lafond, 2008) and limit the cultural dissonance.

Rationale

In urban school districts around Minnesota, there is a large focus on ELLs and the best practices to support them. In many districts, there is a large focus on co-teaching and inclusive practices for all ELLs. However, there is a lack of available curriculum written for SLIFE. Professional developments primarily focus on strategies for ELLs who have formal education and do not address the unique needs of SLIFE. For this reason, it was

important to find research that would give a better context to who SLIFE are and how to address their unique needs.

This research intended to answer the research question: *What are the best instructional practices for high school SLIFE?* The goal was to create a curriculum that teachers of SLIFE can use that is rooted in the best instructional practices. Understanding the background and common experiences of SLIFE provided context for the curriculum. It was intended for teachers to use the section on common experiences to understand more about SLIFE, but it should not be assumed that all SLIFE have the same background. Due to the high drop out rate of SLIFE, this curriculum used the research for building student-teacher relationships to have activities that use relationships to motivate students. The curriculum design had a basis of building and maintaining positive relationships to motivate students to achieve academic success. The curriculum uses the research behind the MALP[®] framework as a basis of creating activities that meet the literacy needs, academic thinking needs, and content standards of SLIFE. Understanding these three facets will help teachers use the best instructional practices for SLIFE.

Summary

Chapter Two addressed the research question: *What are the best instructional practices for high school SLIFE?* The first theme defined SLIFE and gave an overview of their common background experiences as well as some of the barriers they face in the education system. It gave an overview of the cultural dissonance they face while entering school and describes how mainstream public education fails to meet the needs of SLIFE. The research also addressed the importance of positive student-teacher relationships and

their effects on student motivation. It described the importance of creating a student-teacher relationship that gives teachers an insight into the students' needs as well as the importance of giving autonomy and helping students set goals for their learning. The last section outlined the frameworks of culturally responsive teaching, MALP[®], and covered some literacy activities that follow the framework of MALP[®]. These three topics worked together to build a foundation for the best instructional practices of teaching SLIFE.

These three themes are addressed in Chapter Three by using the information to create a unit plan that meets the needs of SLIFE. The background knowledge and common experiences of SLIFE guided the unit plan to make it relevant to their common experiences and cultural norms. The research behind building and maintaining student-teacher relationships was used throughout the unit plan to build in intentional student-teacher conversations to support student learning and emotional needs while also giving the autonomy to work in groups and individually. The frameworks for teaching SLIFE guided the content and the framework that the unit plan will follow. The unit plan specifically followed the MALP[®] framework by ensuring content was relevant and that thinking skills were explicitly targeted throughout.

CHAPTER THREE

Project Description

Introduction

ELLs come with a variety of background experiences and knowledge. While some have formal education in their home countries, others gain their knowledge through informal education. This poses challenges when coming to the United States education system, as many teachers do not know how to best serve informally educated students. This led me to ask: *What are the best instructional practices for high school SLIFE?*

This chapter discusses the development of a curriculum that uses the best instructional practices to teach SLIFE. It describes a curriculum of a unit design that comes from a background of understanding the unique experiences of SLIFE, incorporates building student-teacher relationships, and embeds literacy instruction into teaching the ninth grade Minnesota Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts (Minnesota Department of Education, 2010). This chapter provides an understanding of who the curriculum is intended for, the students it will serve without modification, and an understanding of the school in which it will be used. The rationale is also provided for writing this type of unit design. An explanation of the curriculum design paradigm Understanding by Design(UbD) and the MALP[®] will be given.

Project Overview

This project is a unit design intended to answer the question: *What are the best instructional practices for high school SLIFE?* The unit design was a narrative writing unit that combines explicit literacy instruction while meeting the Minnesota Common

Core State Standards in English Language Arts for grade nine (Minnesota Department of Education, 2010) and using the World-Class Instructional Design Assessment (WIDA) English language development (ELD) standards (WIDA, 2019) to guide the English language learning instruction. This curriculum design was intended to meet the needs of EL students while having specific modifications and differentiation for SLIFE.

Rationale

This unit of study was designed to fill a gap in current curriculums, specifically focused on a large, urban school district. This district has a newcomer program in some of the middle and high schools that is designed to meet the language and content needs of recent immigrants. In the past, teachers were expected to use their English language expertise and create their own curriculum and materials for this program. In recent years, there has been an attempt to create common unit plans for the various levels of literacy classes. This curriculum was created by current English language learner teachers in the district. A team created common unit plans for the students with an English proficiency level 2 as described by WIDA. However, with limited time and resources, the unit plans created primarily focused on formally educated English language learners. These unit plans included standards, a final assessment, and some content and language objectives. However, many of the unit plans did not contain modifications for SLIFE students, nor were daily lesson plans created. The co-created curriculum was used as a launching point for this curriculum design.

This curriculum design incorporates the motivation technique of building positive student-teacher relationships. It followed the framework of the MALP[®], which highlights

the importance of positive student-teacher relationships in motivating students (DeCapua & Marshall, 2010). Research showed that students who have a positive relationship with their teacher have higher academic achievement (Henry & Thorsen, 2018). This curriculum used activities that aligned with the students' needs, goals, and values which has been shown to increase motivation to complete them (Groenke et al., 2017). It also included individualized meetings with students to give feedback, the activities were designed to get to know the students, and the modeling in the classroom should help students get to know the teacher to build positive relationships.

This curriculum design included daily lesson plans and materials for teachers to use that teaches the genre of narratives, builds basic literacy skills, and focuses on building English language skills through speaking, listening, reading, and writing. The goal was to create tangible resources for teachers of SLIFE to use so there was less scrambling to find or create materials. The goal was that teachers will be able to use various graphic organizers and instructional ideas and modify them for different units of study as well. It connected Minnesota ELA CCSS for grade nine with basic literacy skills to ensure that students are engaging in the same standards as their grade level peers, while ensuring they gain the educational discourse skills and thinking skills to ensure success in their future education.

The curriculum used the backwards design model UbD (Wiggins & McTighe, 2011) to ensure that all lessons led to the learning goal at the end of the unit. The base curriculum used backwards design a similar structure of UbD. DeCapua and Marshall's (2015) MALP[®] was utilized to meet the needs of SLIFE. This connected literacy skills,

academic thinking skills, and content while making learning relevant to the lives of the students. This allowed students to see themselves reflected in the curriculum and focused on building a safe classroom environment with positive student-teacher relationships.

Curriculum Design Paradigm

This curriculum was designed to answer the question: *What are the best instructional practices for high school SLIFE?* The focus of the curriculum was to use the best instructional practices for a group of students who are rarely accounted for in published curriculum. Although these students have limited or interrupted formal education, they have the same maturity as their grade level peers, so it is essential that curriculum uses the same standards and higher-level thinking and expectations with modifications for their language and literacy levels. Therefore, the end goal and big learning ideas from the design paradigm UbD were the primary focus (Wiggins & McTighe, 2011).

An essential idea of UbD is that teachers are coaches of understanding. Their main job is to support students in making meaning and being able to transfer their knowledge into other settings. This type of design should make standards relevant to students and which they can show their learning through authentic performance. UbD uses backwards design to create curriculum and is separated into three stages (Wiggins & McTighe, 2011).

Stage one of UbD focuses on the desired results of a lesson or unit. This is the stage in which an educator creates an essential question and unit and lesson objectives. Objectives should be stated in a way that students can see relevance and transfer the skills

to other content areas and life experiences. Stage two focuses on assessment evidence. This stage ensures that the assessments are accurately and thoroughly assessing students on the learning objectives. Assessments should be created to include the six facets of understanding which are to explain, interpret, apply, show perspective, show empathy, and have self-understanding (Wiggins & McTighe, 2011). Stage three of UbD focuses on the learning events, or the actual lessons that are being taught (Wiggins & McTighe, 2011). In this stage, the learning tasks are described and connected to the learning objectives. This paradigm was used in this project because it focuses on what students are able to produce, not on their deficits, and makes learning transparent for students.

Along with UbD, this curriculum design is based on the teaching and learning cycle. The teaching and learning cycle is a genre-based approach to learning in which students explore a genre through a cycle of different stages of learning (Martin & Rose, 2005). The purpose of this cycle is to build in scaffolds for students to move from a high-support environment to low support or independence. This cycle uses reading and model texts which leads to students writing their own texts. The cycle starts with deconstruction, which introduces students to the genre through reading and text analysis. At this stage, teachers choose high-interest model texts to introduce the purpose and structure of the genre (Martin & Rose, 2005; Rossbridge & Rushton, 2015). In this stage, the focus is on reading and analyzing texts. Students build knowledge about the features and structure of whole text, paragraphs, and sentences as well as word choices for the given genre (Rossbridge & Rushton, 2015).

The next stage of the teaching and learning cycle is joint construction. In the joint construction phase, students and teachers work together to construct a text that is similar to the model text (Martin & Rose, 2005; Rossbridge & Rushton, 2015). This stage includes a balance between teacher guidance and demonstration and student ideas. Interactive discussions between the students and the teacher with the teacher modeling their thoughts, student questions, and an interactive dialogue is key for the joint construction process. The purpose is to focus on the writing process and make the thinking behind the writing transparent to the students so they are able to apply it independently. Teachers both model and guide students into writing a piece together while giving students a chance to share in the text construction (Rossbridge & Rushton, 2015).

The third stage of the teaching and learning cycle is independent construction. This stage is where students use their skills from joint construction with a teacher, to write a text independently (Martin & Rose, 2005; Rossbridge & Rushton, 2015). During this stage, a teacher should still support the student in understanding and describing the writing process and their choices while they are developing a text (Rossbridge & Rushton, 2015).

While UbD and the teaching and learning cycle describe the paradigms used for the outline of the unit plan, this curriculum design used MALP[®] to guide the content and instructional practices in each lesson. This paradigm modifies the culturally relevant teaching to specifically include SLIFE needs. MALP[®] includes aspects of culturally relevant teaching such as incorporating home culture and language, understanding

student backgrounds, and having a supportive learning environment. However, MALP[®] adds on to address cultural dissonance that students face when coming to the United States. This framework requires teachers to understand the cultures of their students and integrate them with the culture of the United States education system, which relieves pressure on students to completely adapt to the U.S. education system (DeCapua & Marshall, 2015). This framework emphasizes the importance of combining oral language with written language to scaffold to meet the needs of emergent readers as well as explicitly teaching academic thinking and literacy skills in the classroom. It also includes validating collectivist cultures by having ample group work while maintaining individual accountability through turning in individual work (DeCapua & Marshall, 2015). This paradigm was the guide to creating all instructional activities in the unit plan.

To show where MALP[®] is being utilized different elements of MALP[®] are highlighted throughout the lessons. A table with various codes and meanings is written after the unit scope and sequence table. The elements of MALP[®] that are highlighted are oral language used as a bridge to written language (OL), activities that build student-teacher relationships (STR), group work designed to bridge the gap between individualistic and collectivist cultures (GW), modeling academic skills (MAS), activities that use translanguaging (T), and isolating skills with either familiar content or familiar language (IS). This makes the alignment of MALP[®] and the unit plan visible to the teacher.

Setting and Audience

The curriculum was designed to be implemented in a public 9-12 high school located in one of the largest school districts in Minnesota. The district is located in a large city, and this high school is one of nine high schools in the district. There are approximately 1,877 students at this high school. About 20% of students identify as African American, 2% as American Indian, 55% as Asian, 6% Caucasian, 15% Hispanic, and 2% as two or more races. About 75% of the students at this school receive free or reduced lunch, 35% of students qualify as English Language Learners, and 12% qualify for Special Education services. This curriculum could be modified to be used in other high schools with a newcomer program that is also working toward grade level English Language Arts standards.

This unit plan was designed to be implemented in a newcomer program in which the students have a literacy block of two class periods dedicated to English language arts. This means that the lessons were meant to be taught during two standard 40 minute class periods. This curriculum was designed for students who are immigrants to the United State in a sheltered class with a composite WIDA proficiency level around 2. Minnesota is part of the WIDA consortium, which means ELLs are classified from levels 1-6 by taking a standardized language proficiency exam called ACCESS. Based on WIDA definitions, these students are considered to have emerging language skills. The WIDA can-do descriptors for the genre of “recount” state that students at a level 2 proficiency are able to process written recounts by identifying patterns specific to a narrative and can locate main ideas in a paragraph. When writing they can use specific patterns for

narratives and sequence their narratives using transitional words and phrases. In listening, students can match oral descriptions of main characters or events in content related topics. They can then orally restate information using content specific terms and provide content-related examples in previously studied materials (WIDA, 2016).

This curriculum was created for teachers in the newcomer program who have students in their classrooms that are SLIFE. These teachers are at the forefront of teaching basic literacy skills while also meeting state content standards. This curriculum was designed to be useful to teachers with limited experience with modifying curriculum for SLIFE or new teachers of SLIFE without a prescribed curriculum.

As many SLIFE have more experience learning through oral communication and storytelling, this unit plan was created using the assumption that students have prior background knowledge of narratives. If students do not have prior knowledge of storytelling, this may need to be pre-taught. However, there are no assumptions made of background knowledge of written narratives, so that does not need to be pre-taught for this unit of study.

Outline and Timeline

This curriculum was designed as a unit plan that focuses on a narrative unit and intended to answer the question: *What are the best instructional practices for high school SLIFE?* The starting point for this curriculum was a basic narrative unit plan that was created with other ELL teachers in the district. This curriculum was a starting point for the standards and some objectives. The lesson plans, assessments and instructional materials were all created independently of that curriculum design.

The teaching and learning cycle paradigm was used to guide the creation of this unit plan. In the teaching and learning cycle, the first stage is deconstruction, which includes looking at model texts, understanding the genre, and analyzing texts for various structures and word choice. This unit was designed to cover the joint construction and independent construction stages. It is assumed that the teacher has already introduced the narrative genre to the students, used model texts, and analyzed the structure and language of those model texts. The model text that was referred to in this unit plan is *Green Card Youth Voices: Immigration Stories from a St. Paul High School* (Rozman Clark & Mueller 2017). This text includes multiple personal immigration narratives that served as models and were used for the deconstruction portion of the teaching and learning cycle for the narrative genre.

The unit plan was designed to cover the joint construction and independent construction portions of the teaching and learning cycle. It was designed for 20 instructional days in a newcomer program with a literacy block that extends for about 80 minutes a day. This project followed the UbD framework while using a lesson plan template that sets the goal, accesses prior knowledge, introduces new information, applies new information, and generalizes the learning (GANAG). In stage one, the essential questions were created to guide the entire unit plan. Both content and language objectives were created that were directly related to the Minnesota common core state standards (Minnesota Department of Education, 2010) and the WIDA English language development (ELD) standards (WIDA, 2019). The language and content objectives focus on narrative writing and the language and writing skills students need to achieve this

goal. These objectives were created for the unit and each lesson plan states which objectives were focused on for that day. These objectives were shared with students as “I can...” statements that used student-friendly language to clearly state the learning goal for the day. The goal was to have objectives that students could transfer into other academic areas.

In stage two of the lesson planning, authentic assessments were created that align with learning objectives. This section also looked at the assessments and described how to interpret the evidence and denote if students are achieving the desired outcome. It discusses formative and, if applicable to the lesson, summative assessments. The summative assessments are a written immigration narrative and an oral presentation on the immigration narrative. Formative assessments of skills assessed in the summative assessment are built in throughout the unit. In the third stage of designing lessons, a modified version of the GANAG lesson plan template designed by Jane E. Pollock was used as this was what was provided in the school district (ASCD, 2020). This lesson plan template met the needs of UbD by stating the goal, assessing prior knowledge, introducing new information, applying new information, and generalizing the learning (ASCD, 2020). The lessons built upon each other, starting with introducing the narrative genre and analyzing written narratives with literacy skill instruction built in, and culminating in the creation of their own narrative.

Project Week by Week Overview

As this curriculum was designed to use the principles from DeCapua & Marshall’s (2011; 2015) MALP[®], different aspects of MALP are identified and labeled

throughout the lessons. The purpose of this was to clearly highlight the ways in which SLIFE needs are being targeted and ensure the alignment was visible to the reader and user of the curriculum. The principles focused on were oral language used as a bridge to written language, activities that build student-teacher relationships, group work designed to bridge the gap between individualistic and collectivist cultures to decrease cultural dissonance, modeling academic skills, translanguaging, and isolating skills by using either familiar content to practice new language or familiar language in a new content (DeCapua & Marshall, 2015).

Week One

In week one, the lessons focus on the content objective of brainstorming ideas for a personal immigration narrative and the language objective of using past tense. The week begins with a pre-assessment on narrative writing. Students develop interview questions and ask someone in their family about their immigration journey and connect their school experience to their home life to focus on oral language bridging to written language and the use of translanguaging. Throughout the week, there is explicit past-tense instruction and practice that focuses on isolating the language skills in a familiar context. Students also work in groups to analyze the text features of an immigration narrative. Then, in a whole group setting, students share what they noticed about the narrative. The teacher writes down their words and connects them to the technical vocabulary of title, paragraphs with complete sentences, dialogue, details, and tenses. The remainder of the week focuses on brainstorming ideas for a jointly constructed immigration narrative and independent brainstorming for their own narratives which focuses on oral language as a

bridge to written language, building student-teacher relationships, and modeling academic skills.

Week Two

Lessons in week two focus on the language objectives of past tense, compound sentences, and sequence words. The content objectives focus on creating a first draft of an immigration narrative. There is explicit instruction on sequence words and compound sentences as well as opportunities to practice past tense, sequence words, and compound sentences which focuses on isolating these language skills in familiar contexts. This practice is used as formative assessments for these grammar structures. Early in the week, the teacher(s) hold individual meetings with students about their brainstormed ideas for their personal immigration narrative to build student-teacher relationships. After meeting with each student, the lessons progress to creating the first draft. The teacher and students jointly create the beginning, middle, and end of the first draft using the ideas from the jointly created graphic organizer in the previous week which build student-teacher relationships, allow for the modeling of academic skills, and use oral language as a bridge to written language. Then, students have work time to develop the beginning, middle, and ends of their own immigration personal narrative. Students bridge oral language to written language by recording a video of what they want to write about before starting to write their drafts.

Week Three

Week three focuses on the content goals of students editing their drafts and the language goals of dialogue and adding details. There is explicit instruction and practice of

dialogue and adding details which allows for isolating skills in a familiar content. The practice activities are used as formative assessments for dialogue, details, compound sentences, and past tense. Students also brainstorm details and dialogue to use in their own personal immigration narrative. Later in the week, the teacher models the academic skill of how to go back and look at their drafts to add details and dialogue. Then, students are given time to add this to their own writing. During this work time, the teacher(s) meet individually with students to give them feedback on their first drafts and check-in on their progress which builds student-teacher relationships. The remainder of the time is devoted to writing their final drafts.

Week Four

Week four focuses on creating a multimodal project based on their immigration narrative. The project is introduced and students are given multiple class periods to work on their creative project. Students may create a video of them telling their story or acting out their story, hand-drawn pictures, a slide show presentation, or a presentation of artifacts from their home country that they will describe to the class. The purpose is to utilize the assets of each student, incorporate student interest, and practice oral academic language. The end of the week will be used for presentations.

While this unit plan was designed for 20 days, it may need to be modified based on student needs. After looking at formative assessments, more or less instructional time may need to be spent on certain aspects of the curriculum to meet student needs. To evaluate the effectiveness of the curriculum as a whole, the summative narrative assessment and narrative project was looked at. The students should have been able to

write and present a personal immigration narrative with a beginning, middle and end. It should include details about the setting and characters as well as dialogue, past tense, compound sentences, and sequence words.

Summary

This chapter explained the reasoning and process of designing a curriculum to answer the question: *What are the best instructional practices for high school SLIFE?* The rationale was described for why this type of project was chosen. There is not a lot of curriculum specifically designed to meet the needs of SLIFE, and this project was intended to begin to fill that gap with a unit design for teachers of SLIFE. This unit design was specifically designed for teachers in a newcomer program with sheltered instruction and a literacy block of two class periods, or 86-92 minutes of instruction. While this unit provided materials for students with a WIDA proficiency level 2, the materials could be modified for use with SLIFE with higher proficiency levels.

This curriculum design used UbD paradigm to create lesson plans using backward design and focusing on the end objectives to create lessons. It also used MALP[®] in the creation of lessons as an anchor to meet the needs of SLIFE. This chapter described the project as a 20 day narrative unit that meets the requirements of Minnesota state standards as well as WIDA standards.

The next chapter provides a conclusion to the capstone. It reflects upon the creation of the curriculum and limitations and implications of the project. Chapter Four revisits the literature review and reflects on the usefulness of the research to the

curriculum design. It is a reflection of the project as a whole and how it influences my work moving forward.

CHAPTER FOUR

Reflection

Introduction

The primary goal of this project was to design a narrative writing curriculum that followed the best practices for teaching SLIFE to answer the research question: *What are the best instructional practices for high school SLIFE?* After establishing a need for a curriculum that focused specifically on the needs of SLIFE, I began researching materials that would build writing literacy and connect to students' life experiences. I used and adapted these materials to make them relevant for the setting. This curriculum was designed to be implemented in a sheltered literacy classroom that serves SLIFE and formally educated ELs with a level 2 language proficiency as defined by WIDA. The goal was to provide teachers with differentiated instruction for SLIFE as there is a lack of available curriculum to serve these students.

Chapter Four covers what I have learned throughout the process of creating a capstone. I refer back to the literature review and relevant research to the project and discuss the project limitations. Suggestions for possible future work and research are made for those who work with SLIFE. I end the chapter by reflecting on the project as a whole.

Writing the Curriculum

The curriculum was written using literature referenced in Chapter Two. This research was essential to creating a curriculum that followed the best instructional

practices for high school SLIFE. The base of the unit was writing an immigration narrative to tie in with the real life experiences of SLIFE, which was shown to be an effective motivation tool (Flint et al., 2019). The curriculum was created based on MALP[®] designed by DeCapua and Marshall (2010). They discussed the importance of learning experiences that were familiar and meaningful to the students. The goal was that students could focus on language and writing skills because they were writing about a familiar experience.

Using a common experience also allows for students to collaborate and share ideas with each other throughout the writing process. DeCapua and Marshall's (2010; 2015) MALP[®] described the importance of utilizing the assets of students and embracing the collectivist culture within the classroom. Providing the opportunity for collaboration while still expecting individual accountability aids in merging the cultural norms of SLIFE while meeting the expectations of the U.S. education system. The curriculum also uses oral language with written language to support SLIFE cultural preferences and language needs and is supported by MALP[®] (DeCapua & Marshall, 2015). This can be seen while the teacher models and creates texts with students as the teacher is speaking and writing simultaneously. There are also student activities in which students may choose to speak or write to focus on asset-based learning and aligns with supporting their cultural and language preferences.

There is time blocked off for individual meetings with students twice during the unit plan. This follows the theory of connective instruction for providing meaningful student-teacher interaction in the classroom (Martin & Dowson, 2009). By building

relationships through individual meetings, students will be more motivated to work on their narrative and feel more comfortable asking questions to the teacher. This provides a space for meaningful feedback on their writing while also building relationships (Newcomer et al., 2020). Individual meetings with students also follows MALP[®] by using one process of informal education in which the teacher is mentoring students. According to DeCapua and Marshall's (2010; 2015) research, many SLIFE are more familiar with these informal ways of learning, so this learning activity is intended to bridge the gap between formal and informal education and reduce cultural dissonance. Work time is also built in which is a time in which teachers can connect with individual students informally to build relationships and provide feedback on their work. Ample independent work time allows for student autonomy and allows students to rely on their peers for help, which Martin and Dowson (2009) found to increase student motivation.

MALP[®] described the importance of teaching specific language skills along with content skills (DeCapua & Marshall, 2015). This unit plan focuses on the specific language skills of past tense, compound sentences, dialogue, and transition words and practiced in the context of narrative writing. The unit plan provides explicit instruction on these grammar points, practice in familiar context, and then has students transfer those skills into their writing. Giving students ample opportunities to master the skill before applying it to a new context directly follows MALP[®] (DeCapua & Marshall, 2015).

The summative assessment gives students an opportunity to use their assets in their project. The final project uses research from Flint et al. (2019) to use an asset based

approach and support students' language and literacy skills in multiple modes. Students can be a video, graphic novel, or slide presentation which allows for student choice.

Project Findings

Throughout the process of creating this capstone, I learned the importance of flexibility. When I started creating this project, I wanted to have cookie cutter templates that teachers could take and use directly in their own classroom. My idea is that the unit plan would lay everything out nicely for them and provide examples and perfect timelines. The reality that I found is that all students are different and lessons need to be modified, sometimes heavily, based on student needs and interests. It is especially necessary in the SLIFE classroom to analyze and assess where there may be formal education gaps and fill in those gaps so students are confident and continue growing. This may look very different in each SLIFE classroom. Because of this, I realized that the lesson timeline and activities need to be flexible for student needs. Teachers may need to modify the materials or language points in this unit plan to fit the unique needs of their students.

Flexibility also needs to come in the form of reteaching to those that miss class. I ended up building extra independent and group work time into the unit plan because it is a reality that these students may have other priorities. Especially in a newcomer or sheltered program, students may miss school due to immigration meetings or other obligations and will need to be caught up when they come back. It was difficult to find the balance between moving lessons forward and building in the time to be flexible with the unique needs of the students. The lessons are in sequential order, so students that miss

a day need to be able to make-up that instructional time. Staying after school isn't always a viable option due to transportation, so I reflected a lot on the best way to build flexibility into the lesson plans, which ended up being time for independent or group work in the majority of lessons.

Limitations

While this unit plan is research based and is intended to be flexible, it has limitations. One limitation is that it is only one unit in an entire year. Teachers of SLIFE face a lack of available curriculum, so providing one unit plan is not enough. This unit plan is also the second part to an entire narrative unit. As stated in Chapter Three, this unit plan is based on the teaching and learning cycle described by Martin and Rose (2005). This unit plan is designed to be taught after the first step of the teaching and learning cycle of deconstruction in which students read and analyze the model text (Martin & Rose, 2005). Because of this, teachers must create their own unit using the model text described in the unit plan. This is a limitation if teachers are unfamiliar with the teaching and learning cycle or using model texts to introduce the purpose and structure of a genre.

Another limitation of this unit plan is that the entirety of the plan has not been tested on students. Parts of it have been used, but the entire plan has not been completed with a group of students. As reflected on previously, a teacher using this will need to gauge understanding and assess the needs of their students to modify the curriculum as necessary. Teachers may find that the unit plan needs to be extended or shortened based on student needs.

Possible Future Work

This curriculum provides a starting point for other units to be created. It provides background research and a starting point to design more units that use the best practices for SLIFE. This unit uses the teaching and learning cycle as well as DeCapua and Marshall's (2010) MALP[®] to create a narrative writing unit plan. Unit plans based on other genres such as expository, persuasive, and descriptive could be created for a SLIFE classroom. This would provide readily available resources for teachers of SLIFE. Districts could provide this curriculum to teachers who are new or newly in the role of teaching SLIFE in a sheltered classroom to ensure that best practices are being followed.

The research behind the best practices for teaching high school SLIFE could be extended to create unit plans in other content areas in a sheltered environment. Explicit language instruction is typically thought of in a literacy class, but how could social studies, science, or math use the research to create unit plans to meet the needs of SLIFE? How can oral and written language be utilized across content areas? What thinking skills must be explicitly taught in various content areas? How can students be given opportunities to use their life experiences in the classroom? These questions could guide others to diversify the materials available to SLIFE and teachers of SLIFE.

Summary

This project was created to answer the question: *What are the best instructional practices for high school SLIFE?* In this chapter I discussed what I learned through writing the capstone project. I connected the literature review to the curriculum and discussed the relevant research used. Additionally, I talked about the project findings and

limitations of this project. To conclude, I discussed the future research for those who work in sheltered SLIFE classrooms.

I hope to share this curriculum with colleagues in the district and state who work in sheltered classrooms and serve SLIFE. By providing it at the district level, my hope is that it will be distributed to new teachers so they do not need to create one unit of their curriculum. Working on this curriculum has shown me the importance of studying and learning about the diverse students in our classrooms. While I have a better understanding of SLIFE, it will continue to be important to research the new refugee and immigrant populations that settle in a given area. Overtime, common experiences and cultural norms may change for this population, so continual research to provide the best instructional practices for SLIFE is necessary.

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