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Leveling the Playing Field: A Proposal for a Portfolio Summative Assessment for a Task-
Based Adult ESL Course to Address the Needs of Students with Limited or Interrupted
Formal Education (SLIFE)

by

Joshua Eick

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

Hamline University

Saint Paul, Minnesota

May 2022

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DEDICATION

To my students who have inspired me throughout the years with their fierce optimism and dedicated work ethic which drive them toward the hope of a better future. May this paper help you to get there a little sooner. Thank you to my Capstone Committee. Special thanks to Jayme Adelson-Goldstein and Dave Coleman for planting the seeds which flowered into this project. I have learned a great deal from both of you.

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

Background

Maria (a pseudonym) is an Advanced Low English as a Second Language (ESL) adult student. She is from a small village in Oaxaca, Mexico. She left school at the beginning of the eighth grade to take on a full-time job to help her family. She migrated to the US when she was a teenager. She did not return to school until she was in her 20s, and that was to learn English.

Maria is a very smart and dedicated student. However, she struggled with certain traditional pedagogical methods, like learning grammar through rote practice and reading comprehension exercises. She had failed to pass the intermediate ESL level a few times for the following reason: Although she did fairly well in class during the semesters, she was not able to pass the final formalized assessment tests.

When I began to pilot a task-based curriculum that focused on students' strengths rather than attempting to address their deficiencies, Maria immediately began to thrive. Collaboration and communicative learning came naturally to her as that was the prevalent mode of problem-solving in her native community. Her in-class work improved considerably, and she began to demonstrate mastery of academic, cognitive and other skills which were scaffolded into lessons based on topics that she and other students indicated were of interest to them at the beginning of the semester. However, she was still unable to pass the final district formalized assessment tests.

I began to see that the fact that Maria had not learned to *do school* during her formative years was the culprit behind her inability to pass these academic-based

assessments. She had not been given the opportunity to learn or practice test-taking methods. She was missing background knowledge of cultural cues as well as historic and scientific references inherent in many of the reading excerpts on the reading exams. Grammar on the tests was often used in contexts not aligned to the learning that had occurred in the classroom. In effect, Maria had a distinct disadvantage of not having the academic tools and knowledge that her classmates who had uninterrupted education possessed even though she had proven mastery of the language in class over the course of the semester.

Maria is just one of the many students in the Division of Adult and Career Education (DACE) of the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) who face the same challenges. Twenty percent of the adult students in DACE have less than an eighth-grade education. Over 40% never received a high school diploma (CASAS Data Portal, 2021).

Maria and students like her should be able to prove mastery of learning English via an alternative summative assessment method that is equitable not just for them, but for all students.

The purpose of this capstone project is to outline a proposal, in the form of a Google Slide presentation, for a portfolio summative assessment pilot program for DACE as well as the Los Angeles Regional Adult Education Consortium (LARAEC) which addresses the following question:

Which summative assessment is a more accurate and equitable measure of students with limited or interrupted formal education's L2 mastery based on a task-based course design: a portfolio assessment or a traditional formalized testing assessment?

In this chapter, I will provide some background on DACE's adult learners, how DACE has approached adult ESL curricula and summative assessment in the past, the current state of affairs, and a theory on how curricula and assessment might be shaped in the near future to better serve its ESL student population, especially students with limited or interrupted formal education (SLIFE).

DACE's Adult Learner Population

LARAEC is the largest adult education consortium in California, serving over 100,000 students. DACE, a member of LARAEC, serves over 68,000 of those students. The student population in DACE is made up of students from all over the world with differing educational backgrounds, socio-economic statuses, legal statuses, and goals. DACE has a large population of SLIFE. There are many factors leading to the limitations or interruptions in a student's education such as insufficient funds to pay for school, beginning work at a young age due to familial economic needs, cultural restrictions, etc. (DeCapua & Marshall, 2015). The Comprehensive Adult Student Assessment System (CASAS) statistics for the 2021-2022 school year show that 19% of DACE's student population who completed most of their childhood education outside the US has an eighth-grade education or lower. Forty one percent of the student population never completed high school. For students who completed their majority of education in the US, 56% never completed high school (CASAS Data Portal, 2021). Many SLIFE struggle with learning limitations typical for this population: lower reading ability and content knowledge than their peers and a lack of many basic academic skills (DeCapua, 2016). For SLIFE entering an adult program to learn ESL, not only must they learn the language but they must also learn how to be a student. This would include learning basic

study skills such as note-taking, time management, organization, revising, and test-taking.

Past Curricula and Summative Assessments

In the late 1990s and early 2000s, DACE introduced ESL course outlines, guidebooks for each level of ESL that align with state standards, which reflected the then-current pedagogy which promoted life skills with a strong focus on grammar. Around 2010, some of the course outlines were updated to include workforce-readiness skills, yet the focus continued to be on life-skill topics and grammar. While the life-skills and workforce readiness skills were important for students to learn, much of the grammar was taught through constructions, usage rules and rote learning. Research has shown that learners don't learn constructions individually, but gradually through the mapping of form, meaning, and use (Celce-Murcia et al., 2014).

In addition, traditional formalized testing was used to assess students' mastery of the language in the form of a battery of four standardized district final exams: speaking, listening, writing, and reading/grammar. Around 2010, a timed reading Test of Adult Basic Education (TABE) was introduced as a summative reading exam for the Advanced Low ESL courses to assess whether students were ready to enter the Adult Basic Education (ABE) program (D. Coleman, personal communication, October 25, 2021). Students were given 25 minutes to answer 25 questions. Without having learned skills to aid in taking a stressful reading comprehension exam, some students could be at a distinct disadvantage (DeCapua & Marshall, 2015).

Test-taking skills are skills built up over the course of a child's education. SLIFE miss that skill-building and are at a disadvantage over students who know how to take tests (DeCapua & Marshall, 2015).

The Revised Course Outlines

In August of 2020, LARAEC revised all of the ESL Course Outlines, which outline the performance objectives and exit skills to be taught in each of the 6 ESL levels, to reflect updated research and developments in the pedagogy of teaching adult L2 learners. The results were a pivot from the traditional focus on life skills and grammar to task-based learning (TBL) which focuses on the skills, such as academic, cognitive, soft, employability, and persuasive, necessary to succeed in the 21st century social, familial, and economic arenas (Cohan & Honigsfeld, 2017). The new outlines also focus on college and career readiness. It was suggested that grammar no longer be exclusively taught in constructions, but be recognized through input, taught in context, and integrated naturally into the production of tasks which could then lead toward the production of artifacts (D. Coleman, personal communication, October 25, 2021).

The revised course outlines also place a large emphasis on communicative learning and collaboration. As many of DACE's SLIFE population hail from small indigenous communities where collaboration in problem-solving is the norm (DeCapua & Marshall, 2015), this methodology seems more relevant to their cultural norms while at the same time benefiting other students in the same classroom who have higher levels of education.

Opportunities Created by the Pandemic

The 2020 COVID-19 pandemic and ensuing school closures in LAUSD offered a unique opportunity to develop online course content through the online platform Schoology which centered on TBL aligned to the learning objectives and exit skills outlined in the new course outlines. Each unit in the online courses focused on tasks which culminated in a project. In addition, the new system advocated the use of rubric scoring sheets which promoted student agency in that students could see what was expected of them prior to the beginning of each unit and were provided summative feedback upon completion of the project. A good deal of positive feedback was given by teachers in DACE to the designers of the course materials. Many teachers noticed increases in student engagement and increased incidents of revision post-feedback (D. Coleman, personal communication, November 4, 2021). Ongoing Professional Development was created to support teachers in adapting the online course content, teaching methods, and rubrics to their classes (D. Coleman, personal communication, November 4, 2021).

Concurrently with the design of these courses, a group of teachers and teacher advisors in DACE developed a new system of assessment to be used by ESL teachers. Teachers continued to have free rein over formative assessments throughout the trimester/semester, with the exception of CASAS and English language (EL) Civics testing which focus more on benchmarks than on hard assessment data. DACE recently suggested that teachers use new speaking and written summative exams based on tasks developed in the new online course content. However, the CASAS reading exams replaced the district reading exams as well as the ESL Advanced Low TABE exam as a

reading summative assessment. There is a plan to begin using the CASAS Listening Test as a summative listening assessment in the near future (D. Coleman, personal communication, November 4, 2021).

Despite all of these recent developments in the area of ESL in LARAEC and DACE, as of this writing, promotion is still determined by a battery of summative tests. While the new teaching methodologies, specifically TBL, take SLIFE's learning styles and background knowledge into account, they don't address the fact that most SLIFE lack sufficient academic and test-taking skills that are required to succeed on these exams (DeCapua, 2016).

A Proposal for a New Summative Assessment Method

The objective of this capstone is to address the following question:

Which summative assessment is a more accurate and equitable measure of students with limited or interrupted formal education's L2 mastery based on a task-based course design: A portfolio assessment or a traditional formalized testing assessment?

I am recommending that DACE, LARAEC, and other adult school districts adopt a new summative assessment system based on a portfolio of students' work which aligns with the performance objectives in the new course outlines as well as demonstrates mastery of all of the exit skills. For those educators who wish to use it, it can serve as an alternative to the districts' traditional formalized summative assessments, with the exception of midterm CASAS and EL Civics testing as those are required by the state of California and tied to funding. Though the new speaking and writing summative assessments align with the new course outline exit skills, they only align with some of

them. Further, the CASAS exams, currently being used to assess reading and scheduled to assess listening, do not fully align with the new course outline exit skills.

Rationale

It is my theory that a portfolio better demonstrates adult ESL students' authentic understanding and production of English than traditional formalized assessments. Since students will have demonstrated mastery of skills multiple times through production of tasks and projects throughout the trimester/semester, as learning objectives are recycled throughout the term, there would be no need for traditional formalized summative assessments at the end. Rather, a portfolio of their work which is aligned with more of the performance objectives and all of the exit skills in the course outlines would demonstrate this learning.

What's more, a portfolio summative assessment could address problems caused by SLIFE's lack of knowledge of how to *do school* by focusing on their strengths, not their deficiencies (DeCapua, 2016). This concept aligns with DACE's Vision Statement as written on its LAUnifiedAdult.org website (n.d.): "The Division of Adult and Career Education will collaborate regionally to ensure that all learners are equipped to succeed in a global society." In addition, students would have a hand in creating this portfolio in order to make them active participants in their own education. Administrators would have access to the portfolios to be able to collect data and zero in on specific areas needed for professional development. Teachers would be able to use the portfolios as a self-assessment tool in order to judge whether the course design is working well or if it is in need of adjustments.

Summary

DACE's traditional summative formalized testing not only fails to align with most of the performance objectives and all of the exit skills in the new LARAEC course outlines, but it puts SLIFE at a disadvantage as most lack the same test-taking skills as their more highly educated peers (DeCapua, 2016). As the district moves toward a TBL curriculum, all students will have the opportunity to demonstrate mastery of the language and exit skills through production of various projects and tasks, or *artifacts*, over the course of the term. A portfolio of their artifacts seems a more apt way to not only show growth but demonstrate mastery of many of the performance objectives and all of the exit skills required to be promoted to a higher level of education.

The purpose of this paper is to examine the following research question:

Which summative assessment is a more accurate and equitable measure of students with limited or interrupted formal education's L2 mastery based on a task-based course design: A portfolio assessment or a traditional formalized testing assessment?

In the following chapter, I will review some of the literature defining the learning backgrounds and styles of adult learners focusing primarily on SLIFE, examine the methodology of project-based learning and its focus on tasks, discuss the benefits and challenges of traditional formalized assessment of second language acquisition as well as the benefits and challenges of portfolio summative assessments. I will also examine recent arguments in assessment reform and how those arguments support the addition of a portfolio-based summative assessment. Finally, I will discuss Canada's experiment with portfolios as an assessment method and the lessons that can be learned from it.

In chapter Three, I will describe a capstone project in the form of a Google Slide presentation which outlines the recommended steps for DACE and other school districts to create, pilot, and implement a portfolio summative assessment for a TBL course which will address the challenges laid out in the literature review. I will also provide a rough timeline needed to implement the plan as well as a discussion on data collection and analysis of the plan.

In Chapter Four, I will highlight what was learned through this capstone project, tie the project proposal back to the literature review, consider possible implications and limitations of the proposal, and recommend future research projects.

CHAPTER TWO

Literature Review

Introduction

The purpose of this capstone project is to outline a proposal for a portfolio summative assessment pilot program for ESL courses in the Division of Adult and Career Education (DACE) of the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) and the Los Angeles Regional Adult Education Consortium (LARAEC) which addresses the following question:

Which summative assessment is a more accurate and equitable measure of students with limited or interrupted formal education's L2 mastery based on a task-based course design: A portfolio assessment or a traditional formalized testing assessment?

This literature review begins with an examination of SLIFE and the detrimental effects of cultural dissonance upon their performance on traditional tests as well as a discussion of collectivism as a learning model for SLIFE. An examination of the methodology of project-based learning and its focus on tasks as well as its relation to collectivism follows. After that, the benefits and challenges of both formalized summative assessments and the use of portfolios as an assessment tool will be discussed. From there, the chapter will examine the recent development of adopting differentiated assessment as a means of assessment reform, and how that supports the argument for accepting student-created portfolios as a summative assessment of language mastery. The chapter will conclude with a study of Canada's national experiment with a portfolio summative assessment program, the lessons that can be learned from it, and how this capstone project may benefit from the knowledge gleaned from their experience.

SLIFE

A discussion of effective summative assessment must consider the students being assessed. Two leaders in the research into SLIFE, DeCapua and Marshall (2015), define SLIFE as follows:

SLIFE are English learners 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. Such students, in addition to needing to learn a new language, come from an oral tradition, making it challenging to adapt to the literacy-focused school culture in their new learning environment. (p. 357)

This is not to say that SLIFE are without learning skills or knowledge. Quite the contrary. There is a prevalence of mentoring and apprenticeship by family or the community in the collectivist cultures from which most SLIFE migrate. Many SLIFE master certain work-related skills at a very young age (DeCapua, 2016). The problem occurs when they enter US schools in which learning relies heavily on literary and academic skills, skills to which most SLIFE have not been exposed.

California SLIFE Statistics

Though the exact number of adult SLIFE in DACE and throughout LARAEC has not been measured, they are a known presence in most of the classes throughout the city and county. Table 1 (CASAS Data Portal, 2021) shows the percentages of adult students who participated in the Comprehensive Adult Student Assessment System (CASAS)

testing who marked having completed less than eight years of schooling as well as the percentages who indicated not having completed high school. The data shows that SLIFE are a significant presence within the adult school system, both in Los Angeles and throughout California.

Table 1

Comprehensive Adult Student Assessment System (CASAS) Participant and Program Enrollment - California Workforce Investment Act (WIA) Title II Federal Tables:

Table 6

Years of formal education	As a percentage of all participating adult students in California: 2017-2018 (the latest statistics available)		As a percentage of all participating adult students in the Division of Adult and Career and Education (DACE): 2021-2022	
	US Based Schooling	Non-US Based Schooling	US Based Schooling	Non-US Based Schooling
No schooling	6	-	1	-
5 years or less	4	7	5	5
8 years or less	19	21	13	19
No high school diploma	69	43	56	41

Note. No data was shown as to whether any participants from outside the US marked 'No schooling'.

Other SLIFE Statistics

The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development estimated their numbers around two percent of the US population in 2013 (Porter, 2013). Twenty nine percent of the total population of immigrants in California never completed high school. Of all California residents (native and non-native) between the ages of 25 and 64 who do not possess a high-school diploma, 70% are foreign-born (Johnson et al., 2021). Since

nearly all ESL students are foreign-born, educators should be aware that a significant number of SLIFE may be present in their classes.

A 2002 national-level survey sponsored by the National Center for Education Statistics found that over 11% of immigrant students in the 10th grade experienced interrupted formal education prior to arriving in the U.S. It also found that 65% of those students arrived when they were 12 or older with a two-year grade gap upon arrival (Colon, 2019). Those students are of parenting age now. In a study of immigrant parents of school-aged children who live in California, Hofstetter and McHugh (2021) found that 76% who have pre-K children and 79% who have children in K - fifth grade are without a high school diploma. A key objective of the adult programs in DACE and LARAEC is to provide parents the tools to help their children successfully navigate through the school system (D. Coleman, personal communication, November 3, 2021). However, parents who themselves have not fully gone through a public education system may struggle when trying to understand the academic concepts and skills required of their children in school (DeCapua & Marshall, 2015).

Even without clear statistics on the number of SLIFE in California, educators know that education is crucial not only for SLIFE's day-to-day survival but to aid them in rising above their current economic and social status as well as providing opportunities for success to their offspring (D. Coleman, personal communication, December 2, 2021). While most schools and teachers understand the importance of those goals, many of them are unaware that some of their assessment methods place SLIFE at a disadvantage.

Cultural Dissonance

Standards-based curricula and formalized assessments are often antithetical to the informal ways in which SLIFE are used to learning. They have not been exposed to *doing school* which causes them to experience *cultural dissonance* – not having background knowledge in the expectations, academic language, and methods of thinking and learning prevalent in US schools (DeCapua & Marshall, 2015). In most SLIFE cultures, learning is based on collaboration and reliance upon family and community (DeCapua, 2016). The discontinuities between the culture of US schools, which traditionally assess on individual performance, and the culture of SLIFE's home life can often lead to poor performance on standardized tests (Gay, 2000). The cultural identities and learning styles of our SLIFE should not be discounted but rather recognized and incorporated into our teaching and assessment methods (Gay, 2000).

Collectivism

The majority of the SLIFE in DACE come from indigenous rural communities in Mexico and Central America, while a smaller percentage come from countries such as Ethiopia (D. Coleman, personal communication, November 3, 2021). In these communities, the group is placed ahead of the individual. Collaboration is the primary learning style and individualism is outside the norm (DeCapua & Marshall, 2015). In a study of collectivist versus individualist preferences in immigrant Latino families by Rothstein-Fisch et al. (2009), their findings showed that collectivistic families prefer helping and sharing in order to solve problems over personal choice and autonomy. However, the teachers in the same study were more likely to prefer individualized problem-solving over helping and sharing. This may create conflict and confusion in

those students from collectivistic cultures. In many classrooms, assignments which allow for collaboration are still often assessed based on an individual student's effort and contribution, not the group's (DeCapua & Marshall, 2015).

If the playing field is to be leveled for all students, all learning styles should be taken into account when assessing mastery of learning. One method of teaching that promotes collaborative learning and rewards it is project-based learning.

Project-Based Learning and the Focus on Tasks

Project-based learning (PBL) traces its roots back a hundred years to John Dewey's Project Method which uses hands-on projects as a means of effective learning through collaborative effort towards a real-world experience (Peterson & Nassaji, 2016). Parrish (2019) describes PBL as "an approach that allows for maximum learner involvement and choice in the learning process. Learners choose a topic of interest or concern to them, and then direct their learning through inquiry, research on a topic, and collaboration" (p. 42).

PBL differs from task-based learning (TBL) in that TBL focuses on single tasks and the completion of those tasks using the target language and skills either learned in class or from the student's funds of knowledge. PBL concentrates on a project, a higher-level task, which is usually completed through completion of a series of lower-level tasks over a period of time (Bilsborough, 2013). PBL provides students with multiple opportunities to collaborate on a variety of tasks.

Not all students approach projects in the same way. The Mutually Adaptive Learning Paradigm (MALP) developed by DeCapua and Marshall (as cited in DeCapua, 2016) takes into account all of the different learning styles, background knowledge (or

lack thereof), preferential modes of transmitting knowledge (i.e. oral vs written), and varieties of cultural collaboration (i.e. collectivism vs. individualism) present in a classroom and guides the teacher to plan a series of tasks that build up to a project which allows for all of those factors to function simultaneously while propelling all students toward successful achievement of the learning objectives.

Project-Based Learning Traits

PBL has several traits that make it attractive to an ESL classroom in which SLIFE are enrolled. Since projects focus on language, cognitive thought processes, and academic skills, topics can focus on anything (Peterson & Nassaji, 2016). However, culturally responsive lessons that tap into the background knowledge of SLIFE and involve students in the decision-making process should result in more meaningful engagement (DeCapua, 2016).

Advantages of Project-Based Learning. Projects develop critical-thinking and problem-solving skills while aligning with multiple academic and learning standards (Colegrove & Zúñiga, 2018). Projects can be extended over several class sessions or weeks allowing multiple opportunities for scaffolding. In addition, several language skills can be taught and used during the course of one project and recycled over the course of several others (Peterson & Nassaji, 2016). Projects include tasks that involve collaboration and reward group effort. Rather than focusing on the project goal, the focus is on cooperative learning, information gathering, oral discussions and problem-solving related to that gathered information (two attributes of collectivism), the genuine use of language, and the processes leading toward the project's goal (Peterson & Nassaji, 2016). Since projects often involve task work outside of the classroom, teachers may allow

SLIFE to involve family or community in these tasks, another attribute of collectivism (Peterson & Nassaji, 2016). Projects also include tasks that require individual effort. By scaffolding these individualized tasks alongside collaborative tasks, SLIFE can gradually become accustomed to traditional learning modes that they may encounter in higher-level classes (DeCapua, 2016).

PBL recognizes the varied strengths that all students bring to the classroom and enriches learning by involving multiple language, academic, and cognitive skills simultaneously while encouraging authentic use of language as opposed to the mere practice of rote skills and grammar usage through repetitive exercises (DeCapus, 2016). In its best form, it eliminates the cultural dissonance encountered by SLIFE within the context of traditional US learning systems by focusing on lessons, tasks and projects which are malleable to multiple learning styles as well as student background knowledge and cultures (DeCapus, 2016). Providing a methodology which welcomes diverse learning styles and cultures helps to prevent SLIFE attrition and promotes graduation rates, workforce entry, and economic self-sufficiency (Cohan & Honigsfeld, 2017).

Hesitations Towards Adopting a Project-Based Learning Model

Not all students will react the same way to PBL. In a study of ESL teachers' and learners' perspectives of and beliefs toward PBL done by Peterson and Nassaji (2016), they found that teachers have a slightly more positive attitude toward PBL than students. Students had less enthusiastic attitudes toward group work than teachers. A possible explanation for this could be that many of the student participants came from Asian countries where individualism is more prevalent in schools (Peterson & Nassaji, 2016). That may be remedied over time with more exposure to group work.

In a study by Beckett and Slater (2005) which tested a framework for project implementation in an undergraduate university ESL classroom with the goal of socializing students toward a different way of considering language and language learning, they found that certain students believe that an ESL class should be taught in a traditional style with a centralized focus on the different learning components, like grammar, vocabulary, speaking and writing. One way to deal with that is to demonstrate how all of those components are included in the project lessons and tasks prior to the introduction of the project (Beckett & Slater, 2005).

Despite having a more positive attitude than their learners, many teachers still express hesitancy about implementing PBL. One factor affecting some teachers' hesitant attitudes toward adopting PBL as a teaching method is the pressure of formalized summative testing as well as standardized tests, such as CASAS. In a study by Colegrove and Zúñiga (2018), a first-grade ESL teacher implementing PBL into her classroom felt uncomfortable giving up teacher control to projects which focused on students' interests rather than the specific content present in the districts' standardized tests due to the pressure to meet certain testing benchmarks. She felt more compelled to stick to a traditional teacher-centered pedagogy and teach directly to the tests.

Formalized Summative Assessments

All schools rely on educational standards, whether they be local, state, or national, to determine the content and skills to be taught in a class. Hudson (2014) writes of the divisions that have long existed among educators as to the limits standards put on a curriculum as well as how the standards are manifested in the classroom. Evaluations are also based on those standards and traditionally have come in the form of formalized, or

standardized, testing (Menken, Hudson, & Leung, 2014). In the right hands, formalized testing has many benefits for assessing a student's progress in a class as well as mastery of learning. They also come with certain challenges, especially for SLIFE.

Benefits of Formalized Summative Assessments

Formalized testing comes in different forms. For example, direct testing can ensure authenticity when a student's productive language skills are tested through speaking tests which measure conversational ability and writing tests which measure communicable ability (Ekbatani & Pierson, 2010). When testing receptive skills such as listening and reading, traditional formalized testing such as multiple choice and true-false tests allow for quickness and ease of administration and uniformity of results. They can also eliminate administrator bias to some extent. However, many of these tests don't necessarily measure authentic use of language skills but rather knowledge of its usage and the ability to comprehend it (Brown & Hudson, 1998; Ekbatani & Pierson, 2010). The use of constructed-response tests which combine receptive and productive skills could address those deficiencies. One example would be a debate where students must listen to the opposing group before producing a spoken response (Brown & Hudson, 1998).

Challenges of Formalized Summative Assessment

Direct testing and constructed response tests can be used to measure a student's natural ability to produce the target language but there can be difficulty in maintaining reliability. Not all teachers will judge performance in the same way, and bias can influence grading leading to inconsistent results (Brown & Hudson, 1998; Ekbatani & Pierson, 2010). In a study of MBA students by Smith (2011) which compared formalized

summative test results of L1 students to L2 students, Smith found that such inconsistencies happen routinely. Different skilled assessors were given the same essay exams to evaluate, and they gave them significantly different grades. The same study found that formative assessment grades were consistently higher than summative assessment grades (Smith, 2011).

Formalized Tests Don't Cover All Standards. Hudson (2014) states that another factor to consider is that curricula are often crammed with standards, or learning objectives. Including all of those standards on a test can be unrealistic. On the other hand, limiting the standards measured on a summative test can narrow the focus too much, excluding many language applications (Menken, Hudson, & Leung, 2014). For example, selected-response tests such as true-false tests don't measure productive skills and aren't always aligned with the learning objectives, projects, or tasks encountered during the course. This may lead to washback effects in the form of students only wanting to study the curriculum represented on the tests (Brown & Hudson, 1998).

Negative Effects on Teachers. Formalized tests can have negative effects on the teachers who administer them. Formalized tests can lead to negative feelings of being constricted as a professional educator due to not having input on test content, being forced to adhere to rigid testing schedules, and the absence of flexibility in administering the test (Colegrove & Zúñiga, 2018). In addition, argues Hudson (2014), with little or no input from teachers or students on whether existing formalized testing is being used to make appropriate decisions about student promotion, questions of validity arise (Menken, Hudson, & Leung, 2014).

Negative Effects Created by Administrators. Hudson (2014) also reasons that negative effects of formalized tests can also come from the district itself.

Administratively, pressure from the district to produce results in the form of high test scores may lead to teachers teaching to the test which can narrow the scope of targeted learning objectives. This in turn may lead to administration undervaluing teaching skills inducing a cycle of limited curriculum and a contraction in the breadth of creative teaching methods (Menken, Hudson, & Leung, 2014).

Formalized Assessment Effects on SLIFE

Perhaps the biggest deficiency in the use of formalized testing is the negative effect it can have on SLIFE. Since most SLIFE are impeded by their lack of background knowledge in academic concepts as well as their inexperience with test-taking skills, tests such as selected-response exams put them at a distinct disadvantage (Smith, 2011). In addition, the material on reading tests may contain cultural references unfamiliar to them. In some cases, the emphasis on individualism in terms of test-taking rules may cause undue pressure on those students used to problem-solving using collectivist methods (Gay, 2000). For these reasons, many educators are calling for alternative forms of assessment to be accepted by school districts. One such form is a portfolio of student work.

Portfolios as Summative Assessments

Portfolios are collections of student work in the form of artifacts produced during the class term (Johnson et al., 2010). In order to serve as an assessment tool, portfolios should include artifacts that display knowledge, such as quizzes or research projects; skills, such as writing samples or posters which synthesize learning objectives; and

disposition, such as opinion essays or debate recordings. These artifacts can be used to assess language mastery in real-world settings and to demonstrate growth and learning (Johnson et al., 2010).

A Complicated Assessment Tool

The subject of using portfolios as a summative assessment is a complicated one in that, according to Chappuis (2020), “the portfolio itself is the repository of evidence, not the stimulus that produced its ingredients” (p. 104). Portfolios should not simply be a collection of everything produced in the class. Chosen artifacts should reflect the learning objectives of the class and course outline to ensure validity and reliability (Ripley, 2012).

The question then becomes whether materials, tasks, and projects produced over the course of the class are sufficient enough to be authentic summative measures of a student’s mastery of the language in place of traditional formalized testing, which is the basis of my research question: *Which summative assessment is a more accurate and equitable measure of students with limited or interrupted formal education’s L2 mastery based on a task-based course design: A portfolio assessment or a traditional formalized testing assessment?*

Benefits of Portfolio Summative Assessments

Brown and Hudson (1998) found three advantages of using portfolios as assessment tools: bolstering learning, augmenting the teacher's role in that learning, and improving testing processes.

Bolstering Learning. Portfolios can strengthen learning by doing a number of things, such as focusing on the learning processes as opposed to simply on the goals, motivating students, enabling and encouraging collaboration, establishing clear goal

objectives through use of rubrics and using the rubrics as assessment tools to demonstrate progress, and empowering students by making them an integral part of the assessment process (Brown & Hudson, 1998). It also acknowledges differences in students' learning styles, background knowledge, and skills by allowing a great variety of projects which reflect a wide array of language skills and provide a large amount of data on growth (Kaur et al., 2019). In addition, if the projects are based on students' background awareness and skills, or *funds of knowledge*, recognition of their contributions to the lesson design may result in creative thinking and increased engagement in learning (Cohan & Honigsfeld, 2017; Kaur et al., 2019).

Augmenting the Teacher's Role in Learning. Portfolios can provide an in-depth picture of a student's progress and language abilities while changing a student's perception of teachers from authority figure to mentor (Brown & Hudson, 1998). This redefining of the role of instructors can empower students to have a hand in determining their own educational fate and result in SLIFE feeling more comfortable and confident in school (Johnson et al., 2010). In a study by Colegrove & Zúñiga (2018) of a Texas first-grade ESL teacher, she gave her students opportunities to enact agency by giving them control of their language choices and shifting their identities along with their teacher. The result was twofold: by asserting the teacher's own professional agency in engaging in authentic learning with her students, it opened spaces for the students' own agency in the classroom.

Improving Testing Processes. This is a bit of a misnomer in that Brown and Hudson (1998) are making the case that portfolios ultimately serve the same purposes as formalized testing but improve on the process by making both the teacher and student

part of the assessment, allowing teachers to observe students in more holistic usage of the target language in multiple contexts and situations, and assessing learning in multiple dimensions as opposed to one direct testing observation. Portfolios also allow for engagement in metadiscussions of the assessment processes and expectations of growth, expansion of data collected on students, and the systematization of the assessment of student work. Additionally, when assessment is based directly upon the performance objectives achieved in the class, there can be positive washback effects from students' seeing that their work is valued (Brown & Hudson, 1998).

A Fourth Benefit: Student Involvement. Formalized testing places students in a passive role in which they have no control over what content will be evaluated and therefore no hand in highlighting their own growth and achievement (Johnson et al., 2010). Portfolios, on the other hand, give students an active role in choosing artifacts that demonstrate their mastery of learning. The process may also involve peer evaluation and collaboration in choosing artifacts, a key trait of collectivism (Johnson et al., 2010). By asking students to observe what connections to mastery of language learning they are making for themselves, this increases student agency (Larsen-Freeman, 2019).

Challenges of Portfolio Summative Assessments

The usage of portfolios as a summative assessment is a relatively recent alternative to the traditional method of formalized testing. Therefore, reliability and validity are a concern. Brown and Hudson (1998) make the case for “credibility, auditability, multiple tasks, rater training, clear criteria, and triangulation of any decision-making procedures along with varied sources of data” (p. 656) to ensure validity and reliability. Portfolios will ultimately be as varied as the students creating them; therefore,

the criteria by which they are assessed must be agreed upon by the assessors. Coming to an agreement on those standards will be difficult enough. Judgments on those standards will likely vary from teacher to teacher. Districts must give careful attention to the design of the standards, or rubrics; restructuring the organization due to possible changes in support needed to evaluate portfolios; the training of teachers in not only new evaluation methods but the technology associated with those methods; the additional time required to assess multiple artifacts; piloting the assessment methods in multiple classes; studying the results; and amending the methods so reliability and validity improve. All of this can be time-consuming and budget-siphoning, two big concerns of most school districts (Brown & Hudson, 1998; Johnson, 2010).

In addition, portfolios may not be as effective a tool as standardized tests in that the teacher to whom the student is being promoted may not be familiar with the curriculum of the preceding class or the context in which the artifacts were produced. The same might be said in a situation where a portfolio is used to determine graduation out of one program into a higher-level program (Weigle, as cited in Ripley, 2012).

Brown and Hudson (1998) also point out other challenges, including how to decide what to include in a portfolio, time spent on assessing multiple artifacts as opposed to a few tests, making grading fair and equal for all students, ensuring that all stakeholders such as students, teachers, and administrators have access to the portfolios, assuring reliability and objectivity regardless of who assesses the portfolio content, and demonstrating the adequacy of the artifacts as representative of language mastery.

Finally, a crucial factor is that most adult education programs have continuous enrollment. A student who begins class late in the term may not have enough time to

produce a sufficient number of artifacts from which a portfolio can be assembled (Weigle, as cited in Ripley, 2012). Even though the student may not have learned all of the target objectives over the complete term, they may still be able to pass summative standardized tests at the end of the term (Weigle, as cited in Ripley, 2012).

All of these factors may cause hesitancy in teachers adopting portfolios as an assessment method. A study by Kaur et al. (2019) of student teachers in a master's program who taught a variety of grades in K-12 found that only six percent reported using a differentiated summative assessment such as portfolios. Some of the reasons stated were that the practice was not common among teachers, parents preferred standardized scores, and there was a lack of encouragement from administration.

A Portfolio or Formalized Summative Testing?

The advantages and challenges of both formalized summative testing and portfolio summative assessment necessitate further contemplation of my research question: *Which summative assessment is a more accurate and equitable measure of students with limited or interrupted formal education's L2 mastery based on a task-based course design: A portfolio assessment or a traditional formalized testing assessment?*

One possible area of research which may influence the answer to that question is assessment reform.

Assessment Reform and the Argument for Differentiated Assessment

Most, if not all, of the challenges of using portfolios as a summative assessment tool seem to stem from the recency of the method (Kaur et al., 2019). Like any new pedagogy, issues of reliability and validity will be factors until the method has been

studied, refined, and accepted. However, the same cannot be said of the negative effects of formalized testing on certain groups, especially SLIFE (Gay, 2000).

Advances in cognitive psychology, technology, and automated methods of analyzing complex artifacts to identify significant features have altered the way in which assessment can be done in more meaningful and complex ways (Mislevy et al., 2004). To that end, the opportunity to reform assessment methods in a more equitable way is at hand.

Shepard (2021) uses the term *equitable assessment* to refer to the use of sociocultural theory to focus on the *culture, context, and sense of belonging* that are integral to learning rather than on the pressures of testing accountability which narrow the scope of curriculum (pp. 29 - 30). Shepard (2021) writes:

It's long past time to reckon with how the accountability testing strategy has failed, accepting that we cannot incentivize our way to equity and excellence, and to redirect our efforts to assessments that support learning. It's time to value teachers, strengthen local curricula, build on the knowledge students bring to class, foster caring classroom environments, and focus on assessments that enable next steps for instruction. (p. 28)

Differentiated Assessment

One area that has emerged as a promising alternative to accountability testing is differentiated assessment (Kaur et al., 2019). As opposed to relying on direct-response exams or a small battery of standardized tests, differentiated assessment allows for a great variety of methods such as quizzes, projects, presentations, writing examples, and task applications. These tools allow flexibility in content, delivery, and student choice. While

assessment goals remain consistent across the methods, differentiation allows for students to express their knowledge and language skills through a variety of options such as images, music, charts, and posters (Kaur et al., 2019).

A Focus on Students and Assessment

Differentiated instruction, wherein the classroom is student-friendly and assessment-centered, increases the opportunity for differentiated assessment (Tomlinson, 2015). The students' cultures, interests, and learning preferences are front and center. Constant formative assessments which align with the skills and knowledge necessary to master the content gauge student growth and steer adjustments in lesson planning. Feedback is clear, specific, targeted toward areas of need, focused on growth, and supportive rather than critical. Students use that feedback to improve the quality of their work. They are also encouraged to engage in peer feedback to help their classmates improve (Tomlinson, 2015).

Differentiated assessment takes the students' cultures, interests, and learning styles, as well as the formative assessments, feedback, and revision done during coursework into account when evaluating the students. Skills, knowledge, and understanding of the course content are demonstrated through a variety of activities related to the students' cultural backgrounds and interest areas. Quality data is generated while engaging students in creative and cognitive thought (Kaur et al., 2019).

Project-based learning and its focus upon tasks is tailor made for differentiated learning, and portfolios demonstrate differentiated assessment in action. One country, Canada, attempted to reform the way it assesses adult language learners by standardizing

portfolios as a summative assessment method on a national level. Much can be learned from their experience.

A Case Study: Canada's Portfolio-Based Language Assessment Experience

The Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) noted two research papers which looked into the assessment methods in the Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada (LINC) programs. They found that many of the methods being used for summative assessment were ad hoc and inconsistent (Makosky & Nagy and Stewart, as cited in Centre for Canadian Language Benchmarks, 2019).

Manitoba had been using a portfolio-based summative assessment program successfully for some years, so the IRCC decided to adapt the method on a national scale. The portfolio tool would allow teachers and students to “document, review, analyze, and reflect on learning” (Centre for Canadian Language Benchmarks, 2019, p.2).

The method was termed portfolio-based language assessment (PBLA) and based upon learner-centered, competency and task-based standards. According to the PBLA Practice Guidelines (Centre for Canadian Language Benchmarks, 2019):

Throughout the term, learners are encouraged to self-assess and to think reflectively about their language learning process. At key intervals each learner, with the teacher's assistance, uses the accumulated data to discuss progress towards their goals, to highlight ongoing or emerging challenges and to discuss strategies to overcome them. Teachers use what they learn from these reflections to modify instruction (p. 9).

According to the guidelines, over the course of a term, students accumulate 32 artifacts, or evidence that vocabulary, grammar and pronunciation in collaborative activities have

been completed successfully, into a portfolio binder (Keung, 2021). The binder includes a needs assessment, a goal setting form, learning reflections of the completed tasks, a skills inventory list, and task assessment forms for each task included in the portfolio with additional self-assessment forms for selected tasks. In addition, teachers are required to complete a learner progress report (LPR) when students have achieved standard-based benchmarks based on 8 - 10 artifacts in one or more of the four skill areas - speaking, listening, reading or writing. Since students must complete 32 artifacts in a term, multiple LPRs are to be generated prior to the student being promoted to a higher level (Centre for Canadian Language Benchmarks, 2019).

At the outset of the implementation of the program, Holmes (2015), in a study of a similar program in the UK, found that the keys to the Canadian program's success, which depended on instructors being open to learning and implementing this new assessment method, were an awareness of the change being proposed and evidence of its impact on learners, perception that the change would support their teaching methods, and most importantly, a commitment through self-agency by teachers and students to adopt the assessment method. Alas, this was not to be the case.

Reactions to the Program

After a few years of piloting the program, the method was introduced on a national scale during the 2013-2104 academic year. Teachers were trained on the method through a series of professional development (PD) sessions.

Problems began to emerge from the outset. Teachers and students complained that class time shifted away from the acquisition of skills and language through completion of tasks and toward completion of paperwork to confirm that acquisition.

Teachers also complained of a lack of training and support from the beginning (Keung, 2021).

Desyatova (2018), in a study of adult language teachers in LINC who had been using the method for four years, heard several common complaints from the teachers she interviewed. Teachers' workloads increased substantially, especially for teachers with multiple classes. Many teachers complained of the reduction in diversity in PD options as portfolios became the sole focus of training. Many expressed the feeling that all teachers were required to adhere to the new system whether or not they understood it or agreed with it, and questions and complaints about the method were quashed. There were comments about the lack of modeling prior to implementation. Teachers felt their role as decision-makers was being undermined, and that their professional identity suffered due to the demands of assessing and record-keeping, two activities perceived as peripheral.

Desyatova (2018) offered insight into possible solutions to overcome these deficiencies. Among her suggestions were to replace a top-down approach to teacher learning with dialogic interaction which emphasizes active participation among all stakeholders, an openness to hear opposing viewpoints and questions and to adjust, if necessary, the willingness to negotiate, and perhaps most importantly, making PBLA an optional assessment tool as opposed to a mandatory one.

Canada's experience with a summative portfolio assessment provides valuable insights into the real-world challenges that may arise when implementing a portfolio summative assessment method and the areas which need to be improved. Some of the findings discussed in this case study will be addressed in Chapter Three.

Summary

When comparing formalized testing vs. portfolios used as summative assessment tools, the downsides of formalized testing appear to outweigh the challenges of portfolios. Formalized testing allows for quickness and ease of administration and uniformity of results. Direct testing can also help to control for assessor bias (Brown & Hudson, 1998; Ekbatani & Pierson, 2010). At the same time, many standardized tests do not align with all of the learning objectives taught in classes and may constrict teachers' creativity and breadth of content (Colegrove & Zúñiga, 2018; Menken, Hudson, & Leung, 2014). Perhaps worst of all, formalized testing often puts SLIFE at a distinct disadvantage due to their lack of academic and test-taking skills as well as a lack of familiarity with many of the cultural cues referred to in test questions and an emphasis on individualism. These detriments bring into question the validity of many standardized tests (Gay, 2000; Smith, 2011).

The negative traits of portfolios mostly point to the need for more development, piloting, analysis, adjustment, and agreement on content inclusion and rubrics which control for bias, not to mention support both financially and administratively (Brown & Hudson, 1998; Kaur et al., 2019). At the same time, equal participation amongst all participants, an atmosphere of openness, and a willingness to negotiate must also be present for a portfolio pilot to succeed (Desyatova, 2018). All of these factors can be resolved with determination and commitment from all stakeholders.

In the following chapter, I will describe a capstone project which outlines a proposal for a transition to a portfolio summative assessment which includes the recommended steps for DACE and other school districts to create, pilot, and implement

this assessment method for a TBL or PBL course which will address the challenges laid out in this chapter. I will also provide a rough timeline needed to implement the plan as well as a discussion on data collection and analysis of the plan.

CHAPTER THREE

Project Description

Introduction

Nearly one-fifth of all students currently enrolled in the Division of Adult and Career Education (DACE) in the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) have less than an eighth-grade education (CASAS Data Portal, 2021). These students, referred to in this paper as students with limited or interrupted formal education (SLIFE), are at a distinct disadvantage within traditional teacher-centered classroom settings as they have not had prolonged exposure to *doing school*. They are also at a disadvantage when it comes to direct pencil and paper summative testing due to the fact that they lack the sufficient academic skills and cultural background knowledge necessary to succeed on those tests. The tests can be antithetical to the informal ways in which SLIFE are used to learning (DeCapua & Marshall, 2015). While teaching pedagogy has changed over the years to address the problem of cultural dissonance experienced by SLIFE in the classroom, serious assessment reforms have yet to catch up (Shepard, 2021).

In order for these students to be on a level playing field with their more highly educated peers, assessment reform must be addressed now. This reform should not give SLIFE an unfair advantage, but rather provide an alternative assessment that benefits all stakeholders: students, including SLIFE, as well as teachers, advisors, and administrators. It is my belief that a portfolio summative assessment can be that alternative.

The purpose of this capstone project is to outline a proposal for a portfolio summative assessment pilot program which includes the recommended steps for DACE,

the Los Angeles Regional Adult Education Consortium (LARAEC), and other school districts to create, pilot, and implement this assessment method for a task-based learning (TBL) course. This outline addresses the following research question: *Which summative assessment is a more accurate and equitable measure of students with limited or interrupted formal education's L2 mastery based on a task-based course design: A portfolio assessment or a traditional formalized testing assessment?*

This proposal, in the format of a Google Slide presentation, addresses the challenges discussed in the literature review. The Google Slide presentation consists of some background on the research, a rationale for the pilot, a road map of the pilot, and a final section which addresses the pilot timeline, data analysis, and budget. Handouts include the appendices outlined in this chapter as well as a budget estimate form. The presentation was presented to program and curriculum teacher advisors in DACE but can easily be adapted for any of the districts in LARAEC as well as any other adult school district.

The chapter begins with a brief outline of the setting, audience, and participants for whom this project is intended followed by a rationale for the project and a short discussion of validity and reliability. Next, I provide a detailed outline of the presentation project which is a proposal for a summative portfolio assessment pilot to serve as an alternative to the formalized assessment exit tests currently being used to evaluate learners in the DACE ESL programs. This includes sections on creating assessment task forces and a community of practice (CoP), designing a Portfolio Assessment Handbook, creation of an assessment method guide, production of rubrics which align to the performance objectives and exit skills outlined in the revised LARAEC ESL Course

Outlines, piloting the method, and teacher learning/training. The challenges of using a portfolio summative assessment highlighted in the literature review are addressed throughout this section. Third, I describe how data will be collected to evaluate the effectiveness of the proposed plan. Fourth, I suggest a timeline for the building and creation of this project presentation to DACE as well as a predicted timeframe for implementation of this plan should the district approve its implementation. Finally, I summarize the information laid out in this chapter and provide a preview of the discussion in Chapter Four.

Setting, Audience and Participants

The intended setting and audience for this project presentation are the program and curriculum teacher advisors in DACE as well as a group of selected classroom teachers and ESL program adult students to assure teacher and student agency and peer-to-peer status established from the start. The teacher advisors, with approval from district administrators, plan, implement, and train teachers on new pedagogical and methodological changes to instruction, curriculum, and evaluation. However, this proposal, if adopted, would affect everyone in the DACE ESL programs, including all administrators, teachers, advisors, and students. If the proposal were accepted and a pilot program greenlit to evaluate the new portfolio summative assessment, I would suggest choosing classes with near-equal percentages of SLIFE to participate in the pilot in order to be able to compare data collected with non-participating classes with similar demographics for research purposes.

SLIFE should be a presence in the chosen classes as they could be most affected by this program and the greatest beneficiaries of its hoped-for success. The exact number

of SLIFE enrolled in DACE is not known, but from data collected on the Comprehensive Adult Student Assessment System (CASAS) intake forms, the majority of students who marked having less than eight years of formal education come from countries where indigenous peoples face harsh economic and/or political strife, such as Mexico, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, and Ethiopia (CASAS Data Portal, 2021).

Rationale for the Project

Forty-one percent of DACE students who attended schools primarily in other countries prior to immigrating to the US never received a high school diploma. Nineteen percent of those same students never completed the eighth grade (CASAS Data Portal, 2021). SLIFE are a significant presence in DACE ESL classes. Many SLIFE suffer from cultural dissonance in traditional teacher-directed classes (DeCapua & Marshall, 2015). Traditional formalized testing not only places SLIFE at a disadvantage due to their lack of background knowledge in academic concepts as well as their inexperience with test-taking skills (Smith, 2011), but also doesn't always align to all of the learning objectives, projects, and tasks in TBL/PBL-based ESL courses (Brown & Hudson, 1998). PBL, TBL, and differentiated assessment in the form of a summative portfolio assessment address those challenges not only for SLIFE but for all students (Cohan & Honigsfeld, 2017; Colegrove & Zúñiga, 2018; DeCapua, 2016; Kaur et al., 2019; Peterson & Nassaji, 2016).

The Advantages of Task-Based and Project-Based Learning

Task-based and project-based learning classrooms have many advantages for language acquisition over traditional teacher-directed classrooms. Tasks and projects, which can center on any topic, focus on language, cognitive thought processes, academic

skills, cooperative learning, information gathering, oral discussions, problem-solving, the genuine use of language, and learning processes. Students working on tasks and projects develop critical-thinking and problem-solving skills while working towards multiple academic and learning standards. The length of a lesson which may include multiple tasks and a final project allows for scaffolding, teaching multiple language skills, recycling skills, and opportunities for both collaborative and individualized work. The variety of tasks and projects recognize the varied strengths that all students bring to the classroom and encourage culturally responsive lessons that tap into students' background knowledge. Students are also involved in the decision-making process which can increase engagement (Colegrove & Zúñiga, 2018; DeCapua, 2016; Peterson & Nassaji, 2016).

Since adult language learners demonstrate language skills authentically in a TBL or PBL classroom, portfolios of artifacts created in those classes can be used to demonstrate a more holistic mastery of language (Brown & Hudson, 1998). Also, as Hudson (2014) states, a carefully curated array of artifacts tend to cover a wider range of target learning objectives, known as performance objectives and exit skills in the LARAEC Revised ESL course outlines, than traditional district formalized tests that tend to be narrower in scope (Menken, Hudson & Leung, 2014). This can be a benefit to all ESL students, not just SLIFE. Of course, the assessment method would have to be studied before being implemented to assure validity and reliability.

Validity and Reliability

All new methodologies and pedagogies face questions of validity and reliability. Among the challenges facing the adoption of portfolios as an alternative summative assessment are credibility, assuring involvement of all stakeholders in the creation

process, dealing with varied sources of data, interpreting the portfolio content into auditable data, explicit and equitable criteria across classes and assessors, assessor training, and budget concerns due to increased evaluation time (Brown & Hudson, 1998). The following project proposal overview addressed these concerns and others by offering suggestions as to how to solve or adjust for these challenges.

Project Proposal Overview

The project proposal presentation outlined the recommended steps for DACE to create, pilot, and implement a portfolio summative assessment for a task-based learning (TBL) course. The steps in this presentation were based on the organizational structure of DACE but could easily be adapted to the structures of the other districts in LARAEC and beyond. Traditionally, when DACE decides to apply major developments in adult learner pedagogy and teaching methodology to instruction, curriculum, and evaluation, the district administration and/or district teacher advisors develop guidelines, materials, and professional development plans to aid in the learning and implementation of these new developments. Of late, DACE has budgeted funds to create task forces which include teachers to develop these guidelines, materials, and professional development plans. This will be the first suggested step in my project presentation proposal to DACE.

Portfolio Summative Assessment Task Forces and a Community of Practice

Perhaps the most important challenge to take on at the beginning of the process is assuring the involvement of all stakeholders in its creation. Many school districts already involve administrators, advisors, and teachers on task forces that adopt new methodologies and pedagogies into the curricula. Sociocultural Theory, which calls for fostering student agency and developing a shared understanding of ambitious learning

goals (Shepard, 2021), is an integral part of TBL and PBL. Therefore, I believe students should also be a part of the task forces. Decisions such as which artifacts to include in the portfolios and what criteria to incorporate into rubrics directly affect students. They should have some say in the summative portfolio assessment design. Students can be involved in a variety of ways such as membership on the task force, contributing ideas and opinions in brainstorming sessions, filling out polls and questionnaires, and participating in pilot programs.

Further, as seen in the Canadian case study, a top-down approach to implementation led to a serious power imbalance, a burdensome workload, and resentment towards the method's mandatory status (Desyatova, 2020). Hawkins and Norton (2009, as cited in Desyatova, 2020), suggest five principles of critical language teacher education: context, responsiveness, dialogic engagement, reflexivity, and praxis, or the integration of theory and practice.

To this end, I recommended that a CoP be formed simultaneously with the task force(s) so that teachers can study the research for contextual understanding, see progress being made by the task force(s), and openly discuss the project during its creation. By addressing concerns and allowing an open forum for suggestions or alterations before and during the pilot stage, that may serve to eliminate potential problems before the method is introduced into all classrooms who choose to adopt it. Further, by making it clear that this would be an alternative to current assessment methods, not a mandatory replacement, this might aid in getting participating teachers excited about its potentials as opposed to resentful of its obligation.

Depending on budget size, districts may choose to have only one task force develop Portfolio Assessment Handbooks for all of the different ESL levels or create multiple task forces that focus on one or more levels.

Creating Portfolio Assessment Handbooks

The largest project for the task forces will be the development of handbooks to serve as a guide to planning, assembling, and evaluating student portfolios. These handbooks which would be companions to the revised LARAEC ESL Course Outlines should include chapters related to instructional routines, performance objective and exit skill alignment, summative rubric templates, artifact choice, assemblage, evaluation, and access. There could also be an entry on how to adapt the process to virtual classes as well as HyFlex classes, which are combined in-person and online classes.

Instructional Routines and Course Outline Alignment. A key component to assuring the reliability and validity of a summative assessment method is aligning the assessments to the performance objectives and exit skills of the ESL course outlines (Colegrove & Zúñiga, 2018; DeCapua, 2016; Peterson & Nassaji, 2016). One of the challenges to this alignment is that a portfolio summative assessment plan allows for differentiated assessment. Differentiated assessment permits a great variety of instructional routines such as quizzes, projects, presentations, writing examples, and task applications to be used as artifacts for a portfolio (Kaur et al., 2019). The content of those artifacts will vary considerably depending on the funds of knowledge and background skills, amongst other factors, that both students and teachers bring to each individual class (Cohan & Honigsfeld, 2017; Kaur et al., 2019).

At the same time, TBL, PBL, and portfolio assessments encourage flexibility in a teacher's ability to be creative in class design while empowering students who are an active part of that design (Shepard, 2021). In order for a portfolio summative assessment to be valid and reliable, there must be a system that allows for this creative flexibility while at the same time assuring that there is alignment to the course curriculum and standards, and that the evaluation process considers that a selected number of performance objectives have been met and the student has mastered most of the exit skills laid out in the curriculum (LARAEC, 2021).

Assessment Method Guides. One way to assure that performance objectives and exit skills are being addressed in the summative assessment process is to create an assessment method guide within the assessment handbook. The updated LARAEC ESL course outlines have been designed with TBL in mind. The focus of the performance objectives in the course outlines is primarily on skills and learning processes. Teachers are encouraged to integrate multiple performance objectives into lessons and units as well as recycle performance objectives over multiple lessons and units depending on the needs assessments, learners' priorities, and ongoing assessment of their progress toward development of the exit skills (LARAEC, 2021).

As part of the Portfolio Assessment Handbook, the task force could create guides that define how various generic instructional routines and assessment methods align with the performance objectives and exit skills laid out in the course outlines. For example, personal essays align with particular performance objectives and exit skills regardless of the content. Research projects align with others. Teachers and students will have complete creative control over the content, lesson design, and formative assessments for

those tasks and/or projects because the guides will ensure that all of the performance objectives and exit skills delineated for those tasks and projects are covered.

A good assessment guide will have an example of a course syllabus which uses a variety of projects and methods over the course of the class that not only address many of the performance objectives and all of the exit skills but recycles key skills and learning processes over multiple artifacts. See Appendix A for an example.

The revised LARAEC ESL course outlines could also be updated to include a column in the performance objective and exit skill lists where teachers could check off each objective and exit skill being integrated into projects or assessment methods as they create their syllabus for the class. This will aid them in ensuring that the individual course's selected objectives and all of the level exit skills have been covered. This could eliminate the need for a mandated number of artifacts as long as those objectives have been met. This also allows for teachers to maintain their personal teaching methods without having to drastically learn new andragogy as the guides would include nearly all popular instructional routines and tasks seen in modern classrooms.

Rubrics. One challenge to adopting a portfolio summative assessment method is that judgments on standards vary from teacher to teacher. When the topics and lesson designs vary from class to class as well, those judgment variations can become even more pronounced. In addition, assessor bias can play into evaluation of artifacts (Brown & Hudson, 1998; Johnson, et al., 2010).

Rubrics can be used to standardize those judgments and lessen assessor bias (Brown & Hudson, 1998; Kaur et al., 2019). Chappuis and Stiggins (2020) lay out three criteria for creating high-quality rubrics which address the aforementioned challenges:

content, structure, and descriptors. The content should focus only on key language targets and skills but omit any elements which are unimportant or not relevant to the task or project. The structure includes a number of criteria which match the complexity of the task or project, and the content of each criterion should not overlap with the others. The number of proficiency levels should also match the complexity of the task or project. The descriptors must represent the criteria clearly and accurately so that any teacher and student can understand them in the same way (pp. 246-247).

One of the most important jobs for the task force(s) is to create generic rubrics for each of the instructional routines and tasks in the guide. The task force along with the CoP can decide on the language to be used in the rubrics. For example, formative assessment rubrics may include simple language and task criteria specific to the project or task at hand so that students can understand it easily and use the feedback to revise their work, while summative assessment rubrics may use language that more mirrors the learning objectives and exit skills from the course outlines so that teachers from other levels or programs can easily gauge a student's mastery of language skills and production without having to be familiar with the specific content of the class. See Appendix B for an example.

Each summative rubric should reflect the specific learning objectives and exit skills laid out in the assessment method guides. As an alternative, the task forces may decide to create rubric templates that allow teachers to provide their own specific criteria as long as it adheres to the objectives and skills described above. Students can be consulted to see if the rubrics can be easily understood while also having agency as to whether the criteria and proficiency descriptors are realistic and fair.

Having standardized rubrics accompany the assessment methods listed in the Portfolio Assessment Handbook can provide reliability and validity by addressing two portfolio challenges: allowing flexibility in content creation and teaching methodologies while ensuring that all students are being held to the same standards no matter their teacher, course content, or assessment methods. Further, rubrics which focus on language skills and learning processes as opposed to simply grammar and structural knowledge permit the use of methodologies like the Mutually Adaptive Learning Paradigm (MALP) which takes into account all of the different learning preferences, background knowledge (or lack thereof), preferential modes of transmitting knowledge (i.e. oral vs written), and varieties of cultural collaboration (i.e. collectivism vs. individualism) present in a classroom while propelling all students toward successful achievement of the learning objectives (DeCapua, 2016).

Increased Workloads. One of the most common complaints made by teachers in Canada's LINC programs was the increase in workload due to all of the paperwork necessary to fill out for each student following each task (Desyatova, 2018). Unfortunately, there doesn't seem to be any way to avoid that. However, the burden can be dramatically decreased by doing a few simple things. First, the specific rubrics for specific tasks or projects list the criteria in advance. The teacher needs only to check off the points for each criterion. Second, the rubrics could be made available electronically for ease of completion and organization. Third, if a teacher chooses to use pre-made online course content, such as a DACE Schoology master ESL course, the rubrics can be built directly into the task assignments saving the teacher time and effort of creating one

themselves. Finally, as there would be no mandatory number of artifacts as long as all exit skills are addressed, teachers could decide what that number would be themselves.

Revision as Part of Rubrics. One of the major differences between formalized summative testing and a portfolio summative assessment is that formalized summative testing in the form of direct pencil and paper tests measure language knowledge, and to some extent ability, at a particular moment in time, usually at the end of the term. Portfolios, on the other hand, show the process of learning, growth, and mastery of language over time. Since projects and tasks completed during the course of the class are not summative assessments in and of themselves but rather *used* to evaluate summative learning, there is no reason why revision can't be an important part of that growth process.

To that end, the task forces should consider the role that revision plays in the assessment process. If the focus of a TBL/PBL class is on the genuine use of language and the processes leading toward the lesson or unit's goal more than on the goals themselves (Peterson & Nassaji, 2016), then revision can be a vital part of that process. Thus, revision should be included as a criterion in project or task summative rubrics. See Appendix B, Rubric 2 for an example.

By front-loading the expectation of revision into the summative project assessment rubric, which should be shared with students prior to the start of the task or the project unit, there will be an understanding that students' work will not be summatively evaluated before they have a chance to improve upon it using feedback from the teacher or their peers. This will also sow the idea that revision is an expectation

of good classwork, or any work for that matter. This can be a way to scaffold this important academic skill for SLIFE.

Many language research studies have been conducted on the effect of feedback on revisions and language acquisition. Bonilla Lopez et al. (2018) studied the differential effects of comprehensive feedback forms in writing on Costa Rican university students studying English. They found that both direct feedback and metalinguistic coded feedback had a significant positive effect on English language learners' revision and future writing tasks. In a study of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners' peer negotiated feedback, revision outcomes, and short-term writing development, Tajabadi et al. (2020) studied the effects of student interaction and their uptake of feedback in terms of revision outcomes and short-term writing improvement. Iranian EFL university students were trained on giving feedback, then paired with another student in order to give and receive feedback from their peers. Learners who participated in sociocultural collaboration had the highest rate of learning when revising their written texts. This could have a positive effect on SLIFE who are used to collectivism as a learning process and problem-solving tool. Sato and Lyster (2012) studied the effects of peer corrective feedback on Japanese EFL university students. They found that corrective feedback embedded in peer interaction has positive impacts on accuracy development and contributes to fluency development. This could also benefit SLIFE as it is another positive trait of collectivism.

Revision can and should play a major role in assessment reform. If the playing field is truly to be leveled for all students, they shouldn't have just one shot at proving

their language mastery. They should be given the opportunity to learn from mistakes, acquire knowledge, and demonstrate improvement as *part* of the assessment process.

Having created a Portfolio Assessment Handbook that includes an overview of different task and project alignments to performance objectives and exit skills as well as sample rubrics to assess artifacts, including revision as a dimension, the task force would then complete the handbook by identifying which artifacts could be included in the portfolio and outlining how to summatively assess them.

What to Include in a Portfolio. If the portfolio summative assessment method is to be reliable and valid, then the artifacts in that portfolio, what Chappuis and Stiggins (2020) refer to as a *competence portfolio*, must not only demonstrate an “acceptable or exemplary level of achievement” (p. 377) of the performance objectives and exit skills laid out in the ESL course outlines, but be able to be interpreted as such by any assessor evaluating the portfolio, whether that be the student’s teacher, the teacher to whom the student will be transferred, the advisor transferring the student, the administrator of that program, or the student herself. In addition, chosen artifacts should demonstrate growth and mastery of exit skills over time. Therefore, the section of the Handbook relating to decisions as to what artifacts to include in the portfolios is crucial.

The beauty of the portfolio summative assessment method is that there is not simply one combination of artifacts that will portray a complete picture of a students’ progress or mastery of the language. As described in the preceding sections, the assessment guides and rubrics not only cover most of the performance objectives and all of the exit skills in the course outlines but recycle them over and over across multiple methods and projects. This allows for flexibility in artifact choice as long as the chosen

combination covers the individual course's selected performance objectives and all of the exit skills.

This also allows for students to be directly involved in that decision-making process. When students get to choose which artifacts they deem best demonstrate their achievement, growth, and mastery of language, that agency empowers the students in their own learning which can result in positive washback and, over time, help increase persistence and promote graduation rates which ultimately work toward increasing workforce entry and economic self-sufficiency (Brown & Hudson, 1998; Cohan & Honigsfeld, 2017).

Student Portfolio Guides. If students are to be involved in the assemblage of their own summative portfolio assessments, the task forces should create a student portfolio guide. As Chappuis and Stiggins (2020) write, "Inviting students to help determine what will go into the portfolio offers them an opportunity to practice thinking about what constitutes evidence in a given context" (p. 380). This guide may include self-assessment and self-reflection forms for chosen artifacts, work sample annotations which link the artifact to the learning processes which lead the students toward mastery of the learning objectives, and achievement justification essays for the higher levels (Chappuis & Stiggins, 2020). It would also be helpful to include course evaluations which include questions about the teaching methods and lesson designs used in the class so that the teachers may hear directly from the students about what works and what needs to be adjusted.

The task force and CoP can also decide what percentage of the portfolio will be chosen by the student as opposed to the teacher, or perhaps leave that decision up to the individual instructor and her students.

Portfolio Assemblage Time. The task force needs to make it clear in the handbook how much time will be needed by teachers and students to assemble portfolios of student artifacts. Teachers and students will need time to decide which student artifacts to include, and rubrics and other evaluative forms must be completed. However, the projects, tasks, or other assessments will have already been evaluated by the teacher and in some cases through peer review using the rubrics at the end of each task and/or project over the course of the trimester or semester, so there shouldn't be any additional time needed for that. In addition, teachers should be encouraged to have students complete self-assessments, self-reflections, and/or work sample annotations immediately upon completion of the projects or tasks during the class term. If done in this way, the only extra time needed would be for portfolio assemblage and any final forms to be filled out such as achievement justification essays by students or evaluative comments from assessors. As this summative evaluation method would be replacing formalized testing, the time saved by not having to give multiple formalized tests and evaluate test results could be used to assemble the portfolios and fill out the final documentation.

Access to the Portfolio. Since there are many stakeholders involved, access to the completed portfolios must be manageable and simple. An electronic portfolio would serve that purpose. All artifacts, rubrics, student forms, and teacher summaries could be compiled into one central portal to which all stakeholders would have access. Portals could be set up in Schoology, Google Drive, or any other online application chosen by

the task force and CoP. If the original electronic artifacts cannot be uploaded or linked directly to the portal, teachers could take screenshots of the artifacts or convert them to electronic form such as PDFs or JPEGs and upload them.

The task force could also design electronic portfolio portal shells which teachers could download or copy to their online class site. The task force would decide how that portal would be created and organized. It could be as simple as setting up folders in Schoology or Google Drive or something more sophisticated. Google Drive folders can be shared individually with specific students to control access as can folders in learning management systems such as Schoology. The advantage to having the task force organize the system would be to have a measure of portfolio assemblage uniformity across classes, programs, and platforms. However, the task forces decide to organize the online system, they should include a description of it and user instructions in the handbook.

If access to online portals is an issue, say for students who don't have internet access, paper copies can easily be printed. In fact, both online and hardcopy options could be made available to anyone seeking access to the portfolios.

Piloting the Summative Portfolio Assessment

Once the system has been designed, including the Portfolio Assessment Handbook, the next step will be to establish a pilot to test the portfolio assessment method. DACE has focused on TBL, formative assessments, and the use of rubrics in its professional development (PD) sessions for nearly two years now. The revised LARAEC ESL course outlines are also designed to encourage TBL, PBL, and differentiated learning. Teachers who have participated in this type of professional development would see an opportunity to put their training to use in this pilot program.

One goal of the pilot should be to test for weaknesses in the portfolio summative assessment method. One advantage of this assessment method is that the rubrics and student self-assessments can provide immediate feedback on the success of the method. The course evaluations could also provide important feedback. Any deficiencies found in the system should be shared with the task forces and the CoP so that they may be improved upon or redesigned.

Districts can also apply for research grants in order to perform a study of the system and compare those results to results from classes using traditional testing methods. This will be addressed further in the Data Collection section.

Articulation Meetings. DACE encourages teachers to participate in articulation meetings so that the teachers promoting students can consult with teachers at the next level to ensure that both agree on the merit of promoting those students. When portfolios are the evaluative method, the articulation process becomes more complex. Teachers are looking at a collection of artifacts rather than a set of test percentages to judge whether a student should be promoted.

This actually could work to the pilot's advantage. Having a new set of eyes to review the portfolio artifacts, rubrics, and self-assessments will allow for additional perspective on the effectiveness of the new assessment method. Agreement will indicate success, while disagreement or confusion will signal the need for improvement or redesign.

Teacher Learning/Training

If the pilot ends successfully, teachers and advisors will need to be trained in using the method. Again, DACE has spent two years training its teachers in TBL,

formative assessment methods, and the use of rubrics. The teachers should have most of the necessary background knowledge required to understand this new summative process. This should not put much additional financial strain upon the district. Special focus should be given to understanding and using the student guide as many teachers may not have been exposed to this increased level of student involvement in class design and self-evaluation before.

Special consideration should be given to this part of the process as this is where most of the problems arose in the Canadian case study. As opposed to having teacher leaders simply disseminating information to teachers and pointing out what needs to be done, this should be an opportunity to put the five principles of critical language teacher education into practice, especially praxis. To that extent, peer-research, modeling, and opportunities to actually try it in a classroom setting should be the norm (Desyatova, 2020). Portfolios as a summative assessment will most likely be a new concept for most teachers, so time, openness, and flexibility are of extreme importance.

Putting all of these pieces together - assembling task forces, creating the Portfolio Assessment Handbook including the method guide and rubrics, piloting the program, revising and adjusting, and training teachers - will take a serious commitment of time and money from the district.

Data Collection and Project Assessment

Data collection is crucial for any new methodology being adopted by a school district. Since no direct testing will occur in a summative portfolio method, data collection will come in various forms.

First and foremost, the project and task rubrics can provide the clearest data on whether the method is working. Similar patterns in rubric grading samples from a variety of teachers will signal program success while extreme variations in rubric grading samples will point to the need for parity in teacher training in TBL, and a possible rubric redesign.

Student and teacher satisfaction surveys can be used to gather evidence of program acceptance or frustration. Past student scores from direct testing methods such as the CASAS and EL Civics exams can be compared to results garnered during the pilot program to gauge whether the program has a positive, neutral, or negative effect on tested reading and writing skills. The percentage of promoted students from each ESL level can also be compared to percentages pre-pilot.

As this program is being proposed as an alternative to direct testing, not a replacement, any results that equal or improve upon results from traditional testing assessment methods should be considered a success.

Project Timeline

The timeline of this capstone project spanned two semesters of research, writing, revising and creating the project presentation. The building and creation of the project presentation took approximately two months. As of this writing, the proposal will be presented to the program and curriculum teacher advisors of DACE sometime in the near future. If adopted, the plan will initiate a major overhaul of how summative assessments are evaluated for ESL students. Therefore, a serious investment of time will have to be given for its design, piloting, training, and implementation. A project of this scale would likely take 2 years, if not longer. The Portfolio Assessment Handbook could take up to a

complete school year to be designed depending on the scheduling availability of the task forces, while the pilot program should span a minimum of 2 - 3 trimesters or 2 semesters in order to collect crucial data and allow for adjustments or redesigns. The teacher training would require a number of PDs spread over 6 months to a year, budget permitting. See Appendix C for an example of a budget estimate form.

Summary

In order to assure more accuracy and equity in the assessment of second language acquisition and mastery of students, including those with limited or interrupted formal education, it is crucial to adopt assessment methods which address the educational backgrounds, varied cultural identities, and learning styles of all students.

Portfolio summative assessments are one such method. Artifacts included in the portfolio may include projects which encourage culturally responsive lessons and recognize the various strengths of students while involving students in their own learning process (Colegrove & Zúñiga, 2018; DeCapua, 2016; Peterson & Nassaji, 2016). At the same time, the method is flexible enough to be able to include other types of artifacts, such as quizzes, presentations, writing samples, and task applications (Kaur et al., 2019).

If compiled correctly, the collected artifacts will align directly to the performance objectives and exit skills laid out in the revised LARAEC ESL course outlines (Colegrove & Zúñiga, 2018; DeCapua, 2016; Peterson & Nassaji, 2016). They will also demonstrate learning, growth, and mastery of the language over the course of the term, not simply at one moment in time (DeCapua, 2016).

This proposal outlined the steps necessary to implement this new method of a summative portfolio assessment. In order for this assessment method to be adopted, a

serious commitment will have to be made by the school district. Time and budget will have to be set aside for compiling a Portfolio Assessment Handbook which will include a portfolio assessment method guide along with accompanying rubrics, piloting the assessment process, adjusting and revising deficiencies in guides and rubrics, and training teachers on how to use the method.

Chapter Four will discuss my learning through this research process and project design in relation to the research question: *Which summative assessment is a more accurate and equitable measure of students with limited or interrupted formal education's L2 mastery based on a task-based course design: A portfolio assessment or a traditional formalized testing assessment?* I will summarize the significant learnings that I acquired through the process of completing this capstone project, revisit the literature that was reviewed in Chapter Two, discuss the implications and limitations of my project, ideate possible future projects, list how the results might be communicated, and explore how the project is a benefit to the profession.

CHAPTER FOUR

Reflection

Introduction

The purpose of this capstone project was to explore the guiding question: *Which summative assessment is a more accurate and equitable measure of students with limited or interrupted formal education's L2 mastery based on a task-based course design: a portfolio assessment or a traditional formalized testing assessment?* I came to this question through witnessing many of my students with limited or interrupted education (SLIFE) struggle with standardized formal assessments despite their demonstrated mastery of language learning over the course of the class term. I wondered whether there was a more equitable summative assessment method that would level the playing field not just for them but for all students. Exploring research on the subject along with recognizing that task-based and project-based learning was becoming the andragogical norm in adult learner classrooms, it made sense to explore a portfolio as an alternative summative assessment method. Garnering knowledge about the portfolio assessment method and seeing its benefits over formalized assessments led me to this capstone project: a proposal, in the form of a Google Slide presentation, for a portfolio summative assessment pilot program for the Division of Adult and Career Education (DACE) as well as the Los Angeles Regional Adult Education Consortium (LARAEC).

The chapter begins with the significant learnings I acquired through the process of completing this capstone project. Next, I revisit the literature that was reviewed in Chapter Two. Then, I discuss the implications and limitations of my project, possible

future projects, how the results might be communicated, and explore how the project is a benefit to the profession. Finally, I summarize the learning described in this chapter.

Significant Learnings

This capstone project was a significant milestone in my career as a teacher. It brought together all I have learned from my years as a professional educator with new ideas and information culled from a great variety of research. That research shined a light on the fact that traditional testing methods are not equitable for all students. As an advocate for social justice and equal access to education, I felt it important to find an alternative evaluative method that allowed for differentiated learning and assessment. I learned through research that portfolios can promote differentiated learning and assessment while aligning to more performance objectives and exit skill standards than formalized tests. This could benefit all students. At the same time, portfolios reward students' funds of knowledge instead of ignoring them (Cohan & Honigsfeld, 2017; Kaur et al., 2019).

I was also humbled to learn that even though a portfolio seems designed to overcome most of the deficiencies created by standardized testing, it is still a method that has yet to be proven effective. This is mainly due to its relative recency as an alternative assessment method. However, during the course of producing this capstone, I had the opportunity to discuss this method with several leaders in the adult education field, and all are excited at its prospects.

Perhaps most significantly, I was surprised to discover that Canada had attempted to adopt this method on a national scale. Ironically, the problems they encountered while attempting to implement this method into all Canadian adult schools led me to rethink

how school districts in the US might approach a pilot program. Yuliya Desyatova's brilliant 2018 study of the Canadian experiment was crucial in aiding me to redesign my plan.

The highlights of my learning including the inequity of standardized testing, the challenges of implementing a portfolio, and the experience of implementing the method in Canadian adult schools were garnered through extensive review of the research done by dedicated educators, journalists, and researchers.

Revisiting the Literature

The literature was critical to this project. Two concepts associated with SLIFE shaped the backbone of my argument that a summative portfolio assessment could be a better and more equitable evaluative tool for adult language learners than formalized assessments: cultural dissonance and collectivism.

DeCapua (2016), DeCapua and Marshall (2015), and Gay's (2000) work on cultural dissonance, the idea that not having background knowledge in the expectations, academic language, and methods of thinking and learning prevalent in US schools put SLIFE at a distinct disadvantage among their peers when it comes to standardized testing, became central to my voice being added to the clarion call for assessment reform.

The studies of collectivist cultures and their relationship to collaborative learning by DeCapua and Marshall (2015) and Rothstein-Fisch et al. (2009) helped to shape the reasoning that a portfolio could level the playing field for all students by supporting differentiated learning and assessment as well as task-based learning (TBL) and project-based learning (PBL), concepts that reward collaboration in the classroom. Their research

showed that these concepts and methods help to lessen the negative effects of cultural dissonance.

Portfolios could work best in classrooms where students use TBL and PBL to create artifacts which can demonstrate mastery of learning, thereby potentially eliminating the need for additional summative formalized testing. Colegrove and Zúñiga (2018) and Peterson and Nassaji (2016) laid out some of the benefits of PBL which included developing critical-thinking and problem-solving skills, aligning with multiple academic and learning standards, promoting collaboration and rewarding group effort, focusing on the genuine use of language and the processes leading toward the project's goal, and the possibility of involving family or community in the production of tasks, a key trait of collectivism.

Brown and Hudson's (1998) study of portfolios as assessment tools helped me to highlight the benefits of the method, including bolstering learning, augmenting the teacher's role in learning, and improving testing processes by allowing teachers to observe students in more holistic usage of the target language in multiple contexts and situations, and assessing learning in multiple dimensions as opposed to one direct testing observation.

Perhaps the most important work that influenced the design of my plan for a portfolio pilot program was the study by Desyatova (2018) of Canada's attempt to implement a summative portfolio assessment on a national scale. Her study found that despite the assessment equity that a portfolio promotes, it's a very complicated tool to understand and administer. Witnessing the negative feedback from teachers who had gone through the professional development program and attempted to adopt the method

in their classes, Desyatova offered solutions such as replacing a top-down approach to teacher learning with dialogic interaction which includes permitting teachers to ask questions and offer opinions on the method, offering ample modeling of the method prior to teachers being asked to put it into practice, being more willing to negotiate, and making the method an optional assessment tool as opposed to a mandatory one.

The literature review helped me to shape my project and to identify the benefits as well as the detriments of implementing a portfolio as a summative assessment. Those findings have serious implications.

Implications of the Project

This capstone project was designed to have influence on the way that school districts approach language assessment. Many school districts, including mine, are focused on social justice and equity in education. A portfolio summative assessment is a tool that could fulfill part of that goal by eliminating certain formalized testing which puts certain students, such as SLIFE, at a distinct disadvantage (DeCapua & Marshall, 2015). At the same time, implementation of this method would involve serious commitments of money and time as most teachers are not familiar with the method and would require much training (Desyatova, 2018; Keung, 2021).

My hope for this capstone is to influence at least one school district to pilot this assessment method. If multiple school districts were to pilot or implement a summative portfolio assessment and those trials demonstrated positive results, this method could ultimately have policy implications for assessment reform and could lead to a rethinking of formalized assessment as an evaluation method.

As hopeful as I am for these outcomes, I must also acknowledge the project's limitations.

Limitations

This capstone project is only a proposal to pilot a summative portfolio assessment. Therefore, an obvious limitation would be that no district adopts the plan. Given the scope of the time, person-hours, and budget involved, this is a daunting proposal indeed. However, leaders in the field of adult education have voiced an interest in the method, so my hope is that there will be an eventual pilot.

In terms of limitations to the method itself, it relies primarily on rubrics and self-assessments for grading which make judging mastery more complicated than simple percentage results that some standardized tests offer. At the same time, the potential for bias grows as well. However, the same can be said for standardized speaking and written exams. With careful rubric design and teacher training, these concerns could be lessened considerably (Brown & Hudson, 1998).

Despite these limitations, I feel this method exhibits exciting potential as an alternative form of summative assessment, and I look forward to future projects which would push experimentation with this method further.

Future Projects

Given the limited amount of research that has been done in the area of summative portfolio assessments, the possibilities for future projects are limitless. There are three areas I feel could benefit from future projects and research: development of guidebooks, direct research, and training.

Portfolios promote differentiated learning and assessment, so there is no ‘one size fits all’ approach to them. There are so many factors to consider when creating a portfolio: which artifacts to include, the number of artifacts, the rubrics used to analyze the artifacts, alignment with standards, what language mastery looks like, the amount of involvement from the students, etc. (Chappuis & Stiggins, 2020; Ripley, 2012). Every district piloting this method must choose how to create portfolios that adhere to their specific needs and requirements, and having examples in the form of guidebooks or online guides from other districts would certainly help in that matter. In my research, I was unable to locate examples available other than from the Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada (LINC) programs in Canada.

There is a need for more direct research into the use of a portfolio as a summative evaluative method due to its relative recency as an idea for an alternative assessment. Districts interested in piloting the method would benefit greatly from more information on real outcomes from its use. Since the form varies so greatly from standardized testing, research which compares the two methods would also be of great value.

The Canadian experience demonstrates the need for further research into training in the implementation and use of a portfolio as a summative assessment. While Desyatova’s (2018) research provides valuable insight into the problems encountered with executing the method, it is but one study. Similar analyses of other districts’ experiences could be incredibly beneficial to all future districts interested in piloting the method. Positive results from those trials could also aid in convincing other districts to try out the method.

Canada's experience demonstrates the need for active communication of results between educators, agencies, and districts.

Communication of Results

Since this capstone project is only a proposal for a pilot, I cannot report any concrete results from the implementation of using a portfolio as a summative assessment. However, I can report that every advisor, administrator, and consultant I talked to regarding this proposal were excited by the idea. As of this writing, one school district, a large one, is seriously considering pitching the idea to leadership. I also am scheduled to present the idea at a state conference in California very soon.

Though the project was tailor made for one school district, DACE, it can easily be adopted by any district interested in piloting the method. My plan is to continue pitching the idea until a district is willing to try it out. If that happens, my hope would be to apply for research grants to study the method in action and publish the results. I feel that this is crucial as there are many potential benefits that can aid adult students and move the andragogy forward.

Benefits to the Profession

Nineteen percent of DACE's students never finished the eighth grade and over 40% never received a high school diploma (CASAS Data Portal, 2021). All stakeholders may benefit from an alternative assessment method that allows for differentiated learning and assessment which levels the playing field for all. Students can prove mastery of language skills by using any learning method in which they feel most comfortable (Kaur et al., 2019) and build agency by being more involved in their own education (Tomlinson, 2015). Teachers can observe students in more holistic usage of the target

language in multiple contexts and situations and assess learning in multiple dimensions as opposed to one direct testing observation (Brown & Hudson, 1998). Administrators would have access to the portfolios to be able to collect data and zero in on specific areas needed for professional development.

To that end, my hope is that this proposal will aid school districts in creating guidebooks, piloting the method, and implementing the practice into ESL programs. In addition, it is my hope that this project would aid in making the training of the method a more lateral experience rather than a top-down one, thus benefiting the teachers who would take on the bulk of the work and responsibility for the success of this method.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I discussed the significant learnings that I garnered from researching a portfolio summative assessment as an alternative evaluative method for adult English language learners, revisited the literature and examined how the research affected the outline and design of my proposal to pilot the method, discussed the implications that implementing this method would have upon all stakeholders, pondered the limitations of the method as well as the implementation of it, imagined future projects that would push the development and implementation of the method further, discussed how results of this and future projects could be communicated, and outlined the benefits that this method could have for students, teachers, and districts.

It is my sincere hope that this capstone will be accessible to researchers and educators who are interested in the method as an alternative to standardized testing and that it might aid in future research. I look forward to participating in that research.

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Appendix A

Course Syllabus Excerpt

This is an excerpt from a course syllabus which demonstrates how varied tasks and projects can include a wide variety of performance objectives and exit skills laid out in the revised LARAEC ESL Intermediate High B Course Outline (LARAEC, 2021, pp. 9 - 24), as well as how they can recycle them throughout the term.

Unit 7 - Social-Emotional Wellness	
Lesson: Identifying symptoms of mental health distress and informing others about them (Inquiry: How do we address symptoms of mental health distress?)	
Project Type: Poster	
Project Description: Create a poster for a community health facility which includes signs of mental health distress, services that the facility offers, and contact information.	
<p>Tasks</p> <p>A. Choose an online article about signs of mental stress, read it, and summarize the main points.</p>	<p>Corresponding Performance Objectives and Exit Skills (ES):</p> <p>14. Use an increasing number of vocabulary learning strategies to determine and retain the meaning of words, multiple-meaning words, and phrases encountered in level-appropriate spoken and written texts including:</p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;">b. content-specific words and phrases that signal precise actions, emotions or states of being (<i>cook v. fry, rain v. drizzle</i>)</p> <p>18. Identify the main idea or theme in a level-appropriate, multi-paragraph text by using a variety of pre-, while-, and post-reading strategies such as:</p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;">d. paraphrasing to check comprehension of what the text states explicitly and implicitly.</p>

<p>B. In a discussion, make an opinion about which mental change is the most significant and support it with evidence from the reading.</p> <p>C. In a discussion, listen to other opinions on which mental change is the most significant and agree or disagree with facts from the reading.</p> <p>D. In small groups, research a mental health organization in your community and collect information.</p>	<p>8. Participate effectively in conversations and discussions on a range of topics, texts and issues, in order to effectively express and solicit:</p> <p>b. ideas and solutions to a current event or issue</p> <p>8. Participate effectively in conversations and discussions on a range of topics, texts and issues, in order to effectively express and solicit:</p> <p>b. ideas and solutions to a current event or issue</p> <p>16. Demonstrate effective note-taking strategies to record research information as well as key information in spoken text and multimedia presentations including:</p> <p>a. using cards to note sources for citation purposes</p> <p>24. Interpret, explain, and discuss guidelines for academic integrity, including:</p> <p>a. appropriate use of copyrighted digital images and text</p> <p>c. basic citation procedures.</p> <p>25. Build knowledge by conducting short and sustained research using multiple sources and applying an increasing number of sophisticated critical literacy and information literacy skills such as:</p> <p>a. refining the research question</p> <p>b. using search terms to narrow a search</p> <p>c. evaluating the reliability of sources</p> <p>d. keeping a list of links for resources</p>
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<p>E. Take a video quiz about services offered by a local mental health facility.</p> <p>F. Create a poster about a local mental health facility that includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● signs of mental distress ● general information about the facility ● services offered ● pictures that support the information <p>G. In groups, assess each other's work by using a checklist. Revise work as needed.</p>	<p>(ES) Carry out both short and more sustained research projects to</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - answer a question, - gather information from provided multiple print and digital sources - evaluate the reliability of each source and use search terms effectively. <p>17. Identify the main idea or gist in level-appropriate oral presentations (lectures, speeches), recorded conversations, announcements, and level-appropriate multimedia presentations using <u>pre-listening</u> strategies as well as <u>while-listening</u> strategies such as listening for:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. repeated words and phrases b. stressed words and phrases (held longer and/or louder) <p>26. Demonstrate the ability to locate and interpret online and print maps, illustrations, diagrams, charts and other graphics to illustrate research data or conclusions for oral and written reports.</p> <p>41. Demonstrate the ability to locate and access free or low-cost preventative health care services.</p> <p>42. Demonstrate the ability to research, analyze and identify options for the management of common physical or mental health issues including:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> b. health risk factors. <p>(ES) Integrate information into an organized oral or written report that includes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - illustrations, diagrams, or other graphics as appropriate; and - a list of sources and/or links. <p>23. Use a variety of strategies to strengthen, revise and edit written work such as:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> c. asking for guidance and support from peers.
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Unit 14 - Personal Finances

Lesson: Researching strategies to protect your money and improve your savings

Project Type: Google Slide Multimedia Presentation

Project Description: Create a Google Slide presentation which gives tips on a personal finance topic.

Tasks:

A. Choose an online article from consumer.gov about personal finance and summarize the main points.

B. In small groups, explain why you chose the topic that you read and explain the main points. Listen to others and ask questions.

Corresponding Performance Objectives and Exit Skills (ES):

14. Use an increasing number of vocabulary learning strategies to determine and retain the meaning of words, multiple-meaning words, and phrases encountered in level-appropriate spoken and written texts including:

b. content-specific words and phrases that signal precise actions, emotions or states of being (*cook v. fry, rain v. drizzle*)

18. Identify the main idea or theme in a level-appropriate, multi-paragraph text by using a variety of pre-, while-, and post-reading strategies such as:

d. paraphrasing to check comprehension of what the text states explicitly and implicitly.

16. Demonstrate effective note-taking strategies to record research information as well as key information in spoken text and multimedia presentations including:

a. using cards to note sources for citation purposes

8. Participate effectively in conversations and discussions on a range of topics, texts and issues, in order to effectively express and solicit:

<p>C. Take a video quiz about services offered by a local mental health facility.</p> <p>D. Create a Google Slide presentation which gives tips on the personal finance topic that you read about in Task A.</p>	<p>b. ideas and solutions to a current event or issue</p> <p>10. Initiate and participate in conversations and discussions on a range of topics, texts and issues; contributing ideas; building on the ideas of others; and demonstrating the ability (as needed) to:</p> <p>a. support a claim or research finding with valid reasoning, relevant evidence and appropriate details</p> <p>17. Identify the main idea or gist in level-appropriate oral presentations (lectures, speeches), recorded conversations, announcements, and level-appropriate multimedia presentations using <u>pre-listening</u> strategies as well as <u>while-listening</u> strategies such as listening for:</p> <p>a. repeated words and phrases</p> <p>b. stressed words and phrases (held longer and/or louder)</p> <p>24. Interpret, explain, and discuss guidelines for academic integrity, including:</p> <p>a. appropriate use of copyrighted digital images and text</p> <p>c. basic citation procedures.</p> <p>26. Demonstrate the ability to locate and interpret online and print maps, illustrations, diagrams, charts and other graphics to illustrate research data or conclusions for oral and written reports.</p> <p>27. Produce an oral or written summary (including the main idea, supporting or key details, and concluding statement) of</p>
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<p>E. In groups, assess each other's work by using a checklist. Revise work as needed.</p>	<p>b. one or more informational text c. a spoken text or multimedia presentation.</p> <p>28. Deliver an organized written, oral or multimedia report on a research project or team task adapting language choices and style according to the purpose of the report and the audience.</p> <p>(ES) Carry out both short and more sustained research projects to</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - answer a question, - gather information from provided multiple print and digital sources - evaluate the reliability of each source and use search terms effectively. <p>(ES) Integrate information into an organized oral or written report that includes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - illustrations, diagrams, or other graphics as appropriate; and - a list of sources and/or links. <p>23. Use a variety of strategies to strengthen, revise and edit written work such as:</p> <p>c. asking for guidance and support from peers.</p>
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Appendix B

Rubric Examples

The following rubrics correlate to the Unit 14 - Personal Finance course syllabus excerpt in Appendix A. Rubric 1 is an example of a formative assessment which includes simple language and task criteria specific to the project or task at hand so that students can understand it easily and use the feedback to revise their work. Rubric 2 is an example of a summative assessment rubric which uses language that mirrors the learning objectives and exit skills from the course outlines so that teachers from other levels or programs can easily gauge a student's mastery of language skills and production without having to be familiar with the specific content of the class. Rubric 2 includes a revision criterion.

Rubric 1 - Formative Assessment – Personal Finance Presentation

Criteria	Grading Scale			
Content The topic of the presentation is clear and based on information researched on a website.	4 Exceeds criteria	3 Meets criteria	2 Approaching criteria	1 New to criteria
Supporting Sentences The information is related to the topic, and there is enough information for readers to understand the topic.	4 Exceeds criteria	3 Meets criteria	2 Approaching criteria	1 New to criteria
Comprehensibility The reader can understand the content, and thoughts are organized well using level-appropriate tone and vocabulary	4 Exceeds criteria	3 Meets criteria	2 Approaching criteria	1 New to criteria

Accuracy The author uses level-appropriate conventions (grammar, specifically adverbial clauses, as well as spelling, punctuation, capitalization, and abbreviations)	4 Exceeds criteria	3 Meets criteria	2 Approaching criteria	1 New to criteria
Graphics The pictures are related to the topic, interesting, and help the reader to understand the topic better.	4 Exceeds criteria	3 Meets criteria	2 Approaching criteria	1 New to criteria
References If information was taken from a website, the source is cited clearly.	4 Exceeds criteria	3 Meets criteria	2 Approaching criteria	1 New to criteria

Rubric 2 - Summative Assessment - Personal Finance Presentation

Criteria	Grading Scale			
1. Cites specific details and evidence from a text that support the central theme or idea.	4 The evidence overwhelmingly supports the theme.	3 The evidence sufficiently supports the theme.	2 The evidence partially supports the theme.	1 The theme is insufficiently supported by evidence.
2. Summarizes a text.	4 The presentation provides a detailed and accurate summary of the text.	3 The presentation provides an accurate summary of the text.	2 The presentation provides a partial summary of the text.	1 The presentation provides an inaccurate summary of the text.
3. Expands use of complex general academic and content-specific words and phrases in speaking and writing.	4 The presentation includes a good deal of language specific to the content of the theme.	3 The presentation includes language specific to the content of the theme.	2 The presentation includes some language specific to the content of the theme.	1 The presentation includes little examples of language specific to the content of the theme.

4. Carries out a more sustained research project to answer a question and gathers information from a provided digital source.	4 The presentation excels in summarizing knowledge gained from research provided by the digital source.	3 The presentation demonstrates knowledge gained from research provided by the digital source.	2 The presentation demonstrates some knowledge gained from research provided by the digital source.	1 The presentation demonstrates little knowledge gained from research provided by the digital source.
5. Integrates information into an organized oral or written report that includes illustrations or other graphics as appropriate.	4 The presentation is very well-organized and the illustrations guide understanding of the content considerably.	3 The presentation is well-organized and the illustrations aid in understanding of the content.	2 The presentation is organized and a few of the illustrations aid in understanding of the content.	1 The presentation is not organized and the illustrations are not related to the content.
6. Includes a list of sources and/or links in the presentation.	4 Digital sources are clearly cited throughout the presentation.	3 The digital source is clearly cited in the presentation.	2 The digital source is not clearly cited in the presentation.	1 There is no citation of the digital source in the presentation.
7. Addresses content questions and revises grammatical errors based on feedback prior to and following the presentation.	4 Revision clarifies and corrects all questions and most grammatical errors.	3 Revision clarifies and corrects most questions and some grammatical errors.	2 Revision clarifies and corrects some questions and a few grammatical errors.	1 There is no revision.

Appendix C

Portfolio Pilot Budget Worksheet

The following can be modified for a district's specific needs. It is merely a model to estimate the budget impact of a pilot of this size.

Phase & Timeline	Description of Goal & Deliverables	# of Personnel Involved	Task Hours	Compensation Rate/Hour	Total Cost
Portfolio Task Force(s) 10 weeks	The task force will create a portfolio handbook which will include a method guide, editable summative rubrics, a portfolio assembly guide, and a student handbook.	5 - 10	50		
Community of Practice 1 - 2 hours every 2 weeks over the course of 10 weeks	The CoP will review work done by the task force and provide feedback.	10 - 20	5 - 10		
Portfolio Pilot 1 year	A selected group of teachers will pilot the method over the course of 3 trimesters or 2 semesters.	5 - 10	On the clock?		
Professional Development 2 hours every 2 weeks over the course of 6 months	Teachers will train, model and implement the method into their classes.	60(?)	24		