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Students with Interrupted Formal Education: A Toolbox for Instruction

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Students with Interrupted Formal Education:

A Toolbox for Instruction

by

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

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

Students with Interrupted Formal Education (SIFE) are a subgroup of Multilingual Learners (ML) that are arriving with more frequency to our schools and classrooms (DeCapua & Marshall 2011). In recent years the term Multilingual Learner has become the preferred denotation to students enrolling in classrooms across the United States that are learning English within our school. As language shifts from English as a Second Language (ESL) and English Language Learner (ELL) to Multilingual Learner (ML), I will, for this capstone, use these three terms interchangeably. References acknowledged here will be using any of these terms, however, they are all referring to the same group of students. Students with interrupted formal education in particular come with a unique set of challenges that administrators and educators often struggle to know how to support. Challenges such as trauma, extended lack of schooling or a lack of formal, Westernized educational setting are just some of the challenges these students face (WIDA 2015). The purpose of this capstone project is to answer the question: *What are best practices for schools to support students with interrupted schooling?* This will be accomplished by creating and publishing professional development to assist general education teachers in instructing these new students. This professional development may also be useful for ML teachers when encountering a student with interrupted education and for best supporting their content teacher colleagues.

Chapter One of my capstone project will describe the personal journey of why I chose this topic and my journey to becoming an ML Educator. It will also include information regarding the current situation that I see within my district, which highlights

why I think this is an important topic to explore. Chapter One ends with an overview of the remaining sections of my Capstone.

Personal Journey

Throughout my childhood it had been suggested that I become a teacher- to which I flatly refused. I was the student that teachers paired with the struggling students or students who had issues with behavior. My patience in working with my peers apparently was seen to have a positive effect on whomever I was working with. But I did not see myself going into education. I wanted to experience the world and find a career that would allow me that freedom to travel. So after I finished my undergraduate degree in Cultural Anthropology, I decided to spend a year teaching English at a college in Shaoxing, China. At the beginning, I was less focused on going to teach as I was on the opportunity to live and travel within a different country and culture. While I was there, however, I began to realize that I liked working with students and helping them learn and grow. Even more than that, I was good at working with students, answering questions, and assisting them on their English learning journey. The travel aspect was wonderful, but I got a deep feeling of accomplishment whenever my students learned and used new concepts. These feelings of achievement and joy began to take seed that, perhaps, I should look into becoming a licensed teacher when I traveled back home.

When I returned from China to Minnesota, I was pregnant with my first child. Due to myriad factors, I elected to stay home with them during their first year, which then turned into two. During this joyous but intense time I began to realize that I wanted more of the experiences that I had in the classrooms of that college in China. I wanted more of the types of challenges that problem solving in the classroom provided; how best to teach

a concept, how to ensure that the students were not only understanding, but retaining the information presented and that feeling of joy and accomplishment after a successful lesson. After all of that time refusing to even consider teaching as a career, I was ready to admit that I wanted to go into the field of education. I researched teaching degrees and settled on doing the English Language (EL) Licensure and Masters track at Hamline University. The week after I was accepted into the program, I found out I was pregnant with my second child. Undaunted, I started the program and worked through it as I continued to stay home with my children.

Once my coursework and student teaching were completed, I began volunteering and working in elementary ML classrooms. I thought that my heart lay in teaching K-5. I had worked with older students, but did not see myself working with them long-term. When it was time to begin looking for a permanent position, I only applied at the elementary level. I did not even consider working with any other age group. It was not until two weeks before school started that I got a lead on a full-time ML position at the middle-school level. As my options were coming up short, I decided to take a chance. I almost got hired on the spot. I weighed my options for about twelve hours until I realized that I didn't really have another option, and if I really disliked it at the end of the year I could always find another district or imaginably could transfer to an elementary school. In hindsight, it was one of the best decisions that I have ever made.

Middle school is not for the faint of heart. Emotions run wild and students are beginning to blossom into whispers of who they will be as adults. Within the first few months I determined that I was meant to be a middle school teacher. The curriculum was not as repetitive as an elementary classroom, students were able to understand more

complex concepts and they vacillated between wide eyed children and burgeoning adults. That first year and the next few that followed, my confidence working with the ML students who were coming into my district grew. These were students who came from different places with different skills and stories, but overall had a foundational, educational background.

An ML student entering at the elementary level has the added benefit of learning to read and how the school system works alongside their peers. Students who enter at the middle level start at a slight disadvantage, in that their peers have a foundation of literacy and are using it to obtain information from content courses. They have also attended school for more than five years and have become accustomed to the style of teaching and the ways in which the United States school system operates. I saw first hand how having that background in academics and systems help students feel confident and safe. Multilingual Learners often struggle to process all of this new information at once- *and* learn grade level content in a new language at the same time. For my SIFE students the added learning of how to “do school” in a Western classroom was just another barrier. I found these inequities frustrating and wanted to find ways to support my SIFE coming into the middle level. I also wanted to collaborate with my content teaching colleagues to ensure that they felt confident in working with our new students as well.

School Demographics

The district that I currently teach in is considered a southern, outer ring suburb. According to the US Census Bureau (2021) the city population has doubled in the last twenty years. This rapid growth has been echoed with the school system as well. There were almost 8,000 students enrolled in the school year 2021-2022 (five elementary, two

middle and one high school). Of those students, just under half of the students, 48.2%, are considered non-White. That contrasts the demographics of the city as a whole, where 30.2% of citizens are considered non-White. The school district has progressively gotten more diverse as the population of the city has increased. According to the 2010 census data, the number of non-White residents was 25.7%, a markedly lower number than what the city currently rests at (Demographics, n.d.)

The specific middle school that I work at is also becoming more diverse as the city and school district changes. In the 2021-2022 school year, of the 860 students, 53% of them were classified as non-White, the number of ML alone was 13.5%. In addition to the rising number of ML, the types of students that were joining our program were changing. Students in the past few years were coming to our school well behind their peers academically and socially. These students or Students with Interrupted Formal Education (SIFE) are well below what the Minnesota Department of Education considers the base requirements of that status. Those requirements being they have at least three of the following five characteristics: comes from a home where the language spoken is not English, enters an United States school after grade 6, has at least two years less school than their peers and also is functioning at least two years lower than grade level peers. In addition the student may be preliterate in their home language (Minnesota Department of Education, n.d.). The students I saw coming into my classroom were, after the past two years of pandemic school closures and interruptions all around the world, well below those parameters. As borders and entrance requirements opened, the movement of people resumed. Immigrant and refugee students that joined our schools were at an educational disadvantage due to a general lack of formal education. This was not only seen in their

academics, but in their social abilities as well. It is because of this increase in diversity and high percentage of Multilingual learners that I believe the question of, “*What are best practices for schools to support students with interrupted schooling?*” needs to be answered.

Significance Personally and Professionally

In the 2021-2022 school year, we had two newcomer students who had not had the opportunity of any formalized education. Seeing that they tested on the Screener designed by World-Class Instructional Design and Assessment (WIDA) as a level one, they received two, forty-two minute periods of direct ML instruction, in addition to a co-taught general education class, as was the recommendation in our school district. There is no standard level of service minutes or type of instruction for SIFE students in Minnesota. In my own casual research during the 2021-2022 school year I found a limited amount of research or literature regarding what the best practice for SIFE is. As an ML educator I frequently collaborate with my general education colleagues about ways to best support ML students in the classroom. We have a toolbox full of resources and lessons that we frequently use to assist our newest students. However, we have never worked with a student who is pre-literate and many of our practices rely on our students having literacy in another language. In addition, most of our students before this had at least some form of formal education. So for this capstone, it is of utmost importance that I ask the question, “*What are best practices for schools to support students with interrupted schooling?*”.

Conclusion

As I have shown, this capstone project has both a personal and professional element for me. Students with limited formal education are becoming more prevalent in our schools and the skills that they are entering with are lower than what we have seen historically. Working with students that are starting school at the middle level is a special concern and passion of mine, as I want to try to support them as best I can. Teaching SIFE in the middle level is especially difficult as their classroom peers have normally passed the beginning reading stages and have the skills to navigate the United States school system. It is for these reasons that I believe it is necessary to answer the question, *“What are best practices for schools to support students with interrupted schooling?”* is essential. In order to best serve my students and my colleagues, I propose to create professional development that will help content teachers support SIFE as they navigate both school and their content area classes. This professional development will also aid my colleagues as the students who come into their rooms will be supported by the lessons taught by these educators.

Chapter Overview

In Chapter One, I laid out the guiding question for this capstone project, *“What are best practices for schools to support students with limited or interrupted schooling?”* and also explained why I find this question to be so important both personally and professionally. In Chapter Two, Literature review, I go into depth about who SIFE students are and how they historically have been supported in schools, strategies for best practices with SIFE, as well as methods to assist general education teachers supporting SIFE in their classrooms. Chapter Three provides details of my professional y

development design. Finally Chapter Four will conclude with a reflection on my process in the drafting and creating of this capstone project.

CHAPTER TWO

Literature Review

Overview

Students with Interrupted Formal Education (SIFE) who are entering the United States school system in the middle school years (grades six through eight) often lack the cultural and systems knowledge of how the school system operates. Their need for an acculturation to public school is a major need that has to be addressed (Decapua & Marshall, 2010). These students come to classrooms with large gaps in their formal education, which often reflects an unfamiliarity with academic skills and classroom norms.. A large proportion of SIFE have also experienced trauma either in their home countries or on their journey to the United States. This trauma, coupled with their specific and intense academic and social needs, make SIFE susceptible to falling through the cracks of public education, unless teachers and staff have explicit training and support in working with this unique population.

Chapter Two explores who SIFE are and how schools are affected by their academic and social needs. It will look at best practices for content and general education teachers who have SIFE in their classrooms. It will look at how Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT) uses effective strategies that help support both our Multilingual Learners (MLs) and all students in becoming successful. Then it will look at how the Mutually Adaptive Learning Paradigm (MALP) uses beliefs from CRT to ensure that SIFE feel welcomed and safe in their new school environments, an integral step in a student being ready to receive instruction. It will also address the importance of creating a community and parent connection with the school to continue in the making of school as a safe space.

In writing this literature review the question of “*What are best practices for schools to support students with interrupted schooling?*” will be considered. Chapter Two will end with a brief overview of Chapter Three and my proposed professional development plan.

Students with Interrupted Formal Education

Who are SIFE?

According to the National Center for Educational Statistics (2022) Multilingual Learners (MLs) make up 10.4% (approximately five million students) of the public school population, requiring extra support and specialized instruction to ensure that they graduate and are able to become productive members of society. Of that 10.4%, there are a group of MLs that have even greater needs: Students with Interrupted Formal Education (SIFE), which represent a growing portion of the ML population in schools. These are students who come to the United States for a number of reasons and often arrive with skills behind those of their grade level peers. Newcomer et al. (2021) provide a concise working definition of who SIFE are:

...ELLs who have experienced interrupted education due to war, civil unrest, migration, or other factors; who have never had the opportunity to participate in any type of schooling before entering school in the United States; or who had limited education in their home countries due to limited training of teachers resources, trained teachers or other circumstances (p. 419).

The guidelines according to the Minnesota Department of Education (2022) state that children who are considered SIFE must be an English learner and have an interrupted formal education (meaning at least two years less schooling than peers); the student may be preliterate, and there is no age requirement. The focus of this capstone will be on SIFE

students in grades six through eight and the support that schools working with that age group can utilize to best assist their students.

The COVID-19 pandemic that forced schools to shut down and/or move to online learning did not help SIFE, and in fact pushed some students who were falling behind into the SIFE category because of interrupted schooling and/or a school shutting down. The actual number of SIFE enrolled in United States schools is unknown- the ability for states and organizations to standardize what a SIFE student is and the unwillingness of those organizations to collect data has made it impossible to derive an accurate number. There are only three states (Minnesota, New York and Oregon) that track and have a standard definition for SIFE, and even between the three states there are differences (Sugarman, 2020). Suffice it to say, with the number of displacing global events on the rise, the number is growing (DeCuapa, 2016).

Needs of SIFE

Low-level MLs that arrive in our classrooms are often seen as a homogeneous group- needing the same skills and having similar backgrounds. This could not be further from the truth (Taylor and Sidhu, 2012). Newcomer students enter with myriad needs depending on their origin and life experience. Some students are completely literate in their home languages, have attended regular school and are in need of English language instruction. On the opposite end of the spectrum, some students come to the United States with no literacy skills, no formal education, and trauma. To put these two groups into the same category does both the student and the teacher a disservice (King et al., 2017). For the purposes of this capstone we will be focusing primarily on the latter group of students.

Students with interrupted formal education enter our classrooms with a variety of needs: academic, social and emotional. Not all SIFE students come to school with the same needs; often these needs depend on the experiences the student had (or did not have) in their home country and their experiences of traveling to the United States. Lahiri-Hoherchak (2022) estimates that twelve percent of ML middle school and twenty percent of high school students have missed two or more years of schooling since age six. The struggle of a SIFE is high; they are trying to acculturate to the United States school system, learn English (perhaps, even learning to read), heal from trauma, learn grade level content and try to fit in as a normal adolescent at the same time. The SIFE who have had an interim period between leaving their home country and arriving in our classrooms, the refugee students, are our students with the highest level of need, but often the lowest level of specific and targeted support. According to King et al. (2017) the average wait time in a refugee camp is seventeen years and often during that time there is little or no schooling. These children who have been in these refugee camps have a very limited knowledge of print literacy and alphabets. Often the governments and organizations that are providing and caring for refugees are focused on short-term solutions, even though most stays in these camps are multiple years long. Because of this focus on the short-term, facilities and resources of an educational nature are often overlooked and grossly underfunded (Taylor and Sidhu, 2012). However, because of these experiences, refugees also enter our schools with a unique set of strengths: survival skills, resilience and problem solving. Taylor & Sidhu (2012) go on to remind us that often refugees “are not considered a desirable part of the ethnoscape” (p. 39); a stigma

that follows a child into the classroom, whether overtly or not. The specific needs of these children are the basis of this research.

Assets of SIFE

Focusing on the negative aspects of the refugee student can be a dangerous path to start down. The goal of educators should not be to view these students with a deficit mindset, but rather take the experiences and life skills that they do have and build on them. Kendal, et al. (2017) explain that preliterate learners, often without alphabetic knowledge, may process oral language differently than their literacy educated peers. They are found to have different strengths and strategies to be able to use a larger working memory in place of strategies that usually would be print based. These skills, and the survival skills that they have acquired, should be used as building blocks that their new learning and educational experiences can be built upon. In addition, SIFE students and their families have acquired many skills that have allowed them to conquer moving to a new country, learning a new language and surviving the day to day (Newcomer, et. al., 2021). These skills and traits cannot be overlooked or dismissed as we are discussing who SIFE are. In fact, it is often these skills and traits that make SIFE such assets to our schools.

Best Practice: Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT)

All students who come into the United States school system deserve a challenging and rewarding educational experience, which makes a teacher's job difficult to define and often even more difficult to manage. Teachers don many hats throughout the school day in order to reach each and every student who comes through their classroom. Students are not a homogeneous group. Gunderson (2008) highlighted how the acronyms associated

with MLs are vague at best and problematic at worst because lumping together students with a wide variance in skill and knowledge does nothing to help the students or the teachers that need to support them.

English Language Learners who seem to be uninterested are more often than not trying to survive in their new school environment and trying to make sense of a new language, new content, new rules and are simply just overwhelmed (Gunderson, 2008). Kugler and Price (2009) also suggest that students who are not involved academically during the school day, at a level they can understand, tend to fall further and further behind. This academic engagement is perceived as an unwillingness or apathetic response to learning. Having a school and a staff that recognizes those difficulties and that have the skills to help students navigate the classroom will make the educational process easier on everyone. Students who come to classrooms with specific academic needs, like SIFE, can baffle educators that have never encountered them before because the tools they have to work with MLs will not always work with SIFE (DeCapua and Marshall 2015). Without the skills and tools needed to support them, SIFE can sometimes fade into the background of teachers' daily instructional design. This is not because of a lack of caring on the part of the teacher, but because of the huge amount of needs of all students in the classroom. Viesca and Teemant (2019) found that most teachers are not prepared to teach our ML and SIFE students; these students are often viewed as a negative challenge rather than an asset and often the teachers have an unwillingness to take responsibility for their education. Gaitan (2009) and Newcomer, et. al. (2021) both believe that a teacher's knowledge of their students' backgrounds and cultures is imperative to knowing how to best support their students as well as making them aware of the skills and funds of

knowledge they bring into the classroom. Funds of knowledge is defined by Moll et al (1992) as, "... historically accumulated and culturally developed bodies of knowledge and skills essential for household or individual functioning and well-being." (p. 139) Moll (2002) later says that a lens using the funds of knowledge approach represents communities, "in terms of the resources, the wherewithal they do possess, and a way to harness these resources for classroom teaching." (p. 625) Using these funds of knowledge within the CRT framework allows us to build our students up and draw upon previous skills and learning.

Due to the heterogeneity of SIFE students there is no one right way to support them within a school or classroom. Even something designed to be helpful, like the WIDA ACCESS or Screener scores, an English diagnostic test used throughout most of the United States, can be deceiving when a student with no literacy background and one with rich literacy in their home language can end up with the same overall score because neither can read in English. It is because of this that we must look to each student individually and meet them wherever their needs are highest. Before we can even start to introduce language or content, SIFE students need to establish a level of comfort and stability within the United States school system (DeCapua and Marshall, 2015). Often the first place schools can start is in assisting with students learning how to participate in the American classroom. King, et. al. (2017) found that when students are able to feel successful at participating in school classroom activities they are more likely to interact with teachers and peers.

There is an emphasis in the American school system on individuality that is rarely seen in other parts of the world, especially in the collectivist cultures that a majority of

our SIFE come from (DeCapua and Marshall, 2015). Everyday practices, such as raising a hand to speak, are foreign concepts to SIFE. DeCapua and Marshall (2015) note that the more a student raises their hand, the more interactions they receive from a teacher. While the teacher assumes that the rest of the class is in the process of receiving the same information as the hand raiser, SIFE often have different discourse practices and tune out that portion of instruction. SIFE students simply do not know that even though they are not participating in the conversation they should be collecting information. Scenarios like this are not uncommon in a classroom that includes SIFE. As DeCapua (2016) notes, typically mundane tasks such as how to hold a pencil, use a notebook, navigate hallways or use a locker can be confusing and need to be explicitly taught. Throwing SIFE into a typical American classroom, full of individual work, collaboration, asking questions and the like can be disorientating. This can then turn into a student tuning out and giving up (World- Class Instructional Design and Assessment, 2015).

Schools where SIFE attend can do many things to provide a feeling of safety and give the best possible educational environment. Taylor and Sidhu (2012) state that these can include: a welcoming environment, meeting a student's psycho-social needs, addressing trauma, viewing refugee (and SIFE) children holistically, recognizing multiple areas of need, establishing support systems, encouraging high parental involvement, building links to the community and an ethos of inclusion, celebrating diversity, and establishing an outlook of hope. Schools that embrace the idea that a child needs their basic needs met first, from administrators through support staff, bus drivers to custodians, become the most successful at educating SIFE.

Until these needs are met, learning will be difficult and unsatisfactory for both SIFE and teacher. Using education techniques that honor and reflect students' cultural traditions and backgrounds can help students feel seen and comfortable within the new setting of the United State's public school system. Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT) is one framework that schools can use to onboard SIFE or any students who are not of the mainstream language, society or culture (DeCapua and Marshall 2015). Gay (2002) defines Culturally Responsive Teaching as, "using the cultural characteristics, experiences and perspectives of ethnically diverse students as conduits for teaching them more effectively" (p. 106). One of the central beliefs of CRT is that students are to be viewed as culturally different, not culturally deficient, and having 'funds of knowledge' that they can draw upon as linguistic, cultural and experiential resources (Newcomer, et. al., 2021). DeCapua and Marshall (2015) go in depth about the five tenets of CRT: Cultural Competence, Culturally Relevant Curriculum, Supportive Learning Community, Cultural Congruity and Effective Instruction. They go on to say that using CRT in schools makes, "... a learning environment that will enable them (SIFE) to grow and develop intellectually with the freedom to acculturate gradually into their new school setting." (p. 361).

Cultural Competence

The first of the CRT tenets is Cultural Competence, which means that schools should know the culture of their students beyond just 'holidays and heroes'. Gay (2000) talks about this first tenet as the ability for teachers to become culturally self-aware of themselves and their teaching biases in order to understand how that affects the culture of the classroom. Understanding how a student's culture is perceived and interpreted in the

classroom by the teacher, especially through the lens of a teacher's own culture, can alleviate strife that sometimes is negative or apathetic behavior. When a teacher takes the time to know and care about a student in this way, as an individual within the context of their culture, it is affirming for the student that they are an important part of the school community and any skills and knowledge they bring with them are valued and appreciated (Newcomer, et. al., 2021). King, et. al. (2017,) found that for “... immigrant or refugee background adolescents new to school and new to literacy, the dynamics in classrooms can be demoralizing when the instruction ... is racially/culturally restrictive- for instance, by ignoring their languages, cultural traditions or religious backgrounds” (p. 150).

Culturally Relevant Curriculum

DeCapua and Marshall (2015) describe the second tenet of CRT as Culturally Relevant Curriculum. This means that a curriculum that incorporates different cultures contributes more to the classroom than just a surface level mention of a cultural hero or making a student's culture a holiday to study. Loewus (2016) mentions that oftentimes culturally scaffolded activities are added to curriculum as an afterthought and are useless for SIFE and teachers because they do not directly tie to either the content that is being taught or the students who need the support with background knowledge or specific language structures. Culturally Relevant Curriculum provides students with content that they can readily access using their funds of knowledge, ie. the skills and knowledge that they bring with them that historically has been ignored or devalued by schools. By infusing cultural elements within the content, SIFE students can use this information to make meaning of their new school environments and the content that is being presented

based on the knowledge that they have from their own cultural experiences. Sharing these cultural ways and stories is one way to support a student's socioemotional and academic needs while supporting their access to grade level content (Newcomer, et. al. 2021).

Supportive Learning Communities

Students of any background need to feel safe and respected within their school community in order to succeed in the classroom. Creating supportive learning communities is the third tenet of CRT and is a way to help make sure that SIFE feel welcomed and supported in their schools (DeCapua and Marshall, 2015). Newcomer, et. al. (2021) speak of these communities needing to exist not only in but outside of the classroom as well. Building positive connections between peers, teachers and the content is essential to creating a supportive learning community. If there are behavioral problems in the classroom they might only be cultural differences which are perceived as disruptions. Instead of jumping to punitive measures, teachers should become aware of the cultural differences their students might bring into the classroom and either work with these differences or endeavor to set up a classroom culture that has set norms in order to provide an academic environment where everyone knows and supports one another in specific ways.

Cultural Congruity

A classroom that represents different students and cultures requires a new way of looking at classroom instruction. Not every student is going to learn the same way as the teacher, so the teacher must encourage and incorporate different styles of learning into their daily practice. "Simply treating ELLs just like everyone else will not close the achievement gap between these students and their grade level peers" (Bolos, 2012, p. 14).

Teachers should not assume that SIFE have the same capacity for processing information as their mainstream peers and because of that should be allowed to process and obtain knowledge in different ways. Newcomer, et. al. (2021) speaks to the need for patience and flexibility in instruction, especially with SIFE, helping them to grow their academic confidence with positive connections between content and their own funds of knowledge.

Effective Instruction

Effective instruction forces teachers to present information to SIFE in a culturally scaffolded way to ensure that the information or content is accessible. While using remedial materials or ‘dumbing down’ the curriculum may seem like a good approach, SIFE are not trying to master content that they are relearning, but rather trying to learn new content in a different language based on a different style of education. This can be a struggle as Loewus (2016) found that a high percentage of ML materials are meant for younger audiences and are thus not cognitively complex enough to engage middle school students. Even though they do not have the skills to display that knowledge in English, the materials they have available should still be cognitively challenging. Teachers must design ways to present literacy and school skills in a way that is culturally accessible while at the same time allowing for a growth of mainstream knowledge. Loewus (2016) goes on to say that what is most often needed by SIFE is the vocabulary related to culture or content and the context that would allow them to access the knowledge while using language they have already obtained. Newcomer, et. al. (2021) stress the importance of resources in the languages of the students in the classroom community as well as working with the community to bring in resources or scaffolds that would be beneficial to SIFE making connections with content. The Mutually Adaptive Learning Paradigm (MALP)

works to provide a framework for content teachers that allows for SIFE potential educational differences to be honored while at the same time also structuring content.

Best Practice: Mutually Adaptive Learning Paradigm (MALP)

Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT) goes a long way to helping teachers help students of different backgrounds be successful in the United States school system.

Students who enter with a lack of formal education or have simply been educated outside of the United States often feel confused in their new classrooms as they experience a sort of cultural dissonance, "... not understanding the expectation, discourse styles and modes of school-based ways of thinking and learning ...” (DeCapua, Marshall 2015, p. 357).

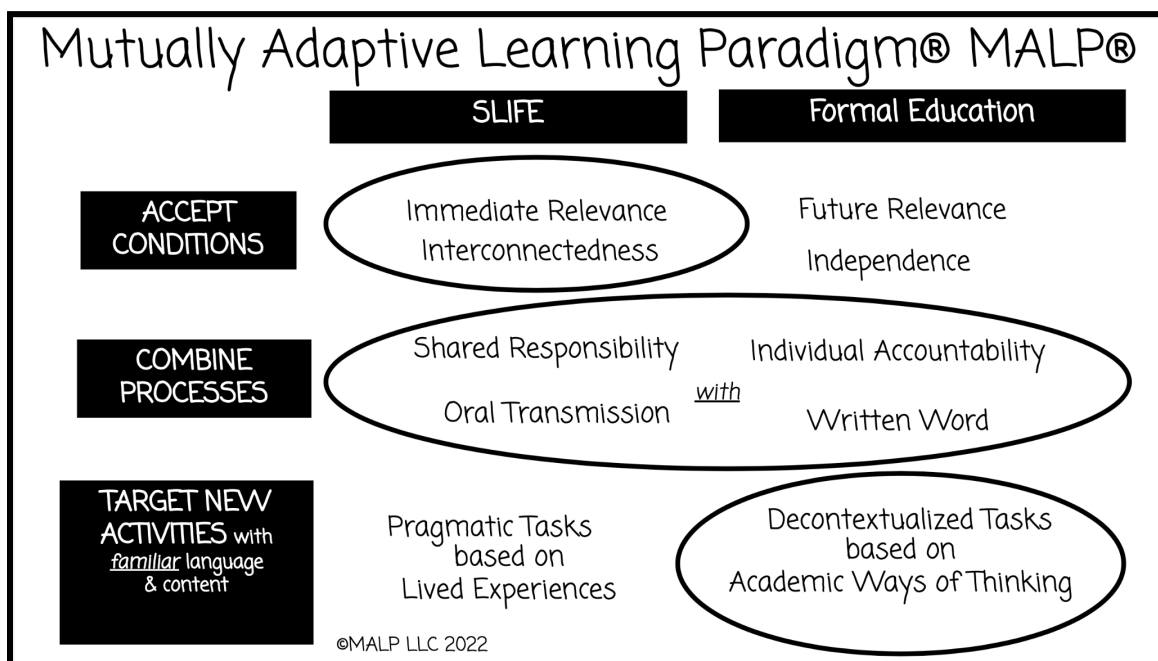
The Mutually Adaptive Learning Paradigm (MALP) is a framework that gives teachers specific guidelines that they can follow when designing and delivering instruction to ML and SIFE that “provides a framework that addresses the cultural dissonance ... and transitions SIFE to U.S. classroom by embracing key priorities about learning held by SIFE and placing these priorities into a framework that in tandem integrates key elements of Western-style education” (DeCapua and Marshall, 2015, p. 361). This learning system looks at the ways that culture gets applied in the classroom system, both from the standpoint of SIFE and the dominant classroom culture. Instead of educators viewing SIFE with a deficit lens, educators can move past that notion to use the skills that SIFE do have to create a culturally responsive learning environment where all students can be successful (DeCapua and Marshall, 2015).

Students who have been in the classrooms of the United States have a set of characteristics that make their learning motivation unique. Overall, these students: believe in the promise of future reward from education, will become independent learners

who pursue individual excellence in their learning, arrive with age-appropriate background in literacy and can both learn and demonstrate mastery through print, and are accustomed to and familiar with Western-style, academic ways of thinking and school-based tasks (Mutually Adaptive Learning Paradigm 2014). Assuming that all students enter the classroom with these motivations becomes problematic as SIFE are entering classrooms with different styles of education and learning. In order to best support SIFE, educators must look at the way that they are designing lessons and delivering instruction so that the content and information presented is accessible to all students. In this way, MALP expects that both educators and SIFE will adapt to find a common ground where learning is possible (DeCapua, Marshall, 2015).

Figure 1

Mutually Adaptive Learning Paradigm (MALP)



As you can see in Figure 1 (Mutually Adaptive Language Paradigm, 2022), MALP uses many of the same strategies in CRT. Educators who use MALP strategies can then focus

on the three main parts of the learning paradigm that differ between Westernized ideas and those SIFE enter with: conditions, processing and finally, activities (DeCapua and Marshall, 2015 and Mutually Adaptive Learning Paradigm, 2014). The above infographic shows how each of these components bring together how each group thinks and understands information in an educational setting.

Accepting Conditions

There are two conditions that must be met when educators start working with SIFE in their classroom: interconnectedness and immediate relevance (DeCapua and Marshall, 2015). The idea of relationship building is not a new concept for educators; however, these strong relationships in the classroom are paramount for SIFE to feel a sense of belonging and place in order to feel a part of the classroom community (DeCapua and Marshall, 2015). At the same time, DeCapua and Marshall (2015) stress that making connections is not enough, but making the lessons relevant to SIFE and how they learn are equally important.

Combining Processes

As was mentioned earlier, SIFE and students within the United States school system have a different motivation when it comes to learning. The second component of MALP helps SIFE use the skills they have from their own learnings and integrate them with the learning paradigms that are used in Westernized education (DeCapua and Marshall, 2015). By scaffolding learning for SIFE so that they can move back and forth between both paradigms it allows SIFE a gentle integration to the Westernized ideas of schooling (Mutually Adaptive Learning Paradigm, 2014). Educators can use the oral traditions and skills of SIFE and pair them with the written expectations of the American

classroom to help SIFE build on their literacy skills while also being able to acquire content knowledge (DeCapua and Marshall, 2015). In addition to pairing the oral with the written, educators who use the MALP paradigm design lessons that have students participate in group work, but then also have tasks for individual responsibility that help SIFE move from their original learning paradigm to the Westernized norms of their new classrooms (Mutually Adaptive Learning Paradigm, 2014 and DeCapua and Marshall, 2015).

Activities That Combine Language and Content

The final component of MALP is designing activities that combine language and content, i.e. the tasks that teachers ask students to participate in during class (DeCapua and Marshall, 2015). Students with limited or interrupted education come to the classroom with a very pragmatic approach to learning- they learn as it is needed in context to their everyday lives. In contrast, the Westernized classrooms of the United States focus on learning that will be used in the future- to show mastery of ideas or ways of thinking (DeCapua and Marshall, 2015). Mutually Adaptive Learning Paradigm (2014) adds on to the language skills and content knowledge that we use for traditional MLs and “... asks teachers to explicitly teach the academic ways of thinking and school-based tasks that are largely unfamiliar to the learners” (pg. 2). This is accomplished by using language and content that has already been presented or learned by SIFE, to teach the new academic skill or way of thinking (DeCapua and Marshall, 2015). As students master the educational tasks needed to find success in their new classroom, educators can add new content and language skills; moving back and forth between using what SIFE already knows and building on both academic tasks and content knowledge in a gradual

acculturation of academic tasks, content knowledge and language skills (DeCapua and Marshall 2015 and Mutually Adaptive Language Paradigm, 2014).

A SIFE's experience in the classroom can be supported by using the tenets of CRT and MALP, but school is not the only community they are involved in. Family, religion, employment (familial or otherwise), cultural groups all play a large role in making up the rich community that a SIFE participates in. The next section will highlight just how important these other communities are in the success of a SIFE.

Best Practice: Family and Community Involvement

Not all cultures around the world see school as an arena where they have influence or even a space that they enter. In addition, schools in the United States can often seem imposing and uninviting, especially for families coming from places where schooling was limited or vastly different. Villavicencio et. al (2021) found that recent surveys and testimonials from students and families have reported that they "... experience hate speech, bullying in school, violence outside school, and an increase in immigration raids, resulting in depression, suicide ideation, and long-term trauma." (p. 295) This hostile climate makes it difficult for families to feel welcome at their children's school and even less likely to trust them. At the same time, school and family/community partnerships are even more important because of the need for communication because it greatly benefits the students who attend. The lack of trust often outweighs the benefits of education, even though parents and families often bring their children to the United States for that very purpose (Villavicencio, et. al, 2021). Immigrant and refugee communities often have a high regard for the American schools, and as such

don't want to interfere with the education system which is a disservice to their students and the school at large (Kugler and Price, 2009).

While students are tackling the seemingly insurmountable task of learning a new language while learning new systems and rules plus grade level content, the community and families of SIFE are also trying to navigate the American school system. Gaitan (2012) found that families that were able to learn the ways of public school and were able to build relationships and communicate with the school community found it empowering and essential to their student's success. As families learned how to and what questions to ask of the teachers, educators became better informed and families were able to advocate for their students. Because these adults are often trying to maintain a job and family it is the student who is learning English at school that serves as the main interpreter outside of the school day. When families are able to communicate with the school independently of their children they feel less isolated from the school and community at large (Kugler and Price, 2009).

As was mentioned earlier, students require a welcoming and safe environment to be able to learn effectively; the same type of welcoming community is essential if schools want parents to take ownership of their student's education. When parents have been isolated because there is a lack of their own education or language skills, it is even more essential that schools reach out to communities so that the adults of the community can gain the cultural and educational capital that will help ensure their student's success (Gaitan, 2012). Kugler and Price (2009) emphasize that point further by explaining that, "For the child to do well, the entire community must understand and support the services the child receives" (p. 50). Cultural, religious and community leaders can be instrumental

in helping schools navigate how families perceive school, aid in communicating with the school and providing school consults when dealing with sensitive topics about students within the community. Being a part of that community helps students feel cared for and families become more trusting of the school system.

Schools are in need of strategies to help encourage families, teachers and school administrators to build partnerships with each other. Emotional and academic care are essential to building relationships with immigrants and families of SIFE whose lives have been turned upside down due the factors that brought them to the United States in the first place. Even though many families chose to come to the United States, the experience is no less difficult and overwhelming. Connecting with families takes a certain amount of understanding and empathy of the hardships and experiences they face when starting in a new country; poverty, family separation, food insecurities, homelessness, learning a new culture, paying for the journey to the United States, etc. (Villavicencio, et. al., 2021). Schools that offer more than just academic support to students, for example, offering classes to educate families on topics they have chosen, help to foster that community feeling even quicker. Schools that were able to look at ways of engaging parents, other than that of the normalized white, middle-class, found that they were able to deeper engage with the parents of the entire school community in ways that were more meaningful to those non-white communities (Villavicencio, et. al., 2021).

Building relationships with families requires the work of the entire school, not only cultural liaisons, interpreters, administrators or teachers. This school wide effort makes a community where everyone has an equal voice and care for each other, helping students to find success (Villavicencio, et. al., 2021). Families are wonderful resources

that schools can tap into and not just for information about their students. Immigrant and refugee families have faced extraordinary challenges to arrive here and have skills that many schools can use (Kugler and Price 2009). Having authentic engagement with families that elicits their expertise and funds of knowledge is yet another way that schools can be welcoming. Having an open door policy for family and community members to come into school when they have questions or need assistance goes a long way in maintaining an open dialog and trust between them and the school. Oftentimes those one-on-one conversations with teachers or the principal signal to families that are truly thought of as essential members of the school community that will be supported no matter what their academic or support needs are (Villavicencio, et. al., 2021).

Traditionally, schools reach out to families only when they need to inform them of upcoming events or if there is a problem. However, when families are engaged by sharing information back to the school communities, both students and families feel more connected and this often leads to more educational success. Schools should work to empower parents and communities to understand and learn how they can best support their children in their educational journeys. One such way to bridge that relationship with parents is for school employees to make home visits to students' families; these are not just to gain familial insights, but can be a way that school officials can pay respect to the community. Once those connections are made, communication between family and school becomes more natural and parents feel like they have an active role in their child's education. Schools can then start to ask families to 'bring a friend' with them to school engagements. This helps new families feel less intimidated if there is a language barrier and feel more comfortable knowing that someone who understands their background will

also be there. By bringing a friend with them, families are empowered as the holders of knowledge and can act as guides (Kugler and Price, 2009). Gaitan (2012) also notes that by continuing to build relationships with families, schools are also building a common culture with the community; a culture based on educational success and communication that allows all members to participate in meaningful ways.

Conclusion

The information that was presented in this literature review is intended to show why the question of “*What are best practices for schools to support students with interrupted schooling?*” is important and also to showcase what those best practices are. It first started with defining who Students with Interrupted Schooling (SIFE) are and what are some of the challenges they bring. Next, it looked at three best practice topics. We started with Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT), which is a pedagogy that seeks to affirm and support any student that is from a minority culture, religion or background. Teachers using the ideas in CRT find success within their classrooms. Then, I presented a more specific learning model that focuses on the education of SIFE: Mutually Adaptive Learning Paradigm (MALP). This learning model focuses on helping learners transition from their preferred and culturally specific learning style to a more Westernized approach while still learning grade level content and language. This acculturation to the American school system is not because one style of learning is better than the other but is simply the norm in the United States. Finally, research suggests that involving a student’s family and community can help a student be successful and also benefits the school community. By combining all of these facets into a professional development for teachers and school administrators it will help to answer the question, “*What are best practices for*

schools to support students with interrupted schooling?”. Chapter Three will outline the specifics of the proposed professional development.

CHAPTER THREE

Project Description

Introduction

I started my teaching career with a similar goal to most educators- to guide every student to reach their fullest potential. As I began teaching I quickly realized just how much more I had to learn. As students are human beings, they come to us with a varied set of needs and backgrounds. When I first began teaching Multilingual Learners, the term SIFE to describe Students with Interrupted Formal Education, was just becoming common knowledge. As I progressed through my career, my school district began to see more SIFE enroll. I had very little experience working with these students, as did my middle school colleagues, so it was necessary for me to research and dig deeper into how we could best serve these new students. This work led me to ask the question for this capstone project, *“What are best practices for schools to support students with interrupted schooling?”* Chapter Three will describe the professional development that I created for middle school staff on best practices to support SIFE and to equip staff with a list of resources and ideas that they can readily implement into their classrooms. Included in this chapter will be an overview of the project, including a description of the audience and setting. This professional development was developed over the course of fall 2022 and will be presented after the new year. In addition, I will reflect on the positionality of my research and how that impacts my project overall. Finally, I will look at theories related to adult education in preparation for presenting in the future. Chapter Three will end with a summary of the project and which will lead into the reflective statement of the project in Chapter Four.

Project Description

The idea behind the professional development series for this project is that it will be a resource that teachers and support staff at the middle level can use to aid the SIFE that enter our district. Each presentation is an hour long learning period with a total of four learning sessions overall. Sessions are collaborative in nature allowing educators to both be the learners and the experts. There is a focus on using an assets based approach, meaning that the sessions are focused on the strengths SIFE bring into school communities and also the strengths that the educators bring to the learning being done during the professional development. Briefly, this professional development series includes an overview of who SIFE are, what their needs are and concludes with a set of actionable tasks and strategies that are created by the group. I also see the potential for this presentation to be made to other educators in our district that work with SIFE, as the ideas and resources will not be solely limited to working with students at the middle level. I also hope to present this at a conference or workshop.

This professional development was created with the school that I currently teach in mind. The school is in a suburb of Minneapolis, Minnesota that has seen a large amount of growth in the last ten to twelve years. The district has approximately 8,000 students enrolled with over seventy languages being spoken across its nine school buildings (five elementary, two middle, one high school and one alternative high school). Of those 8,000 students, sixty percent of them identify as white, while thirty percent are Multilingual Learners (ML). In the building that I work in, there are almost one hundred ML or about eight percent of the total building population. The number of ML enrolling has steadily increased while at the same time the level of English proficiency they have

obtained before they have enrolled has decreased. Our building has two full-time ML teachers that work with our newcomer and lower level students. Additionally, these two staff co-teach in content area classrooms, consult with all staff and work with administration to problem solve how to best support and service our ML. Post COVID-19 pandemic, we are seeing more students with interrupted schooling due to school being shuttered or student illness/quarantine. For these reasons this project is both timely and necessary.

All school staff and administrators within my school building will have access to the resources that have been created and shared during the professional development. This information is also shared district wide with anyone that has contact or influence on ML or SIFE; whether that is the ML Coordinator, other ML staff, Equity staff, administrators, etc. The goal is to show supports that are easily implementable into daily lessons and provide strategies to all stakeholders to best assist SIFE.

The goal is to have the professional development presentation described in this capstone ready to be presented in early 2023. I started developing this series of presentations based on the research I performed during the summer of 2022. I created the presentation and also tried any strategies that would best fit my own classroom as I work with SIFE throughout fall of 2022. As I created the presentation, I continued to look for strategies to support SIFE as it is relevant to both my research and my classroom needs. Any information that I found has been included in both this capstone and the resulting professional development.

In choosing how I wanted to relay this information to the stakeholders in my district, I knew I wanted the ability to have a conversation with those present. The

resulting project is a professional development series including four, hour long sessions. These presentations leave participants with a knowledge base regarding elements of who SIFE are, their needs and how they could best support their educational journeys. The professional development series also affords educators with time to be collaborative and reflective, try new strategies in their classrooms and gain a broader base of skills. I had thought about creating a website that could be used as an on-going resource for educators working with SIFE, but ultimately decided that a face-to-face presentation would better suit the material I wanted to present. I knew that the collaborative process would lead to sharing and brainstorming for the needs of the specific students in our community, a process that is made difficult when not in person. Additionally, I wanted to create a space for educators to try new ideas in their classrooms and be able to report back and reflect on their experiences.

I was excited to put together the professional development- I wanted it to be as user friendly and relevant to our community as possible. I wanted to take the research that I had done and synthesize it into a professional development that the teachers and administrators at my school district could use and refer back to, full of specific tools and strategies that can be implemented quickly but not add unwarranted amounts of planning and stress to my colleagues' planning time. It needed to include less of the theoretical research that I did and more of the concrete ways that attendees can use my research and apply it to their own classrooms.

Framework and Research

The framework for this presentation is focused around Malcolm Knowles' Theory of Andragogy (1984), Jack Mezirow's Transformative Learning Theory (2000), and the work of Darling-Hammond, et. al (2017) in reference to adult education in a professional development setting. I chose these three specific researchers on the basis that they focused on the learning of adults and more specifically in terms of how adults learn and retain new information. I found it necessary to ensure that the participants of my professional development had the ability to access the information presented in such a way that enabled them to internalize their new learning and also reflect on their current practice.

First, Knowles defines Andragogy as the art and science of helping adults learn. (Knowles, 1984) Adults and children differ in that adults have different needs and ways of internalizing information. Adults have more experiential learning and prior knowledge about topics, which means they bring their own opinions and biases into their learning. Knowles informs that the process of learning for adults should build on the "backgrounds, needs, interests, problems and concerns of the participants" (Knowles, 1984). Because of this, adults need to have information presented to them in context to what they are actively learning, not merely be the passive intakers of information (Knowles, 1984). Knowles (1992) built upon his previous research to state, "My experience is that when people have the opportunity to learn by taking some initiative and perceiving the learning in the context of their *own* life situations, they will internalize more quickly, retain more permanently, and apply more confidently." I used Knowles' ideas of Andragogy within each of the sessions I created. I asked participants to help me

create the objectives and needs of the sessions- inviting them to not only be passive consumers of information, but educators and facilitators to the others in our group at the same time.

The project uses Mezirow's Transformative Learning Theory (2000), in order to help attendees to critically reflect on their current classroom practices and create new types of learnings in the instruction of MLs. According to Mezirow (2000), humans view the world through their own assumptions and expectations referred to as a frame of reference. One's frame of reference includes the way we learn, our sociocultural backgrounds, and our worldview, which we often base on the frame of references of our families, communities, and cultures. An individual's perception of events can be different based on their individual frame of reference. Mezirow emphasizes the need for critical reflection on our viewpoints to see whether the beliefs we have internalized through our lived experiences align with our current values and practices. Adults can alter or reframe their own frame of reference through the use of discourse, "Discourse is not based on winning arguments; it centrally involves finding agreement, welcoming difference, "trying on" other points of view, identifying the common in the contradictory, tolerating the anxiety implicit in paradox, searching for synthesis, and reframing." (Taylor & Cranton 2012) During the in person sessions, participants were frequently asked to reflect on their previous experiences and ideas of SIFE but also to acknowledge the change and broadening of understanding that was happening to challenge their previous frames of reference.

The work of Darling-Hammond, et. al. (2017) for the Learning Policy Institute around professional development for educators is where I started when building my

professional development series. “We define effective professional development as structured professional learning that results in changes in teacher practices and improvements in student learning outcomes.” (Darling-Hammond, et. al. 2017) The research of PD the authors did found seven different areas that were necessary for successful retention and implementation of ideas. (p. 4) Of those seven I strove to specifically include the following elements: active learning, collaboration, reflection and sustained duration. Darling-Hammond, et. al. ideas of active learning and collaboration during PD asks the participants to be a part of the learning that they are acquiring, by actively participating in the type of strategies and learning that they will then use with their students, working together to find new learnings and understandings together (pp. v-vi) The ability to offer a series of PD sessions allows me to utilize reflection in a meaningful way- participants can implement a change in their classroom and then have the time to reflect and receive feedback from the facilitator and other educators. This reflection time is necessary to ensure that there is meaningful change within their practice that they feel confident about and ensure student success. (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017) These elements of active learning, collaboration and reflection all echoed the research done by Knowles and Meizrow. The new piece of information that I learned from Darling-Hammond was the idea of sustained duration. Darling-Hammond, et. al found that, “Professional development that is sustained, offering multiple opportunities for teachers to engage in learning around a single set of concepts or practices, has a greater chance of transforming teaching practices and student learning.” (p. 15) As I built my PD sessions I knew that I not only wanted my participants to become facilitators, but I also wanted to give them the opportunity to hear multiple perspectives and strategies,

implement those strategies and then receive feedback on their efforts. This kind of learning cannot be accomplished within a one hour (or even one day) session of professional development.

Researcher Positionality

I recognize and understand that the lenses that I bring to educational settings, as a white, middle-class woman that has grown up attending schools based in the United States and with a Westernized view point, has both political bias and privilege that need to be acknowledged and addressed. In this type of educational setting reading and writing is the single most important skill to obtain for success. I am aware that I do not have the context of what life without formal education looks like, or even how life without the stability of a permanent home and family impacts one's life. I have never been a part of a culture or community that has strong oral traditions and collectivist beliefs. It is because of these differences that I wanted to research and understand what the needs of SIFE are, in the context of a Westernized classroom. I am a firm believer that all students who enter my classroom are entitled to the best education that I can present them with- which means that I am always striving to look at my practice through the different lenses of all my students to best understand how to connect with them. This capstone project has given me insight as I continue along this journey.

Conclusion

Chapter Three discussed the overview of this capstone project including its description, setting, audience, and timeline; in order to answer the question, "*What are best practices for schools to support students with interrupted schooling?*" This chapter also gave an examination of the context of the professional development presentation. In

addition, I reflected on the positionality of my research and any bias that I might bring to the capstone project as I proceed. Chapter Four includes a reflective statement about what was learned through the capstone process, important aspects of the literature review, implications of this project as well as limitations and finally recommendations on further research related to this project.

CHAPTER FOUR

Reflection

Introduction

The purpose of this capstone project was to find strategies to aid middle level, content area teachers as they work with Students with Interrupted Formal Education (SIFE). To focus my research I chose to ask: *What are best practices for schools to support students with interrupted schooling?* I have learned in my decade working with Multilingual Learners (MLs) that there is no one ‘standard’ ML student. I have filled my educational toolbox with strategies and know-how to best support a myriad of different learners. It was not until a year ago that I first had SIFE in my classroom. A seventh-grader from Central America and two sisters from East Africa. As a middle school staff we were unprepared.

All students who were starting back in person, full time after the Covid-19 pandemic were behind in some respects, social-emotionally, academically or both. The SIFE came with these struggles and others we had not anticipated- a lack of overall schooling and no experience with Westernized school environments. As one of the two ML educators in the building I was often consulted, asked and begged for any insight as to best help these new SIFE. I was at a loss, the strategies I had relied on for years were helping, but they garnered far less success than when I had used them in the past. After doing some casual research I realized that there was a need for research and documentation on best practices to aid middle school staff in the educating of SIFE. In pondering the best way to present this information, I decided that a three-session professional development series would be the most effective.

This final chapter will share the learning that I found in the process of researching SIFE and how best to support them in the content area classroom. Next I will take another look at the literature that was reviewed in Chapter Two and explain how that informed my work. Lastly I will discuss limitations in my research, the benefits of doing this research to the education community at large and also future projects that would help further answer my research question.

Major Learnings

Researching my capstone questions and the product that followed was not only a new process for me, but also fueled a lifelong passion for continuing education. One reason why I chose education to devote my career to was because teachers are forever learning and adapting to new ideas and improving on their craft. This ability to become a lifelong learner and then to continue my credentials to work toward a Master's Degree has been incredibly fulfilling.

My first major takeaway from this research is something that I have continued to learn throughout my career- students are kids first and there is no one 'type' of student. Students with interrupted formal education are no different from other kids in our classrooms in that they need connection, patience and empathy as they learn and grow in our classrooms. The strategies that are paramount for SIFE to be successful are also just good teaching for all students that we see everyday. Therefore, if teachers implement specific strategies to aid SIFE, they are in no way hindering the education of the other students in the classroom, because ultimately SIFE are students and kids first.

A brand new learning that I found myself enjoying exploring was the research I did on adult education and professional development. I had not, previously, thought about

how the needs of adults and children might differ in regards to education and also what makes up a good professional development session. I believe that the reading and research I did on androgyny not only was beneficial for my final product, but also has aided me as I work with colleagues on a daily basis. Keeping in mind the needs of adult learners has helped me to be specific and direct in collaborating with content teachers and also mindful to make it a true collaboration where both sides are contributing to the ideas and solutions that need to be found. Although I have sat through hours of professional development as a teacher, I had rarely thought about what made a session worthwhile and what made it just another box to check off. I really tried to keep the purpose for the sessions in the forefront of my presentations as well as ask for audience feedback and needs. Sessions included homework for participants to do or think about between sessions and also the activities we did tied back to specific needs that were strategies that were necessary for SIFE.

Revisiting the Literature

The research process for this capstone project was perhaps the most challenging part for me; I wanted to read *everything* that was ever written on SIFE and how to best assist them at the middle school level. That, of course, was not a realistic goal and I soon found that there was little peer-reviewed or longitudinal research that had been done regarding my research question.

The first of my three professional development sessions was spent learning about characteristics and classifications of Multilingual Learners and Students with Interrupted Formal Education. I took much of this information from the Minnesota Department of Education, the US Census Bureau, WIDA and the work of Lahiri-Hoherchak (2022) and

Kugler & Price (2009). These sources helped me to present a whole picture of what SIFE generally have in common and also what other needs they may have in a classroom. In addition these researchers allowed me to include *why* these characteristics were important to understand in the educating of SIFE.

The next two sessions really honed in on the strategies that I found to be most useful and also researched to be most effective in aiding SIFE in the classroom. Session two looked at the tenets of Culturally Responsive Teaching which I learned from reading Gay (2000, 2002) and Gonzalez & Moll (2002). The concept of students having funds of knowledge that they enter the US school system with as being tools that educators can use to bridge learning styles and background knowledge of SIFE were a welcome asset-based approach towards students who are often seen through a deficit lens. With the research on CRT and funds of knowledge, I was able to show participants that SIFE enter our classroom with a wealth of learning already embedded, but often simply needed to learn new ways of acquiring knowledge and demonstrating that the knowledge has been internalized.

The third and final session of my product looked at two other important strategies that benefit SIFE in the classroom- the Mutually Adaptive Learning Paradigm (MALP) and the importance of family and community engagement within the school and classroom. The first, created and researched by DeCapua & Marshall (2011, 2015) gave educators a way to bridge the gap between how SIFE have learned in the past with a way to access content and show mastery in the way of a Westernized classroom. Mutually Adaptive Learning Paradigm shows educators that there doesn't need to be an entire redesign of a lesson or its concepts in order for the content to be accessible for SIFE, but

by merely being mindful about how the content is acquired and mastery shown can help SIFE learn content *and* be successful in an US classroom at the same time.

Finally I looked at how important it is for SIFE to have a connection between home, community and school. Several scholars (Gaitan, 2012;, Haneda, 2006), Hos, 2016; Kugler & Price, 2009; Taylor & Sidhu; 2012)wrote about how the ties to the community and home were strongest with SIFE and the newly arrived in the United States. Although not all SIFE come from cultures with a collectivist mindset, when an immigrant arrives to a new community they quickly form bonds with people of a similar background or culture. Being able to open those lines of communication to families and the community can help educators better understand their newly arrived SIFE and find new ways to assist and include within the classroom. In addition, this makes school a place that is safe and trusted within the community which means that families are more likely to come to the school with concerns or questions as they arise.

Limitations

Like many aspects of education, the strategies that are used to assist SIFE are ever changing and improving; as such, there is a limit to the benefit of this research and product. Because the area of current SIFE research is relatively small, any new work being done could be a significant addition to the field. All of the strategies could be expanded upon and gone over with more detail. Just as there is no one type of ML student or SIFE, there is not a finite list of strategies that are available to reference. Thus there are limitations to the examples that I have produced and showcased.

There are many aspects of educating SIFE that I did not delve into due to a lack of time and with narrowing the scope of my research. I did not report on the strategies that

best serve preliterate SIFE, high-school or adult SIFE. These are three more subgroups within the SIFE umbrella that deserve more time and research than I was able to provide.

Future Projects

Potential directions this project could take are to create a set of age and culturally appropriate reading materials for secondary SIFE or perhaps even aiding a current curriculum with adding in more culturally relevant and SIFE identities to their program. Research shows that when a student's cultural background and identity is highlighted and utilized, there is increased engagement and participation (Thomas & Dyches, 2019). However, Montero et al. (2014) point out that there is a lack of research based, age appropriate texts that connect SIFE lives, interests and background knowledge, especially texts that are the appropriate level for emergent readers.

Benefit to the Profession

My hope is that this project can help content area teachers in the middle level not feel so intimidated or overwhelmed when a SIFE enters their classroom. If these teachers have strategies in their educational tool boxes that are helpful for SIFE, they are more likely to implement them and feel empowered to take action. This is a serious area of need as SIFE continue to arrive in the United States and not perform as well as their ML or native-born peers. This is evidenced by a significantly higher dropout rate for ELs, and for refugee students it is more than 70% (DeCapua & Marshall, 2015).

Conclusion

Chapter Four has provided a reflection of the capstone process as a whole. First, this chapter provided a reflection of takeaways I gained doing the research and then also by creating the professional development series. Second, it revisited the literature from Chapter Two that was available and relevant to the project. Next, Chapter Four examined the limitations as well as future project possibilities of SIFE projects. Finally, it discussed how the project benefits the profession. It is my sincere hope that this work assists both content teachers in the middle level and English Language Development teachers in aiding their Students with Interrupted Formal Education become successful in their classrooms.

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