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## **Best Practices: To Supporting and Including SLIFE, Preliterate, Pashtu Students in Secondary, Western, Schools**

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Best Practices: To Supporting and Including SLIFE, Preliterate, Pashtu Students in Secondary, Western,  
Schools

By Claire Madden

A capstone project submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree in Masters  
of Arts in Teaching English to Speaker of Other Languages.

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## DEDICATION

To Ismail and Muhammad, thank you for taking time and effort to improve education for Pashtu students.

To my students, thank you for teaching me everyday.

To my family and friends, thank you for supporting me through everything.

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## CHAPTER ONE

### *Introduction*

Teachers are given the opportunity to educate a diverse group of students. One of those groups being SLIFE (Students with Limited or Interrupted Formal Education), preliterate, Pashtun students. However, teachers likely do not have the educational background to best support this specific group of students. This group of students will need additional support in literacy and understanding the common practices displayed in secondary, western schools. This brings me to my questions that I will be exploring in this capstone, *how can educators promote literacy? How can educators model the celebration of each students' native culture and create a positive classroom environment? Ultimately, what are the best practices for supporting and including SLIFE, preliterate, Pashtun students in secondary, Western, schools?*

I first heard of Pashtu culture, when I was student teaching and a new student entered my classroom. This student was identified as SLIFE and Pashtun speaking. SLIFE is the acronym used to describe students with limited or interrupted formal education (Minnesota Department of Education, 2023). Students identified as SLIFE are likely behind on the content that is taught in formal education but also need to learn the norms of the classroom and education system (Minnesota Department of Education, 2023). Since students identified as SLIFE are not common in many schools, SLIFE is also not a popular topic in a teacher's education. Teachers may not have much experience teaching SLIFE learners and may not know how to approach teaching SLIFE students.

It was later discovered, this student was also not literate in Pashtun. In this capstone project I will use preliterate to describe students who have limited or no literacy skills in any language. This does not mean that students will never develop literacy skills, but during the

duration of time where they are learning literacy. Due to my lack of education and experience with Pashtu culture, SLIFE learners, and teaching literacy in secondary education, I did not know the best practices for teaching this student. I wanted to learn more about how to help my students become successful in education and I asked myself, *What are the best practices to support SLIFE, Pashtu, and preliterate students in secondary, Western, classrooms?*

### *Students*

Zahla (pseudonym) is from Afghanistan. She spent 17 years speaking Pashtun and received no formal education, likely due to the political situation in Afghanistan. Due to the lack of schools for Zahla to attend, she is considered preliterate. Zahla and her family of 9, fled Afghanistan when the Taliban assumed power in 2021. They arrived in Minnesota, in the spring of 2021, about 2 months before the school year ended. Zahla had no knowledge of the language, culture, or environment she was placed in. What she did bring with her was hope, motivation and determination. Through the obstacles, Zahla grew into a hardworking and dedicated student.

Although Zahla and her family were considered the lucky ones to even have the opportunity to live in the United States, there were many great challenges ahead. One of the largest obstacles for the family would be the language barrier. When a student begins to learn literacy in a new language, it is helpful to use background knowledge of a student's first language (Duong, 2022).

Without literacy in a student's first language, it becomes a much greater challenge to learn literacy in a second language. At an older age, it is much more difficult to learn literacy in general (Ellis, 2000). Even more difficult to learn literacy in a language that is new. In most parts of Western countries, literacy is used everyday. Literacy is used commonly for communication



like emails, texting, and world wide or local news. It is intentionally incorporated into every lesson taught in schools. In Western countries, literacy skills are key to success in education.

### *SLIFE English Class*

Zahla was placed into my SLIFE English class with two other students. One, a male student, Ali (pseudonym) who also speaks Pashtun and is from Afghanistan. He also happens to be the only other Pashtun speaking student in the school. The second student, a female Spanish speaking student from Mexico. I thought Zahla and Ali would work well together and help each other in class. I was surprised when Zahla and the second female student were fast friends.

Ali arrived in the United States about two months before Zahla. Ali had some formal schooling in Afghanistan and is literate in Pashtun. Due to his literacy, I could communicate with him through google translate. Even though google translate is not very accurate, it felt like a start. I thought I would be able to use his literacy in Pashtu to communicate with Zahla. I thought through him I would be able to figure out what Zahla is passionate about, what her story is and how I could best help her through her new journey in the American school system. I noticed that Zahla did not want to interact with Ali as much as I had hoped.

I was thinking through a Westernized lens. In Western countries, it is not abnormal for boy and girl students to interact and help each other in school. I was not considering the culture of Afghanistan, and specifically Pashtu culture. It can be seen as shameful for a man and a woman to work together, even talking together (Ahmadzai, 2014). Finding this out derailed my plans. It took away the crutch that I had been using to feel like I was helping Zahla. However, when I asked Ali to help me communicate with Zahla, I had only made her experience worse.

I began to search for other ways to communicate with Zahla. I struggled to find tools and assistance. There were not many Pashtun speaking people in my community, especially at that

time. The only books that I could find in Pashtun to support learning in the students L1 were children's books, which seemed impossible with the expansive options on the internet. I felt unprepared to teach Zahla. All my training on effective teaching skills did not touch on the subject of young adult literacy. Other teachers were struggling as well and together we were able to ask our school for assistance.

The following year, my school bought Language Line, an online program to have translators in any language available during the day, to try and assist our English Language Learning students. This tool was found to be more useful at functions like conferences or behavior issues, but everyday class use was not realistic. To effectively use Language Line, time and a quiet space is necessary.

Zahla was in my ELD Biology class with 35 other new to country students and many SLIFE as well. It was not realistic to have one on one time with Zahla to use Language Line. I was overwhelmed with responsibilities. Teaching a lesson, managing behaviors, and translating. With 35 students in one room, the noise level was elevated creating a space that often did not allow for clear communication. I had many barriers to even using the tool provided to teachers to help Zahla. After a year of being her teacher, I was still struggling with my lack of knowledge and skills. Other teachers were still feeling similar frustrations. With the goal of finding the answer to the question: *What are the best practices for SLIFE, preliterate, Pashtu students in Western classrooms?* I also wanted to keep in mind the ability to apply these new best practices.

### *Problem*

Over the past year with Zahla as my student, I have heard and seen many inequalities in her education. Overcrowded classrooms, lack of effective resources, and teachers lacking proper education. One of those items that I can personally improve is by educating myself so I

can educate others. As teachers we were not provided instruction on how to teach students that come from backgrounds where they did not have the opportunity to go to school and learn. Zahla deserves the opportunity to quality education just like anyone else in the world.

The goal of this project is to discover the best practices for SLIFE, preliterate, Pashtu students in secondary Western schools and provide teachers with the education discovered in this study. With the information found I will create a professional development presentation. The goal of this professional development is to encourage teachers to incorporate new supports into the classroom. This professional development will provide teachers with strategies that are easy to implement in the classroom to provide assistance to SLIFE and preliterate students. It will also include information about Pashtu culture and strategies to celebrate multiculturalism in the classroom. With this new information I aim to provide a small solution to the inequalities in education that impact SLIFE, preliterate, Pashtu, students in secondary, Western, schools.

This capstone will impact more students than Zahla. SLIFE, preliterate, Pashtu students enter classrooms in Western countries everyday. The numbers are growing as people are forced to leave their country due to instability. Teachers need the appropriate skills and strategies to provide quality education to this population of students. Without proper education, teachers can become frustrated and students will not receive the quality education that they deserve. SLIFE, preliterate, Pashtu students are not being provided with the proper quality education that they deserve in Western classrooms. My goal is to create a professional development to better educate teachers on the best practices to teaching SLIFE, preliterate, Pashtu students.

### *Inquiry Questions*

With the problem and action plan identified, there still lies many questions that revolve around the best practices to include SLIFE, preliterate, Pashtu learners into the classroom

community. I struggle with this in my school environment everyday. The school observed for this capstone, has a high percentage of Spanish speaking students. With little known English, it is difficult for my Pashtu speaking students and my Spanish speaking students to interact.

Not only is language a barrier for communication, but the two cultures of primarily Mexican and Pashtu are extensively different. Incorporating and celebrating these two very different cultures in the classroom comes with its own set of challenges. Which leads to the thread of questions for classroom inclusion: *How can educators include Pashtu students into the classroom with limited knowledge of the English Language? How can educators create an environment where all cultures and students are celebrated? How can educators not only include SLIFE, preliterate, Pashtu students, but also their families?*

Another theme of questions lies within language. *How can teachers support a students literacy in English but also in the students first language? How can teachers provide appropriate and accessible content for students while promoting literacy?* It is important that both languages, English and Pashtun, are valued and appreciated. Speaking and becoming literate in Pashtun is alongside the goal of speaking and becoming literate in English.

### *Assumptions*

Throughout this capstone it will be assumed at some point a teacher will have the responsibility of educating a SLIFE, or preliterate or Pashtu student in their classroom or school. This capstone would be beneficial for anyone that may interact with these students. In this capstone it is assumed the teacher or professional will have questions on how to appropriately teach SLIFE, preliterate, Pashtu students and create an inclusive classroom space and classroom community. It is assumed teachers have questions on promoting literacy in their classroom.

Finally, it is assumed that the SLIFE learners addressed in this capstone are English Learners and are preliterate in their first language.

### *Point of View*

This capstone project is written and created through the point of view of an American, 27 year old, high school educator. Keeping my point of view in mind throughout this capstone project is critical since this project involves a plethora of different cultures and combinations of cultures and communities. Keeping in mind my own perspectives will help me avoid making mistakes and assuming that everyone has the same perspective and ideas that I have. In my purpose section I talked about how I assumed my own perspective on my students and it ended up hurting their educational experience rather than helping. To avoid this occurring another time, it is imperative that I know my perspective is different than most or all of my students.



## CHAPTER TWO

### Literature Review

#### *Introduction*

Chapter two is a literature review discovering successful methods of including SLIFE (Students with Limited or Interrupted Formal Education), preliterate, Pashtu students in secondary, Western, schools. To understand how to help SLIFE, preliterate, Pashtu students, it is necessary for educators to understand the challenges that they face in the classroom. Also, it is beneficial for teachers to understand an overview of the Pashtu culture and how to celebrate culture in the classroom. Since many SLIFE students are also struggling with literacy ability, methods to promote literacy is also research.

Chapter two will highlight research that I conducted on successful practices and strategies used in the classroom to provide SLIFE and preliterate assistance in the mainstream classroom. First this chapter will include information on the challenges that SLIFE and preliterate students face in the classroom. Second, this chapter will include strategies to create an empowering multicultural classroom and community. Finally, the third section of chapter two will touch on Afghani culture in relation to education.

#### **Challenges**

There are many challenges that SLIFE learners face when it comes to succeeding in a new and unfamiliar educational environment. They are also placed in a situation where educators and staff of schools make assumptions, intended or not, about SLIFE students. Assumptions such as SLIFE students lack abilities, that language barriers inhibit teachers ability to create interpersonal relationships and that SLIFE students are already familiar with educational expectations. These assumptions are harmful to the progress and success of SLIFE students in

education. Furthermore, SLIFE students are excluded from the educational experience and classroom community. Curriculum and learning materials used by educators can be inaccessible to SLIFE students due to language barriers and literacy ability. Educating teachers on SLIFE students and the challenges they face will create better understanding between SLIFE students and educators.

### *Assumptions About Secondary Students*

Oftentimes in secondary education it is assumed that each and every student has been in a similar school system for many years. However, many SLIFE students have not had these opportunities (Pentón Herrera, 2022). The education environment feels comfortable to most educators and students (Pentón Herrera, 2022). Students and educators typically have been in the classroom for most of their lives. However, SLIFE students who have not had the same experience, can feel overwhelmed by the classroom (Pentón Herrera, 2022). First, many do not know the insinuated social and academic norms of school, there might be new rules and expectations in this new classroom (Pentón Herrera, 2022). Explicitly teaching expectations is crucial for teachers to convey to students. Students may not have the cultural knowledge or educational background to know what is expected of them in a classroom setting (Pentón Herrera, 2022).

It is assumed that interpersonal relationships are impossible to have with a language barrier. However, SLIFE students have more success in schools with positive interpersonal relationships. Often SLIFE students are not only struggling adjusting to a new language and culture but also struggling with trauma (Pentón Herrera, 2022). This can limit their capacity and ability to focus on education (Pentón Herrera, 2022). SLIFE students need the support of positive interpersonal relationships and connections. For educators, it is known that interpersonal



relationships are imperative for students. SLIFE students can be overlooked due to language barriers, cultural barriers and fear (Pentón Herrera, 2022).

Third, SLIFE students can feel excluded in the classroom from experiencing a language barrier. Depending on the students in the classroom, not knowing the same language as the surrounding environment, can exclude them from social conversation, lessons and conversations with teachers (Pentón Herrera, 2022). When a student does not speak or understand the same language, it is difficult for an educator to gain a student's previous knowledge and understanding. It is often then assumed that the student does not have any skills (Pentón Herrera, 2022). However, when given the opportunity students are able to show their own skills and abilities learned from their own unique experiences (Pentón Herrera, 2022).

### *Misconceptions*

This section will discuss the misconceptions that preliterate students face in education and the working world. This research will provide evidence of the inequalities that preliterate students are facing and significance to the questions discussed in this capstone project. Many preliterate students face significant barriers inside and outside of the classroom.

Students that are preliterate are often excluded from certain opportunities because of their literacy skills. It is assumed by many that limited literacy skills would equate to limited knowledge and work related skills as well. “A large body of evidence has recently been compiled that suggests that many people whose literacy skills are declared too low for employment or military service may, in fact, be successful if given an opportunity to work or serve in the military” (Sticht, 1989, p. 69). In this quote, Sticht (1989) highlights two important points. One being preliterate students and people are not provided the same opportunity to work as people with some literacy skills. Secondly, when preliterate people are given the opportunity to work,

they can be successful. This information shows the importance of providing lessons for our preliterate students so they are given the opportunity to succeed.

### *Exclusion*

Some factors of exclusion in the classroom may be difficult to control, however there are some methods that educators can incorporate in the classroom to promote inclusion. “Inclusion depends on classroom climate factors as well as effective instructional strategies.”(Ruth, 2006, p. 520). These instructional classroom strategies could be seating chart placement, specific groups during group activities, choosing roles for students and changing roles, allowing every student to participate in each role. All of these options would allow for teachers to provide students with opportunities to have their voice heard in the classroom.

Many cultures continue to be excluded from schools in the U.S. The current standards required to be taught to secondary students often are leaving certain parts of history out creating less opportunities for students to feel connected to the schools (Lash, 2018). There is an absence of Latino and Asian subgroups from the curriculum that diminishes the success and contributions of these communities (Lash, 2018). The backlash of this is the decreased amount of resources educators can apply to teach Critical Multicultural Education (CME) (Lash, 2018). Without the requirement of these huge historical and cultural events, students will not be taught about the histories and cultures that may allow them to connect more to the schools. This can impact a students identity and minimize their cultural history and experience (Lash, 2018).

### *Teacher Education and Representation*

Too often teachers are only trained to teach one type of student. Each student is unique yet, most of them are taught in the same way (O'Hara & Pritchard, 2008). Teachers are not taught in their own education on how to teach in a multicultural classroom, and primarily end up teaching to the students of their own culture (O'Hara & Pritchard, 2008). The consequences of developing teaching styles that were developed for one specific type of student is a higher rate of expulsion, suspension and dropouts for minority students (Harris, 1992). A change is needed in modern educational practices in order to include more students in finding success in education.

Part of the inequity in education is due to over representation of white teachers and school leaders (Marrun, 2018). Mostly white teachers in the school, teaching through a lens of mostly white culture and therefore excluding students from relating to educational content. (Marrun, 2018). In K-12 education 80% of the teachers are white, while Students of Color represent 50% of students enrolled in school (Bitterman, Gray, and Goldring, 2014).

The impact for the students not represented directly impacts their options compared to their peer students that have been represented (Huerta, 1999). Multicultural education helps to mitigate this impact (Huerta, 1999). The consideration that teachers should be required to be educated in multicultural education is argued by multiculturalists. The reasoning for this requirement would be for educators to have the knowledge to create a more responsive and equally represented school environment. (Banks, 1995).

In order to combat this cycle of white students having more success in schools there needs to be a change to the education system in the United States. To start creating changes to the system, having an equal representation of teachers compared to the representation of the student body, would improve the experience of students. To improve the success of students in

education, more multicultural education for teachers would improve the success of all students in the classroom.

### **Positive Classroom Environment**

This section will discuss the implementation of effective teaching strategies to create a positive classroom environment. Two effective teaching strategies that promote a positive classroom environment are teaching clear-cut and captivating pedagogy, and practicing evidence-based classroom management strategies (MacSuga-Gage, Simonsen and Briere, 2012). This section will expand on methods to implement these strategies into the classroom. Secondly, this section will discuss approaches to lessen anxiety in the classroom. Implementing these strategies would assist with creating a positive classroom environment. Lastly, this section will explore the integration of culture within the classroom. A positive classroom environment positively impacts students' success in school.

#### *Pedagogy*

One method of practicing clear cut and captivating pedagogy is by strategically sequencing information or skills using sequential methods (MacSuga-Gage, Simonsen and Briere, 2012). Effective teachers ensure that all students achieve proficiency in fundamental concepts or skills before introducing more advanced topics (MacSuga-Gage, Simonsen and Briere, 2012). When students are able to build on their skills each day, they are more likely to engage with the lessons and see their own growth (MacSuga-Gage, Simonsen and Briere, 2012). They develop confidence in their abilities when teachers ensure that students are not lost in the curriculum (MacSuga-Gage, Simonsen and Briere, 2012). When lessons are sequenced in a method that builds upon a student's learning, students are more likely to engage in the lesson and

feel more confident in their abilities (MacSuga-Gage, Simonsen and Briere, 2012). When a student develops confidence, they are more likely to continue and succeed in school.

### *Management Strategies*

Another way that is possible for teachers to promote a positive classroom environment would be for teachers to have in place positive strategies to manage instruction. One simple way that teachers can do this is “First, they develop and use an attention signal to get the students attention. (e.g., teach students to look at the teacher when they raise their hand)”(MacSuga-Gage, Simonsen and Briere, 2012, p.15). This is a clear signal that communicates that the teacher is ready to instruct. This causes less yelling and frustration. This is also helpful in a multilingual and multicultural classroom because once this is explicitly taught, there is no language barrier involved and all students are able to know what to do.

A second management strategy for teachers is to create a predictable classroom environment and schedule. There are three simple strategies that teachers can use to develop predictability in the classroom. One is to structure their physical classroom environment in a way that promotes the teaching method used in that classroom (MacSuga-Gage, Simonsen and Briere, 2012). For example, if a teacher often uses the teaching strategy of “pair and share”, desks should be set in pairs so students are able to discuss. Implementing seating charts so students know where they are supposed to go and who they will be seated next to.

The second method is to establish clear and explicit daily classroom routines (MacSuga-Gage, Simonsen and Briere, 2012). Reminding students what is expected of them and following through with expectations creates less conflict in the classroom (MacSuga-Gage, Simonsen and Briere, 2012) Doing this everyday improves consistency from both teacher and students (MacSuga-Gage, Simonsen and Briere, 2012). Finally, implementing a consistent

schedule that spans across days and weeks is beneficial for students (MacSuga-Gage, Simonsen and Briere, 2012). Again, knowing what is expected of them and at what times is critical for all students. SLIFE students who have not had as much experience in schools may not be as knowledgeable on educational expectations (Pentón Herrera, 2022). Developing these classroom expectations creates consistency which is important for SLIFE students (Pentón Herrera, 2022). Consistency creates predictability in the classroom and decreases anxiety.

### *Incorporating Culture into Classroom*

An alternative approach to fostering a positive classroom environment is by creating opportunities for students to learn about the cultures represented in the classroom by incorporating individual traditions and culture (MacSuga-Gage, Simonsen and Briere, 2012). By including these opportunities to teach about culture, one is also assisting in the education of the class as a whole, as well as including families as well as creating a positive classroom environment. When students can connect to lessons and curriculum, they are more likely to invest time and effort into the lessons. Connecting state standards to culture would promote student buy in (Acuña, 2022). Providing students with the opportunity to teach about their culture through their personal experiences can have many positive impacts in the classroom. Creatively tying culture to state standards, can create a positive and engaging learning environment.

In conclusion, this section discusses the benefits of a positive classroom environment. By implementing successful lessons with beneficial sequencing, consistent classroom management strategies and incorporating culture into the classroom, can improve the classroom environment. This section included specific examples that can be incorporated into the classroom.

## **Positive Classroom Environment and Relationships**

Creating a positive classroom environment also supports home-school relationships and positive student-teacher relationships (Epstien, 1995). This section will discuss the research that shows when a school and family have communication, connection and respect for each other, students succeed more often in school (Muscott, 2008). Furthermore, when specifically students and teachers have positive relationships, students are more likely to work harder and comply with classroom management strategies (Jeffery, 2013). Home-school relationships and positive teacher-student relationships are beneficial in creating a positive classroom environment and are beneficial for all students.

### *Home-School Relationships*

Creating connections between school and home can help teachers, students and families understand what is expected of their students and help everyone facilitate and communicate throughout that student's education (Jeffery, 2013). Having those connections will help keep students motivated to do well, and create accountability for behaviors. There are many ways that teachers can include families into the education of their students. A simple option would be establishing communication home to all families at the start of the year (Muscott, 2008). Starting off with a respectful and open line of communication will improve relationships if behavior intervention is needed later in the year. There are also more complex ideas that can be beneficial in the classroom such as creating volunteer opportunities in the classroom or teaching parents how to help their students with classwork (Muscott, 2008). Although this may not be possible for all students, it would be beneficial for the overall positive classroom environment.

### *Positive Student-Teacher Relationships*

There are many benefits to developing strong, positive, student- teacher relationships. One is students are more likely to work harder in school (Cothran, Kulinna & Garragy, 2003). When a student has a connection with their teacher, they are more likely to buy into the curriculum and lessons planned (Cothran, Kulinna & Garragy, 2003). When a student is focused on the lesson, they are promoting a positive learning environment and lessening disruptive behavior in class (Cothran, Kulinna & Garragy, 2003).

Academically, it is beneficial to develop positive relationships with students in order for educators to discover what background knowledge the students might have (Linares, 2019). “It is necessary for teachers to access students’ existing repertoires of knowledge as a foundation for future learning and to teach in ways that reflect care for students’ well being and academic success”(Linares, 2019, p. 521). Positive student teacher relationships create an environment where students feel able to express their previous knowledge and their questions about the learning. Teachers benefit from this information because they are able to understand what lessons need to be taught more explicitly and what lessons that the class is able to dig deeper into (Linares, 2019).

There are two simple methods to building positive relationships, meeting a student's physical safety needs and fostering emotional well being in the classroom (Jeffery, 2013). Keeping students safe in their school environment is one of the main factors of positive teacher-student relationships (Jeffery, 2013). When students are not focused on personal safety in class, they are able to focus on the lessons. When students have positive interactions in class, for example, positive communication with other students, students have a more fulfilling experience



in school (Jeffery, 2013). Teachers should ensure that all students in the class are treated with respect and kindness by their classmates and educators (Jeffery, 2013).

Secondly, teachers should foster students' emotional well being (Jeffery, 2013). Teachers that connect with students on a personal level everyday, create stronger student- teacher relationships (Jeffery, 2013). Simple ways to connect are as simple as daily check-ins with every student. Sharing a short greeting can improve student- teacher rapport (Jeffery, 2013). When students see the actions of teachers expressing care, they feel cared for and respected (Jeffery, 2013). That caring action could be educators ensuring that all students have the materials that they need (Jeffery, 2013). Educators connecting with students and showing care in the classroom will improve student- teacher relationships (Jeffery, 2013).

In conclusion, creating a positive classroom environment and developing strong relationships between teachers, students, and families have critical roles in promoting student success and creating an effective learning environment. Research indicates that effective home-school relationships are created with communication, connection, and mutual respect, that contribute to students' success in school. Similarly, positive student-teacher relationships have numerous benefits, including increased student engagement, and academic performance. By prioritizing positive classroom environments and creating meaningful relationships, educators establish the groundwork for students' growth and educational success.

### **Multiculturalism**

This section will discuss the benefits of including multiculturalism in the classroom. There continues to be an influx of multilingual learners into the American education system. The amount has nearly doubled in the past twenty years, climbing to six million in 2020 (Faltis, 2006). In Minnesota, there were close to 73,500 EL learners in public schools in 2021

(Minnesota Department of Education, 2023). Those numbers show there is a significant amount of diversity in many schools in Minnesota. Multiculturalism is a rising theory that celebrates culture in the classroom and expands cultural knowledge. The goal of multiculturalism is to create a cohesive community where students as a whole are valued and celebrated in the classroom.

### *Past Practices*

Earlier practices of multilingual teaching have been English-only and assimilation into American culture (Lash, 2018). However, more recently there has been controversy over this theory since new theories and ideas have been researched (Lash, 2018). In the article by Lash (2018) the need for the change to different teaching methods is discussed. “Classic theories of assimilation have treated it as a process of subtraction whereby the ethnic elements of the individual are stripped away and replaced with Anglo European cultural and linguistic norms.”(Lash, 2018, p.101). By stripping a student of their cultural norms and language to assimilate to the majority culture of the school, it is detracting from their lives, the classroom and the school as a whole. In order to facilitate the growth and development of the whole student, assimilation practices are not effective (Lash, 2018).

### *Multicultural Education Theories*

New theories to best support multicultural students in school systems are known as Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT) and Critical Multicultural Education (CME)(Lash, 2018). These two theories combine cultures between the student and the school (Lash, 2018). CRT “is the belief that the degree of ethnocultural mismatch (or ethnic distance) between students and their teachers, curriculum, and school culture profoundly influences student achievement, motivation and sense of belonging to their school” (Lash, 2018, p.102). Students find more

success in school when their culture is connected to their educational experience. Critical Multicultural Education is the celebration of culture in the classroom. It is the theory of including culture into the classroom, and teaching with the intention of students developing knowledge about culture (Lash, 2018).

### *Methods to Incorporate Multiculturalism*

There are many different ways to incorporate culture into the classroom and into the curriculum. Stevens (1983) discusses cooking as a theme to express and teach culture in the classroom. “Cooking is another excellent vehicle for learning language for developing personal skills and is equally as appealing to boys and girls” (Stevens, 1983, p. 265). Food is also a staple to culture and would serve as a fun and unique experience for students to remember and share with their classmates (Stevens, 1983). To further incorporate family and classroom inclusion, students could cook family recipes throughout the year.

In addition, Stevens explores extracurricular activities as a means of imparting the school's culture to the students through hands-on experiential learning. “Each region has its own particular celebrations or festivals which can serve as special experiences for English Learners” (Stevens, 1983, p. 267). These experiences can provide students with the opportunity to practice speaking their language being learned with native speakers of that language. Stevens (1983) describes an assignment that provided students with an opportunity to speak when participating in community events (Stevens, 1983). Students were provided with a list of basic questions. Students were then required to interview three people that they met at the community event (Stevens, 1983). Having students participate in events like these would teach them the culture that is surrounding them as well as having them practice conversations with native speakers in the language being practiced. These experiences would motivate students to continue working

on their language being practices and it would provide them with necessary exposure to the new culture that they are experiencing (Stevens, 1983).

A final method to practicing multicultural teaching is explicitly teaching certain cultural norms of the school and surrounding area to multicultural students. Right now, in the U.S, multicultural students are not receiving the knowledge that they need about the U.S culture. “It is clear that there is a need to be more explicit about teaching certain unspoken American classroom rules, attitudes and behavior” (Hos, Murray-Johnson, Correia, 2019, p. 101). When students are given clear information and instructions on cultural norms and expectations, they are also given the opportunity to succeed.

### *Benefits of Multiculturalism*

The importance of creating a community and classroom that are conducive to all students in the classroom is imperative to student’s well-being and success in the world (Stevens, 2008). The lack of multiculturalism continues to be a dire issue in today’s schooling system (Stevens, 2008). We as teachers know we are bringing up the next generation of students into the world, to benefit those students and people in the world, teaching multiculturalism is a vital step. Huerta (1999) states “More importantly, multicultural education encourages the inclusion of different perspectives which critically examine what are believed to be universal truths”(p. 150, Huerta, 1999p. 150,). Teaching students that they have their own culture and explicitly teaching other cultures help students learn how to be open minded and accepting individuals. Students being able to understand multiple cultures set up for success as they enter the real world (Stevens, 2008). With the increase in immigration throughout the United States, it is vital for students to work with all different types of people in their future. They will find more success in their lives with a multicultural perspective.

When we choose to ignore cultural perspectives in learning, students are able to see the strengths in a variety of cultures alongside their own. “When the cultural backgrounds and linguistic knowledge students bring to school are considered *deficit models* there are often serious academic and psychological implications for teachers and students that lower expectations of what language minority learners can achieve” (Wong-Fillmore, 1992). When explicitly teaching students and teachers about culture, it is more likely that teachers and students will begin to understand that all linguistic knowledge is a strength. Through learning about and respecting other languages and cultures, schools strengthen their ability for all students to succeed.

Although there are many benefits to teaching through a multicultural lens, many educators are against the new methods. Huerta (2009) discusses the views of multicultural education from the staff and teachers from inside a school that was implementing multicultural education in their classrooms. “They argued that focusing on groups too heavily contributed to stereotyping. Other teacher educators felt that the examination of different ways of life, learning and perspectives was the only way to stimulate critical thinking and address educational inequities.” (Huerta, 2009, p.157). Teaching multiculturalism will set students up for success in the real world where they will likely have to work with a diverse group of people. “We all realize the majority of our students must find work in the cities where the minority students are the majority. And are we preparing our students for this? I don’t think so” (Huerta, 2009, p. 159). This quote shows the importance of not only teaching multiculturalism at schools with a high amount of diversity but also at schools that are lacking in diversity.

In conclusion, including multiculturalism in the classroom has many benefits for students and the educational system as a whole. With a steady flow of multilingual learners and SLIFE

students in the American education system, it is imperative that they are included and recognized in order to succeed in the educational system (Stevens, 2008). Due to the failure of previous assimilation tactics in education, showing a need for change. CRT and CME are new methods that are proving successful for all student achievement (Stevens, 2008). Methods to use these approaches are cooking, and participating in community days (Stevens, 1983). Creating a multicultural classroom, promotes open mindedness, acceptance and the development of critical thinking skills.

## **Literacy**

Literacy is the foundation of language and knowledge acquisition. Literacy is used in every subject in school and is critical to success in education. In this section we will define literacy as “the ability to use language and images in rich and varied forms to read, write, listen, speak, view, represent, and think critically about ideas” (Chang, 2012, p.3). In this section, the importance of literacy in academia will be discussed and methods to support the literacy of SLIFE students. There are SLIFE students that also have limited literacy skills in their first language (L1). Being an English Learner while having limited literacy skills in their L1 can add additional stress communicating and understanding school and in life. People involved in any part of academia, use their literacy skills constantly in all subjects (Windle & Miller 2010). To improve the success of SLIFE students in school, literacy assistance is needed in all classes (Windle & Miller 2010).

### *Importance of Literacy*

Literacy in education is essential to gaining knowledge and information due to literacy being embedded in all classes (Windle & Miller 2010). Furthermore, “Literacy connects individuals and communities, and is an essential tool for personal growth and active participation

in a cohesive, democratic society” (Chang, 2012, p.1). Literacy is not only essential in education but for everyday life skills (Chang, 2012). Literacy is important to a student’s general well being and future. People use their literacy skills everyday in the real and academic world. In order to help the student be successful in school and in life, literacy is crucial (Chang, 2012).

### *Graphic Novels*

One method to support literacy of SLIFE students is the incorporation of graphic novels (Chang, 2012). Graphic novels are useful because the message of the novel is being conveyed in more than just one mode, the text and the images (Chang, 2012). Graphic novels can assist in the literacy development of learners that are working towards their language and literacy goals. Secondly, graphic novels are also useful for vocabulary development, “Vocabulary development was not only through the written word but also through illustrations and the layout of the comic and graphic novel.” (Chang, 2012, p. 9). Students with low literacy in their home language will not be fully capable of learning vocabulary solely through written explanation. Having images to explain vocabulary is useful for students to gain more vocabulary in English (Chang, 2012).

### *Dialogue Journal*

Another way to promote literacy and vocabulary in the classroom is by using a dialogue journal. Linares (2019) describes a dialogue journal as “students are provided a notebook that serves as a journal in which they regularly respond to prompts provided by the teacher. The teacher collects the journals at regular intervals and responds to what students wrote”(Linares, 2019, p. 521). During the year, students and teachers would be able to evaluate the dialogue journal and be able to assess progress. From those evaluations teachers are able to assess what parts of literacy need more explanation (Linares, 2019). Incorporating a dialogue journal in class

would be beneficial for developing literacy skills and helpful for educators and students to see the progress of their teaching and education.

In conclusion, literacy is a critical role in academic success and success for personal growth and participating as a member in society. Focusing on literacy development and comprehension support, is needed for creating a pathway for SLIFE students to find success in school and in their future. Incorporating graphic novels and dialogue journals are methods that strengthen literacy skills and promote vocabulary development. By prioritizing literacy in the classroom, SLIFE students will feel more empowered to succeed in the academic world and the world beyond it.

### **Afghani Culture in Relation to Education**

This section will discuss the educational culture of Afghanistan, providing teachers with background knowledge needed to understand and support Pashtu students in education.

Background knowledge on cultural and educational norms of Afghanistan and Pashtu cultures will be included. This section will also increase understanding of the barriers literacy and gender norms in Pashtu culture. This section will further educate teachers on the complexities of Pashtu culture and barriers to education.

#### *Background Knowledge*

Pashtu people originate near the Afghanistan and Pakistan border (Tainter & MacGregor, 2011). This group of people has many different versions of the name, but most commonly known in the media as Pashtu and Pashtun. The Pashtu people make up about 40% of the Afghani population, therefore oftentimes Afghani and Pashtu are used to describe the same group of people (Tainter & MacGregor, 2011).

The Pashtu people have strong familial values, family comes before all (Tainter & MacGregor, 2011). Many Afghani men see education as an opportunity to become independent



and want to work to help their families in their futures. However, education is not seen as equally appropriate for women (Holland & Yousofi, 2014). Women are not considered equal to men (Tainter & MacGregor, 2011). Pashtu women generally do not interact with men who live outside her home (Tainter & MacGregor, 2011). With a little bit of background knowledge on Pashtun culture, more understanding is created.

### *Literacy*

In Afghanistan 70% of the population are not literate. Literacy being defined as the ability to read and write in a person's first language (Holland & Yousofi, 2014). Due to a high percentage of people in Afghanistan that are not educated, educated Afghans are considered high status. It is feared by many Afghani elders that if the youth of the country are not educated properly, history will continue to repeat itself with corrupt leaders and non-equal opportunities (Holland & Yousofi, 2014). Education is seen as an opportunity to grow and change society for the better, starting with the nuclear family. The people that are educated are less likely to follow selfish leaders and become manipulated by people of power (Holland & Yousofi, 2014). People who are not provided with opportunities to be educated are likely to become dependent on others (Holland & Yousofi, 2014). Literacy is not as common in Afghanistan than it is in Westernized countries. This is due to the attempt to keep the uneducated out of power. Preliterate students are not preliterate because they are incapable of literacy, they are preliterate because of the lack of opportunity for education in Afghanistan (Holland & Yousofi, 2014)

### *Afghani Women in Education*

In Afghani culture, women often need familial support in order to go to school to be educated. Depending on the nuclear family that a woman is born into, it can be a challenge to be supported in their education. Fathers and older brothers ultimately choose if a daughter or

younger sister goes to school. If the fathers and brothers do not agree, it could possibly break apart the family (Holland & Yousofi, 2014). In more conservative provinces, it is more common for girls not to be educated or only educated to about sixth grade (Holland & Yousofi, 2014). Pashtu provinces are considered to be more conservative areas of Afghanistan (Holland & Yousofi, 2014). Many female Pashtu students have barriers to receiving an education. As teachers, understanding these barriers is important to support students in their education and with family communication.

Some arguments in agreement with women's education are marriage, social status and changing social norms. Women that are educated are more likely to marry into high social status families. The higher the social status of a family, the more honorable the family is seen in society. When a woman marries into a high social status family, her family also climbs higher in their status. Social norms are also shifting in Afghanistan. Girls' older brothers will often argue with their fathers for their sisters' education. Women's education was once seen as dishonorable in society, now it is shifting to be seen as honorable and worthy (Holland & Yousofi, 2014). Overall, providing education to women is a changing topic in Afghanistan, women's education can be argued as bringing honor to the family.

The arguments against women's education lie in bringing dishonor to the family. Oftentimes, families do not want their daughters, sisters or nieces to go to school because of harassment in public places and lack of female only education facilities. The patriarch is seen as the head figure of the family; every action of any females in the family, are reflected on the men in the family (Holland & Yousofi, 2014). Socially, it is a risk for women to attend school. Women seen in areas that are considered for men only, like schools and businesses, are often harassed in public, bringing shame to the family (Holland & Yousofi, 2014). Lastly, having

schools that are co-gendered schools, are deemed as inappropriate. If there were schools that were only for women, education would be seen as more appropriate for women (Holland & Yousofi, 2014). Due to the lack of female education facilities and a culture of harassment of women, education is not equitable in Afghanistan (Holland & Yousofi, 2014).

In conclusion, obtaining an understanding of Afghani culture is beneficial for educators when providing instruction to Pashtun students (Pentón Herrera, Custodio, & O, L. J., 2022). This section discussed insights of the educational culture in Afghanistan, providing teachers with information to best support Pashtun students in the classroom. This section explored the complexities and barriers of education in Afghanistan and the overall feelings surrounding education in Pashtu culture.

### *Conclusion*

In conclusion, chapter two has described multiple strategies for finding the best practices for supporting and including SLIFE, preliterate, Pashtu students in secondary, Western, classrooms. Chapter two explored topics such as, challenges SLIFE students face in education, creating a positive classroom environment, positive classroom relationships, multiculturalism and Pashtu culture.

Literacy ability is a challenge that SLIFE students often face in the classroom, to combat this, teachers can scaffold assignments, to support literacy and success in the classroom (Sticht, 1989). Methods to create a positive classroom environment were explored. The major finding was fostering standards to connect with the culture of the students that make up the class (MacSuga-Gage, Simonsen and Briere, 2012).

In the next section discussed in chapter two, positive relationships, home-school and student-teacher, were found to be correlated with success of SLIFE students. In order to foster

these positive relationships, teachers should show care for their students and ensure that the students are experiencing safety at school (Jeffery, 2013). Teachers should include parents in their students' education by allowing them choice and opportunities to participate (Linares, 2019).

Next, multiculturalism was researched and determined a successful method in the classroom. Particularly for SLIFE students, multiculturalism incorporates culture into the classroom. The celebration of culture can validate a student's life experience and connect them to life in school (Huerta, 2009).

Finally, background information on Pashtu culture and Pashtu relationships with education. Understanding this knowledge will create a bridge between teacher and students (Huerta, 2009). Chapter two uncovered many methods to improve the success and inclusion of SLIFE, preliterate, Pashtu students in education.



## CHAPTER THREE

### Project Description

#### *Introduction*

I wanted to write this professional development because teachers should have the tools to include all students. Professional development builds teachers' awareness and skills needed to properly serve EL, SLIFE, Pashtu students. My first experience with Pashtu students was at a high school close to Minneapolis, Minnesota. At first few staff were aware of the Pashtu culture, language and social norms. The students had many barriers to get through when entering the school systems, and unfortunately unprepared teachers were one of them.

Many teachers expressed frustration of not knowing how to teach basic literacy to secondary students. Teachers expressed struggling developing appropriate difficulty level curriculum with appropriate content. Much of the curriculum for developing literacy is for the children ages 5-8. Using inappropriate activities and books is critical for students' self esteem and motivation to continue in their education. Using materials targeting a younger age range for adults, can feel demeaning for the student. Just like using materials targeted for high schoolers can feel too challenging and inaccessible to the young students.

#### *Participants*

The English Language Program at the high school where this project will take place, was and is mostly based around the Spanish Language. At this school the majority of the population is Hispanic at 45%, next largest being white at 27% (publicschoolreview.com, 2023). With only two Pashtu students out of the 1,127 students, Pashtu students make up about .0017% of the school's population (publicschoolreview.com, 2023). The teachers' demographics are majority white, with the second highest population identifying as hispanic. With Pashtu students being one of the smallest minority groups in the school, little is known about Pashtu culture among

students and staff. To understand a student it is important to have some understanding of their culture (Pentón Herrera, Custodio, & O, L. J., 2022).

Creating a professional development session on best practices for SLIFE, preliterate, Pashtu students in secondary Western schools would benefit the education practices of staff. Staff would be able to develop an understanding for students, and would be instructed on how to develop a positive classroom environment, helping include all students in the classroom. Teachers would be given activities for community development. Finally teachers would be instructed on strategies to help students develop literacy skills. The goal of chapter 3 is to provide activities, ideas and knowledge about how to teach SLIFE, preliterate Pashtu students in secondary Western schools.

#### *Project Description*

The goal of this professional development is to provide teachers with knowledge, resources and tools to aid in the education of preliterate Pashtun students with a SLIFE background. This professional development presentation will be broken down into three sessions: foundational knowledge of SLIFE and Pashtun needs, Multiculturalism methods, and promoting literacy. Each session will be an hour and a half long or one four hour long session. I hope to present this to every school in the district that I am currently working in and potentially at other schools or conferences. I want this professional development to be heard at many schools so teachers can feel more prepared to teach Pashtu students with SLIFE backgrounds.

#### *Foundational Knowledge of SLIFE and Pashtu Needs*

In this section of the professional development, it will include an overview of the definition of SLIFE and how SLIFE students are identified. Then this section will describe challenges that SLIFE students face in the classroom. Participants in the professional

development will complete a community building activity that is accessible, culturally relevant and low stakes. Next, an interview with two Pashtu educators will be displayed. The goal of this interview is to identify culture norms that would be relevant for classroom teachers in secondary Western schools to know about their students. Finally, participants will discuss in small groups the interview and what they were able to gain from it.

### *Multiculturalist Classroom*

This section will have an introduction and overview of multiculturalism. During the overview the benefits of multiculturalism will be provided and backed up by research. This section will also include examples of different methods incorporating multiculturalism in the classroom. Teachers will be grouped up by what they teach. Educators will have an opportunity to collaborate and discuss different strategies to incorporate multiculturalism in their classroom. The goal of this section of professional development is for teachers to have the time and community to develop methods that they can use in their classrooms.

### *Promoting Literacy*

The final section of this professional development will discuss literacy. This section will discuss the challenges due to preliterate skills and why a student might have preliterate skills. Next this section will provide examples to promote literacy skills in the classroom. Finally, there will be time for educators to work together to discuss methods to incorporate literacy skills or create activities that are accessible for students with preliterate skills. The objective of this section will be to create empathy for students that are still developing literacy skills.

### *Setting*

This professional development was created with the school that I currently teach at and the students I currently teach in mind. I work at a school just outside of Minneapolis. During the



past 10 years, the school has seen a difference in their demographics. There has been an increase in Spanish speaking students as well as students new to the country. This school serves about 1,100 students at the high school level. In 2023, at the high school, 261 students out of the 1,100 students are English Language Learners. Approximately 23% of the population are identified as ELL (English Language Learners), with the majority first language (L1) being Spanish (ellevationeducation.com, 2023). There is also an alternative high school, a special education school, one middle school and four elementary schools. The other schools in the district also reflect these numbers, about  $\frac{1}{4}$  of the population of each of the schools are English Language Learners (ellevationeducation.com, 2023). This professional development is created with high school level students in mind, but can be useful for all the schools to learn from.

The English Language department at the high school consists of five teachers that are solely dedicated to the English Language development of the ELL students. They use a variety of methods to assist the needs of the students. For the English language learners at the 3-4 level on the WIDA scale, EL teachers co teach classes like English to help strengthen the academic vocabulary of our ELL students. When students reach the 3-4 level, they are placed in classes with the general education students. This positively impacts EL students' self esteem, and increases opportunity to practice social English.

For the students that are at level 1-2 on the WIDA scale or new to the country, teachers have their own classes to facilitate the growth of speaking, writing, reading and listening in English. For content classes that are not language focused like math and science, ELL teachers co teach with science and math teachers in sheltered classes. The school is conscious of Spanish speaking students. The school has a Latin dance club every Wednesday, all the fliers and announcements are described in both Spanish and English, there are social studies and math

classes that are taught just in Spanish. The school generally chooses staff that are bilingual in Spanish and in English to support Spanish speakers. This is progressive and helpful for our Spanish speaking students, however, can leave speakers of other languages out. The need to educate teachers with supportive practices for all students is high.

The rolling number of students in the ELL program at all the schools in the district is constantly increasing. Increasing the needs to implement classroom inclusion for all students. All schools in the district will have access to the resources and materials provided by this professional development.

### *Timeline*

This professional development will be ready to present by Fall of 2023. I began the development of these presentations with the research that I have studied in the Spring of 2023. I have also been working with SLIFE, Pashtu students since the spring of 2022. I have learned from my own mistakes, my own attempts at creating an inclusive classroom for my Pashtu SLIFE students. It has been relevant to my need for knowledge as a professional and as a student. Any information that I have researched, found or studied is included in both my teaching career and my career as a student, has been included in this capstone project, resulting in this professional development. The goal of this professional development is to educate teachers on what Pashtu culture is, the different assets and needs of these students, and best practices to support including all students into the classroom. The goal is to provide teachers with materials that they will easily be able to incorporate into their classroom.

In choosing the format to relay this information to members of the district, I wanted it to be an authentic and open conversation. I wanted teachers to be able to learn from each other and ask questions that they may not have had the opportunity to ask before. I wanted teachers that

teach the same classes to be able to work together and find ways in which they can adjust their new learnings into their current classroom and curriculum.

Secondly, as a white teacher with little experience with Pashtu culture, I wanted to incorporate voices of the Pashtu community. Therefore, recording interviews with Pashtu teachers that describe in detail Pashtu culture were included. This interview also helped create a connection between the schools and the Pashtu community. Knowing that community and home life connections support students educationally, a connection is imperative to the success of Pashtu students.

Third, I want to provide a space for teachers to think about their classroom procedures, practices and community and find where it can be limited for SLIFE, Pashtun students. I want teachers to be able to have time to work with the materials that are provided to recreate some classroom activities and norms that would include SLIFE, preliterate Pashtun students in their classroom.

### *Framework and Research*

This framework for this capstone is centered around the best practices on adult learners from the research of Aguilar (2013). The framework of this capstone is also centered around Gillham (2005) in reference to their research in conducting appropriate interviews. Aguilar and Gillham have supported the research of adult learners with authentic conversation and specific listening strategies.

I am incorporating in the creation of this professional development is The Consultancy Protocol (Aguilar, 2013). In this protocol there are a series of steps that help people process a problem or dilemma (Aguilar, 2013). The goal of this protocol is to listen and understand a variety of perspectives to unmask potential solutions. The focus on The Consultancy Protocol

will be about teachers receiving a new student in their classroom that does not speak English and does not have literacy skills (Aguilar, 2013). To assist with the consultancy protocol, a fishbowl discussion will take place.

The goal of the fishbowl discussion is for teachers to be able to express their ideas, thoughts and concerns about how to include these students in their classroom (Aguilar, 2013). Aguilar's strategy of The Consultancy Protocol will allow teachers to voice their feelings and prior knowledge on this topic allowing me to adapt my following professional development to meet the group where they are (Aguilar, 2013) By using this method during professional development, I hope to facilitate an authentic conversation where teachers can focus on identifying solutions and ideas that benefit SLIFE, preliterate, Pashtu students.

Another method from Aguliar that will be incorporated into the professional development that I am creating is coaching through conversation (Aguilar, 2013). During this professional development I want to be able to hear from the teachers in the group. I want to hear questions they have, concerns and experiences. In order to do that effectively, I need to personally keep an open mind and be flexible to the possibility that everytime I present this professional development, it will be different. In order to lead this conversation effectively, I will need to listen to my own listening (Aguilar, 2013). Paying close attention to how I am listening and processing the information before responding. Allowing for wait time for both myself and the other participants in the conversation is critical for thoughtful and problem solving conversation.

I am also implementing the work of Gillham (2005) for my professional development due to their work in researching methods for conducting interviews. Since I conducted interviews with Pashtu educators in the community, with translators and cultural differences, reading Gillham's research was crucial. One may think that conducting interviews would be as simple as

a series of questions and answers, like I myself was before I began this research. However, there are many different strategies, with different pros and cons that are discussed in Gillham's work.

The first strategy that I will be implementing in my own interview is the semi structured interview. This type of interview allows for specific questions to always be asked, specific time limit and the ability to probe (Gillham, 2005). Probing is the method of the interviewer to ask more specific questions, when implied or suggested. This type of interview will allow me to plan and also flexible space to allow the conversation to flow more naturally. Having an outline for this type of interview and sharing it with the person I am interviewing, will be helpful when conducting the interview.

Using a semi structured interview will also allow for a post interview analysis of the questions. This type of interview will require transcriptions of the interview. Based on the type of responses from the interview I can analyze what questions need to be rephrased or issues with translation or if the interview is lasting far beyond the time frame needed (Gillham, 2005). With that information I would be able to perfect the conduction of the interview.

### *Researcher Positionality*

I recognize my positionality, as a white, middle class woman. I have spent all of my schooling in a Westernized educational system, specifically in schools that were predominantly white. I acknowledge my positionality comes with privilege. In this Westernized educational system literacy, reading and writing, are heavily embedded into everyday activities and are necessary for succeeding in schools. In Westernized school literacy is the key to success, however, this is not the same in all school systems. I acknowledge that I do not have the knowledge of what life without literacy is like. I do not know what it is like to come to a new country without any experience with formal education. I do not know what it feels like to go to a

place where communication is dependent on interpreters and pictures. I have never been a part of a culture that passes on knowledge and traditions orally. Both of these experiences, orally or written, are important to communities. Due to these differences, teachers need to alter their teaching strategies to help scaffold literacy for these learners. I am researching this topic to find the best practices for including and supporting SLIFE, preliterate, Pashtu students in secondary, Western classrooms.

### *Conclusion*

Chapter three discussed the basic overview of this capstone project. This included what the project is, where the project will take place, who it will be for and what the hoped outcome is. The goal is to offer support in answering the question: what are the best practices to supporting and including SLIFE, preliterate, Pashtun students in secondary Western schools?

Chapter three gave an outline and a timeline of the professional development that will take place and the importance of having a professional development on this topic. Furthermore, in chapter three I discussed my reflection on my positionality in relation to this research. My background and positionality in the world impacts my research in many ways and in many ways I am still discovering. Chapter four includes information on what was discovered throughout the capstone process, important information researched in the literature review, implications of best practices, limitations from the study and research, and finally, final recommendations for future research on this topic.

In conclusion, chapter three provides an outline of the professional development on the topic of supporting SLIFE, preliterate, Pashtu students in secondary, Western, classrooms. This chapter highlights the importance of educating teachers with the essential tools and background knowledge to create an inclusive and multicultural learning environment. During the professional

development, teachers' voices and concerns will be discussed as well as solutions to challenges in the classroom. This chapter provided insights to the demographics of the school where the project will be implemented. Furthermore, chapter three discusses the framework and research of adult education used by Aguilar (2013). Also included is Gillam's (2005) strategies for conducting interviews. Finally, this chapter acknowledges the positionality of the research and the importance of recognizing one's privilege. Overall, chapter three provided an overview of the professional development project, setting the stage for further research in chapter four.





## CHAPTER FOUR

### Conclusions

During my experience, teaching English as a second language in a high school classroom, I have seen a need for knowledge on the best practices to support and include SLIFE (Students with Limited or Interrupted Formal Education), preliterate, Pashtu students into the classroom. I witnessed SLIFE, preliterate, Pashtu students struggle through the Western education system with language barriers, culture shock and preliterate skills. With few supports for students and teachers to rely on, the system in place was and is ineffective.

In my own school setting, I was the lone support for SLIFE, preliterate, Pashtu learners. Unfortunately, I was uneducated on the best practices for my students. I felt lacking cultural knowledge, knowledge of literacy, and knowledge of including SLIFE, preliterate, Pashtu students into the classroom. I was not the only staff member that had this feeling, wanting to help but not knowing how. This led me to this capstone project question, *how can educators promote literacy? How can educators model the celebration of each students' native culture and create a positive classroom environment? Ultimately, what are the best practices for supporting and including SLIFE, preliterate, Pashtu students in the classroom?*

Chapter four focuses on the reflections from the capstone project. During this chapter, I will reflect on the capstone process and the key learning points that were acquired. Furthermore, Chapter four will revisit the greatest learnings, the most beneficial research for my professional development that were found in the literature review. Chapter four will then go on to discuss the limitations and implications of the research conducted. This section of the chapter will discuss who this project will benefit and how? How will this project impact decision makers in school buildings? And what were the limitations of this project? Finally, Chapter four will end with the

discussion about conducting further research or projects, how this project will be conducted and who will benefit, as well as a final conclusion of the project.

### *Reflections on the Capstone Process*

This capstone project has been a long, winding road, filled with many roadblocks and excitement in overcoming every obstacle. I was new to teaching when I started the program for Masters in Education for Teaching Speakers of Other Languages. I did not know yet how much of an impact students could make on a teacher. Shortly after I began teaching, the school I taught in experienced an influx of Pashtu immigrants. The new Pashtu students were entering a Western education program, and were also the only Pashtun speakers in the building. The teachers were given little information about their experience and background. When we began teaching we discovered many of our Pashtu students came from a SLIFE background and were preliterate. With this new discovered information, I felt unprepared as their educator.

I knew that I was not the only educator in the school that felt like this. As educators in a Western classroom, we had not been educated on the best practices to support SLIFE and preliterate students in the classroom. I experienced first hand the need for support that the teachers and students needed. The new Pashtu students had an immense will to learn, and I also noticed their frustration when teachers and staff did not have the correct education or support to provide the education they deserved. After connecting with the students and spending months feeling like I was failing, I knew I had to do more.

At this time I had started my first capstone course and I began developing a question. The first topic that popped into my mind was about my Pashtu students. How can I help secondary Pashtu students in education? There were many more questions that spewed around this. I was not sure how I was going to specify this topic. As I wrote chapter one, I felt a lot of passion for

this topic. I felt and feel like this project is very important for Pashtu students and the need for more education for teachers. Chapter one was my favorite part of the paper portion of my project. I felt the most able to be myself and express the need for this topic.

Chapter two was the chapter I found most challenging to write. I had some experience in writing a literature review during my undergrad, however some time has passed since then. I felt out of practice and unorganized. This chapter took a lot of time and focus on being organized and finding the most important pieces of information to help Pashtu students in secondary classrooms. Through many drafts and peer reviewing, I was able to develop chapter two with relevant information and research for this topic

I enjoyed chapter three as a method to really hone in on the ideas of how I wanted to present this information and who I wanted to present it to. As I thought about my project, I thought about who I wanted as my target audience, which was educators. I wanted teachers to be able to know about these topics as well as have specific tools that they would be able to use in their classrooms. Therefore, I decided to create a professional development for secondary educators. I chose this method of communication because teachers are required to participate in professional development hours. Also using the method of professional development, teachers are able to learn with each other and from each other in group discussions.

During the professional development, I wanted there to be time allotted for teachers to think about their own curriculum and how they can incorporate their new learnings into it. I wanted teachers to be able to go from professional development and create changes in their classroom based on the information that they learned in the professional development. I also wanted educators to be able to use each other as learning partners. During the professional

development, group conversation by subject matter will be included so teachers can bounce different ideas or solutions off each other.

I also knew that I wanted to include a Pashtu educator. I am not Pashtu, I do not feel comfortable teaching others about Pashtu culture, when a Pashtu person would be a much more experienced and reliable cultural educator. This, I believe, is vital to my presentation. Therefore I decided to incorporate an interview with Pashtu educators in the community. I wanted the interview to be seen during the presentation so I asked for permission to record the conversation to be shared and reflected on.

In conclusion, the capstone process has been challenging, rewarding and educational. I learned more about who my students are and how to help them in secondary Western schools. I am proud of the work that I have done and excited to bring this project to life. With help from peer reviews and professors, I was able to overcome obstacles and find some answers to my question, *what are the best practices for supporting and including SLIFE, preliterate, Pashtu students in secondary, Western, schools ?*

### *Revisiting the Literature*

When revisiting the literature review, there are several references and researchers that played a vital role in the creation of this capstone project. I found Huerta (1999), Lash, (2018) and O'Hara & Pritchard (2008) useful in the description of challenges and recommendations to accommodate SLIFE students and often referenced this work in my projects. Huerta (1999) discusses the trauma that SLIFE students can carry with them and teaching strategies that can create an inclusive classroom environment. Lash (2018) discusses how literacy ability can impact the inclusion of students in the classroom. Finally O'Hara & Pritchard (2008) describe

the need for a multicultural classroom. All of this information together was a large part of my literature review.

Another section in the literature review that became a larger part of the project was about methods to incorporate into a positive classroom environment. Research from MacSuga–Gage, et al. (2012) Jeffery (2013) and Kulinna and Garragy (2003) is often referenced when describing positive classroom environment practices. MacSuga–Gage, et al. (2012) researched the impact of a positive classroom environment on student achievement, showing the importance of incorporating positive classroom environments. Research from Jeffery (2013) discussed the impact of positive student-teacher relationships and methods to achieve positive student- teacher relationships . Finally, Kulinna and Garragy (2003) research shows students are more likely to learn and be less disruptive in class with positive student- teacher relationships.

Also I referenced the research from Holland and Yousofi (2014) and Tainter and MacGregor (2011) to inform the audience about literacy and Pashtu culture. Holland & Yousofi (2014) research describes the educational culture in Afghanistan and among different cultural groups. This research discusses rates of literacy in Afghanistan. The research from Tainter & MacGregor (2011) describes significant cultural traditions and norms that are beneficial for Westernized teachers to understand.

### *Implications*

I believe that this project will have some positive implications for teachers, students and administrators. One implication that could transpire from this project is teachers and administrators understanding more about Pashtu students. Understanding more and being aware of cultural differences would be beneficial for the school environment. Teachers will also learn how to create a classroom environment that is beneficial to all students and incorporates culture.

Further implications are the benefits for SLIFE and students from all literacy levels. In this professional development, educators will learn strategies to develop literacy and methods to be inclusive to students with all levels of literacy. This would improve the education of SLIFE and students with varying levels of literacy.

Beyond these implications there is the possibility of this professional development to be presented at many school districts. This could make a difference in the education of teachers throughout many schools and would answer unknowns to teachers that are struggling with the same challenges I was overcoming before I began this project. There needs to be new regulations set in place, such as a cultural liaison or interpreter for students that are SLIFE or preliterate. There needs to be more assistance and time available to provide the best education for SLIFE, preliterate, Pashtu students.

### *Limitations*

There are some large limitations to this project. One limitation is that the researcher and creator of this project is not Pashtu. I do not have the experience and background to be considered an expert in Pashtu culture. In the research project, I provided information about Pashtu culture that I found important for educators.

Another limitation of this project is that this is only a small step to meet the needs of Pashtu students in secondary, Western, schools. This project was created to be small, simple methods that teachers would be able to incorporate into their classrooms themselves.

### *Future Plans*

In the future, this project as described in chapter three will be used to educate the staff at a proposed high school with an increasing number of SLIFE, preliterate, Pashtu students. By providing this professional development, teachers will learn about Pashtu culture, methods to

include and support multicultural students and how to create a positive classroom environment. This professional development will be used to help teachers include and support SLIFE, preliterate, Pashtu students into their classrooms. This professional development can be presented at many schools and can be beneficial to many educators and students.

### *Conclusion*

In conclusion, this capstone project shows the need for improvement in supporting and including, SLIFE, preliterate, Pashtu students in secondary schools. Through my experiences teaching English as Second Language in a high school, I have seen the challenges that students and teachers face in schools, language barriers, culture shock and limited literacy. This personal experience and realization of my own limitations led me to formulate the question *what are the best practices for supporting and including SLIFE, preliterate, Pashtu students in secondary, Western, schools?*

As I completed my capstone project there were many obstacles that I had to overcome but I found passion and excitement every step of the way. My literature review provided valuable research from researchers like Huerta (1999), Lash (2018), O'Hara and Pritchard (2008), and others that created a solid foundation for my recommendations and information for the professional development.

The implications of this project are benefiting teachers and students by providing cultural knowledge and promoting strategies for literacy development and an inclusive classroom environment. There is potential for this professional development to be shared across school districts and can lead to positive changes in the educational system. Moving forward I plan on bringing this professional development to a chosen high school.

In conclusion, this capstone project has been a journey of learning and self discovery. Through all of the challenges the hope of this project is to benefit the education of SLIFE, preliterate, Pashtu students in the classroom. Professional development for teachers is necessary for SLIFE, preliterate, Pashtu students to be more successful in schools.



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