

Serving ELLs With Limited or Interrupted Education: Intervention That Works

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This article reports on the results of a 5-month intervention in one high school class of English language learners (ELLs) with limited or interrupted formal education using an instructional model developed by the authors. These students are a challenging group for educators, especially at the high school level because they must master content knowledge and develop English language and literacy in a relatively short amount of time. Furthermore, they must also learn how to participate effectively in U. S. schools, institutions with their own culture and culturally based assumptions. The two research questions of this study were: How could the implementation of the instructional model assist this subpopulation of ELLs in the development of literacy and academic thinking? Would the implementation of the model improve the engagement and participation of these students? Findings indicate that through the implementation of this instructional model, the teacher in this study was able to facilitate students' transition to the U.S. educational system. Classroom observations and analysis of student work revealed that students were participating more actively in their learning and had developed increased facility with both print and academic-style thinking.

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Over the past decade, the United States has welcomed record numbers of immigrants. Of these immigrants, 10.8 million have been school-age children, leading to more than double the number of English language learners (ELLs) in U.S. schools between 1990

and 2005 (Padolsky, 2005). With these large increases in school-age ELLs, there has also been an attendant increase in the subpopulation of ELLs with limited or interrupted formal schooling. This subpopulation, which has experienced interrupted education due to war, civil unrest, migration, or other factors, is frequently referred to as *students with interrupted formal education* (SIFE). However, some of these so-called SIFE are students who never had the opportunity to participate in any type of schooling before entering school in the United States. Others may have been enrolled in school in their home countries for the same number of years as their U.S. peers but experienced limited education, whether due to lack of resources, trained teachers, the type of schooling they participated in, or other circumstances (Gallegos, 2005; Suárez-Orozco, 2004). Therefore, DeCapua, Smathers, and Tang (2009) have proposed that these ELLs be identified instead as *students with limited or interrupted formal education* (SLIFE), the acronym we use here.

This subpopulation of ELLs is particularly challenging for educators, especially at the high school level, where students have a relatively short time to develop English language proficiency while simultaneously developing literacy skills and catching up in academic content knowledge (DeCapua, Smathers, & Tang, 2007; Freeman & Freeman, 2002). Moreover, because of their limited exposure to Western-style education, SLIFE need to learn how to participate effectively in U.S. schools, institutions with their own culture and culturally based assumptions (Chavajay & Rogoff, 2002; Needham, 2003).

The literature on ELLs at risk is replete with recommendations and model programs. Most often cited as especially effective with SLIFE are the following (see, e.g., DeCapua et al., 2009; Echevarria, Vogt, & Short, 2008; Freeman & Freeman, 2002; García, 1991; Gay, 2000; González, Moll, & Amanti, 2005; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Mace-Matluck, Alexander-Kasparik, & Queen, 1998; Moll & Greenberg, 1990; Ruiz-de-Velasco, Fix, & Clewell, 2000; Short & Boyson, 2004; Walsh, 1999):

- *Grouping strategies*: small-group instruction, collaborative work, and differentiated instruction
- *Strategy training*: development of cognitive and metacognitive learning strategies

- *Supports for tasks and content*: scaffolding, sheltered content courses
- *Curriculum design*: theme-based models, academically challenging material with language modifications
- *Cultural orientations*: culturally relevant content or *funds of knowledge* and culturally responsive teaching

Despite the existing research on pedagogy and model programs, many educators remain unsure of how best to address the needs of SLIFE. Through classroom observation and mentoring teachers, we have identified reasons why SLIFE may not succeed, despite these excellent recommendations and strategies. We argue that these are only pieces of a larger puzzle. What is needed is an overall reconceptualization of the education of SLIFE. It is this broader perspective, or framework, that our instructional model provides by helping educators frame their instruction using this population's ways of learning and knowing in order to educate them. Our primary goal in developing this model was to assist teachers in understanding key cultural factors and aspects of formal education needed by SLIFE so that they can access the language and content needed for effective academic participation. The purpose of this exploratory study was to work with a teacher of SLIFE to implement this new educational model. Specifically, the study focused on two research questions:

1. How could the implementation of this instructional model assist SLIFE in the development of literacy and academic thinking?
2. Would the implementation of the model improve the engagement and participation of SLIFE?

BACKGROUND

Contrasting Views of Learning

Learning may be viewed as a cluster of culturally determined schemata consisting of the conditions, processes, and activities commonly expected in an instructional setting (August, Goldenberg, & Rueda, 2006; Heller & Martin-Jones, 2001; Needham, 2003). These expectations derive from cultural assumptions that are, for the most part, below the level of conscious awareness (DeCapua & Wintergerst, 2004). Because they are developed through the process of enculturation (i.e., becoming a participating member of

one's culture or subculture), people generally do not realize that their assumptions may differ greatly from those of others (Cole, 1998; Hall, 1976). Western-style education has its own set of assumptions about learning that contrast with those of people who have not participated in such an education, regardless of race and ethnicity (Chavajay & Rogoff, 2002; Spring, 2008). Schools as institutions reflect the beliefs and values of the dominant culture. In U.S. schools, these include the belief that educators should help students become independent learners, that students must be individually accountable for their work, and that learning prepares students for the future (DeCapua & Marshall, 2009; Gollnick & Chin, 2006; Marshall, 1998; Marshall & DeCapua, 2009).

Participation in a Western-style model of education, with its emphasis on critical thinking skills and the primacy of literacy, develops an academic way of understanding and interpreting the world based on abstract, scientific models of thinking (Flynn, 2007; Rogoff, 2003). Those who have not participated in such an educational model have cognitively different ways of understanding and interpreting the world, ways that rely on practical and functional frames of reference (Flynn, 2007). SLIFE, who have not fully partaken in Western-style schooling, may come into the U.S. schooling context with this different learning paradigm. They have a great deal of knowledge about daily living; they have different priorities and different, nonacademic ways of perceiving and construing the world around them; and they are used to seeing learning as being of immediate benefit or relevance (for more discussion, see DeCapua & Marshall, 2009). When SLIFE enter U.S. schools, they are confronted with a contrasting way of approaching learning and organizing knowledge.

Collectivism and Individualism

Another essential factor to consider is the individualistic-collectivistic dimension, which refers to the relative importance cultures place on the individual versus the group. The SLIFE in this study come from collectivistic cultures that heavily emphasize group relationships and responsibilities. For members of such cultures, maintaining and fostering social relationships, or interconnectedness, is more important than individual achievements,

wants, and desires. In an individualistic culture, on the other hand, the focus is on one’s own accomplishments and self-actualization (DeCapua & Wintergerst, 2004; Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005; Triandis, 1995).

U.S. mainstream culture, and by extension the U.S. educational system, emphasizes individual accomplishments, satisfaction, and achievement (Rothstein-Fisch, Trumbull, Isaac, Daley, & Pérez, 2003). In light of these factors, we can expect that the learning paradigm of the SLIFE in this study, who come from collectivistic cultures, will differ from the prevalent learning paradigm expected in U.S. schools, leading to a sense of cultural dissonance (Ibarra, 2001). Although this collectivistic-individualistic distinction is not truly a dichotomy, but a continuum, it is useful in understanding cultural differences in the enactment and perception of social relationships and personal achievements.

MUTUALLY ADAPTIVE LEARNING PARADIGM

The Mutually Adaptive Learning Paradigm (MALP; see Figure 1), the instructional model implemented in this study, directly addresses the cultural dissonance encountered by SLIFE. It is mutually adaptive because it combines elements of the SLIFE learning paradigm with elements of the U.S. formal educational learning paradigm, thereby facilitating the transition for SLIFE to school settings (DeCapua & Marshall, 2009; Marshall, 1998).

Components of MALP	Learning Paradigm: SLIFE	Learning Paradigm: U.S. Schools
Accept conditions from SLIFE	Immediate relevance Interconnectedness	Future relevance Independence
Combine processes from SLIFE and U.S. schools	Shared responsibility Oral transmission	with with Individual accountability Written word
Focus on U.S. learning activities with familiar language and content	Pragmatic tasks	Academic tasks

Figure 1. The Mutually Adaptive Learning Paradigm (MALP)

Source: Adapted from Marshall & DeCapua, 2009.

First, teachers need to accept those conditions that are essential for SLIFE in the classroom. In the middle column, the top shaded box shows the two major conditions that SLIFE need: immediate relevance and interconnectedness. Generally members of collectivistic cultures, SLIFE look for interconnectedness in the classroom setting and for some immediate benefit from the lessons themselves. Teachers need to accept these conditions for learning and make every effort to establish and maintain them in the classroom.

Second, to transition SLIFE, teachers need to combine processes from the students' learning paradigm with those of the predominant U.S. learning paradigm. This is illustrated by the middle shaded box in Figure 1. SLIFE tend to think in terms of shared responsibility and seek to collaborate, and help each other learn, rather than focus on individual accomplishment and accountability; however, the U.S. educational system ultimately demands individual accountability, especially on assessments. Following MALP, teachers incorporate both shared and individual responsibility routinely. In addition, teachers need to facilitate the transition from learning through oral transmission to learning from the written word. Although in U.S. schools instruction is often delivered orally, students must still demonstrate the ability to derive meaning from print and express understanding using print. SLIFE bring a primary reliance on oral transmission as a means for learning; therefore, teachers need to bridge oral and written modes consistently. It is not sufficient merely to present material in both modes. This bridging requires building in redundancy and encoding speech to be memorable so as to promote retention (Ong, 1982; Shuter, 1985). Moreover, the oral and written need to be continuously connected so that SLIFE learn to derive meaning from print.

Third, to promote academic thinking, teachers need to focus on academic tasks, indicated by the shaded box in the right-hand column in Figure 1. Because SLIFE bring pragmatic ways of thinking to the task of learning but are new to academic ways of thinking, teachers should focus directly on academic tasks that help these students develop their critical thinking skills. These tasks should be scaffolded by using familiar language and content so as not to overwhelm SLIFE. We argue that, taken together, these three components of MALP create a classroom setting that facilitates the

transition to the U.S. educational system for students unfamiliar with its norms and expectations.

METHOD

Here we present the results of a 5-month qualitative study on the use of MALP in a high school SLIFE program.

Participants

A total of 16 students participated in some part of the 5-month intervention. The students ranged in age from 15 to 20, with the majority 18–19 years old. They came from rural areas in the Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Guatemala, and Haiti. Regarding their prior education, data were unavailable for four students; five had attended only elementary school; four had attended at least some middle school; and three had had some high school. It is important to note that the three with some high school education were Haitian and had attended severely overcrowded schools lacking even basic resources with few well-trained teachers (Haitian school–community liaison, personal communication, December 5, 2008).

For all the SLIFE, the exact years of schooling and quality of prior education were not easy to determine because school records were often missing, incomplete, or suspect (ESL Department Chair, personal communication, October 8, 2008). In interviews, the students described their school experiences, but we were warned that this information was not necessarily accurate. For example, some SLIFE feel embarrassed or even ashamed of their lack of education because school is not always affordable, even if available in their home countries (school–community liaison, personal communication, December 5, 2008).

Of the students in this group, eight were listed as enrolled SLIFE for the entire 5-month period, four enrolled a month or more into the intervention, three dropped out before the intervention ended, and one was expelled. Regarding attendance, of the total number of school days included in the intervention (83), six students attended at least 70% of the time; all but one of these were among those enrolled for the entire 5 months. Attendance of the other students was sporadic or partial based on their late start, early withdrawal, or personal factors. Patterns emerged, such as students leaving

school to work full-time (four) and students missing school for the 2 weeks immediately after the winter holiday (six). The data show the wide variation in participation by these students and underscore the difficulty of serving this population (see Table 1).

The Teacher

The teacher, Christina,¹ had a master's degree in TESOL and state certification. She had been an ESL instructor at North Randolph High School for 9 years and, in addition to her regular ESL classes, had been teaching SLIFE for 5 years when the study began.

Setting

North Randolph High School is a suburban school located in a racially and economically diverse county about 30 miles northwest of New York City. There are approximately 1,600 students in the school: 40% African American, 25% Haitian, 16% Hispanic, 10% Caucasian, and 9% Asian. Seventy-five percent of all students receive free or reduced-price lunches.

SLIFE Program

At this school, the SLIFE program was freestanding under the aegis of the ESL/Foreign Languages Department. SLIFE were in a self-contained class for all subjects, and three teachers taught in the program: an ESL teacher, a math and science teacher, and an ESL/U.S. history teacher. The Spanish-speaking students also had one period of Native Language Arts.

Placement in the SLIFE program was based on a combination of factors, including available records; a writing sample, either in English, the native language, or both; self- or family reports; and school-community liaisons' familiarity with the type and quality of school students previously attended.

Data

This exploratory study drew on data from three sources: classroom observations, interviews, and student work. The classroom observations consisted of our visiting Christina's ESL/U.S. history

¹All names used in this article are pseudonyms.

TABLE 1. Enrollment and Attendance of SLIFE Class During Intervention, October 2008–February 2009

Name	Age	Country	Prior Education *	Joined Intervention Late or Early	Total Number		Percentage Participation Based on Number of Days Enrolled	Participation Out of 83 Days of Intervention
					of Days Attended During Intervention	of Days Enrolled During Intervention		
Edouard	19	Haiti	Some HS		77	83	92.8%	92.8%
Ana	16	El Salvador	Some MS		73	83	88.0%	88.0%
Claude	19	Haiti	Some HS		68	83	81.9%	81.9%
Beatriz	18	Guatemala	ES		64	83	77.1%	77.1%
Melisa	16	Dominican Republic	Some MS		61	83	73.5%	73.5%
Sergio	15	Guatemala	ES		51	83	61.4%	61.4%
José	Uncertain	Guatemala	Unknown		47	83	56.6%	56.6%
Yolanda	15	Guatemala	MS		45	83	54.2%	54.2%
Pierre	20	Haiti	ES	Dropped out Feb.—Job	62	83	74.7%	74.7%
Jaime	19	Guatemala	Unknown	Dropped out Feb.—Job	42	68	61.8%	50.6%
Junie	19	Haiti	Some HS	Dropped out Feb.—Job	35	68	51.5%	42.2%
Polycarpe	19	Haiti	ES	Expelled Feb.	23	68	33.8%	27.7%
Emilio	Uncertain	Guatemala	Some ES	Enrolled Nov. 10, dropped out Feb.—Job	22	61	36.1%	26.5%
Jorge	19	El Salvador	Some MS	Enrolled Dec. 9	33	49	67.3%	39.8%
Juan	18	Guatemala	Unknown	Enrolled Jan. 12	28	28	100.0%	33.7%
Jesus	18	Guatemala	Unknown	Enrolled Jan. 12	23	28	82.1%	27.7%

*According to the Haitian school–community liaison, the high schools the Haitian SLIFE had attended in Haiti had few resources, were extremely overcrowded, and were not comparable to a U.S. high school (personal communication, December 5, 2008).

Note: SLIFE = students with limited or interrupted formal education; HS = high school; MS = middle school; ES = elementary school.

classes 10 times, taking extensive field notes each time. The method of analysis for the field notes was our MALP Checklist (see Appendix), which is based on the three components of our MALP instructional model. After each observation, we met with Christina to review the checklist and to exchange feedback about the implementation of the model.

To obtain background information about the students, the SLIFE program, and educational systems of the students' home countries, we interviewed the ESL/Foreign Languages Department chair and school–community liaisons. Our third source was student work, including webquests, PowerPoint presentations, and graphic organizers such as Venn diagrams, bar graphs, and KWL (know–want to know–learned) charts. Using MALP as a framework, we examined these data for evidence that the teacher was fully implementing the model and that the students were generating products showing development of literacy skills and academic thinking.

Procedures

The intervention reported here took place from October 2008 through February 2009. We first spent a school day shadowing SLIFE. Due to logistical and time constraints, we decided to work with only one of the three teachers of SLIFE, Christina, the ESL/U.S. history teacher.

The intervention began with two half days of professional development. The first session provided theoretical background and an overview of the basic principles underlying the MALP instructional model. The second session focused on examining previous activities created using this model and assisting Christina in planning her first series of activities. Once these initial steps had been taken, we observed Christina regularly, approximately every 2 weeks. During these 10 observations, we documented classroom activities as well as student–teacher and student–student interactions. The purpose was to gather insights into classroom dynamics and student engagement within the framework of qualitative research (Dörnyei, 2007).

After we greeted the students, we functioned as nonparticipant observers, sitting off to the side of the classroom. On occasion we

would circle the room, especially when SLIFE were in the computer lab, to observe the students more closely. We met with Christina the days of the observations to discuss lesson delivery, student response and engagement, difficulties, successes, upcoming lessons, and the students themselves. In addition to the face-to-face interactions, we exchanged e-mails with Christina whenever questions or concerns arose or she had new information to report regarding instruction or students.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In reporting the data, we first analyze Christina's teaching style before and during the intervention, and then examine the two research questions in light of the intervention.

Before the Intervention

The following is from field notes taken during one of the initial visits to the U.S. history class. In this class session, Christina was conducting a lesson on U.S. symbols:

She begins the lesson by asking the students if they remember the national symbols they talked about the day before: the flag, the bald eagle, and the Statue of Liberty. For the lesson, Christina has prepared a PowerPoint presentation with a slide of these symbols and asks them, "Do you remember what these symbols mean?" When the students do not respond, she says, "OK, we're going to review them. First, tell me what a symbol is." No response. "Can you give me an example?" Jaime responds, reading from his notebook, "Something that represent something else." The teacher says, "Right. Here's my water bottle (holding it upside down and pointing), and on the bottom is the symbol for recycling." She next shows a slide of the U.S. flag and tells them what the stars mean, what the stripes mean, and what the colors symbolize. After this, she looks at one student, Melisa, and asks, "Do you have any colors on your flag that represent something?" Silence. "Come on. What about the red?" Another student, Edouard, replies, "On the Haitian flag, red is blood." The teacher asks, "Why, why does red represent blood?" Edouard responds, "Independent from French." Another student, Junie, chimes in, "Because Haitian people fought the French." Later she asks still another student, José, "Do you have these (pointing to the stars and stripes) on your flag, your flag from Guatemala?" Then she shows another slide, this time with

the bald eagle, elicits the word *bald*, and asks what it means. One student, Ana, says, "No hair." The teacher talks about the difference between hair, feathers, and fur. The bell rings, and the students leave for their next class. (field notes, October 8, 2008)

Christina had hoped that this lesson would engage her students. Knowing that they were fascinated with technology, she believed that she would encourage them to respond more actively if she used PowerPoint as opposed to mere printed pictures. In this lesson, however, many elements of MALP were missing. The conditions for learning that SLIFE need were not addressed. Christina chose important U.S. symbols she thought the students might have seen and would need to know, and she attempted to make the lesson relevant by referring to symbols from the students' own countries. Yet in reality, Christina was presenting facts that had no immediate relevance to the students. Furthermore, there was no sense of interconnectedness among the students because they interacted only with the teacher, not with each other.

The processes for learning from the two paradigms were not combined. Christina and the students primarily used the oral mode with no literacy tasks, and she did not use oral interaction to scaffold text. There was no collaboration; Christina expected the students to respond individually throughout the lesson.

Finally, Christina did not introduce or practice any academic tasks, and there was only one instance of some critical thinking when she raised the issue of the meaning of red on the flag. Essentially, the lesson focused on identifying symbols and teaching vocabulary.

Overall, this lesson did not represent a successful instructional experience for SLIFE and did not follow the MALP instructional model. Although Christina was a lively, caring, and dedicated teacher, observations of this and similar lessons indicated that the students in her class were learning little and remained largely uninvolved. Christina expressed how difficult she found it to reach these students: "It's like pulling teeth to get them to say or write anything" (debriefing, October 8, 2008). The question for her was how to change her teaching in order to more actively engage students because engaged students are more likely to be successful academically (Gay, 2000; Nieto, 2004). The question for us focused

on how Christina could use MALP to engage students, promote literacy development, and develop academic thinking.

During the Intervention

Over the course of the intervention, Christina increasingly focused on including each of the elements of MALP. In a unit on the U.S. Civil War, one of her objectives was for students to describe the everyday life of Civil War soldiers and to compare and contrast this with their own lives today. This particular activity was only one part of Christina's larger unit on the Civil War, which included other activities such as developing surveys, making bar graphs based on information students had collected, and researching on the Internet—all related to different aspects of the Civil War (for a detailed discussion, see Marshall & DeCapua, in press). The following describes Christina's evolving approach:

In small groups, the students complete a Venn diagram on how Civil War soldiers spent their free time. Each student has a Venn diagram with the right side already completed from a previous activity in which they explored how the students in their class spent their free time. Christina placed selected sites on delicious.com for the students to explore. She chose the sites based on their limited amount of text and unambiguous visuals. In their groups, the students examine the sites to find the requisite information. When some photos draw their attention, Emilio, Sergio, and Jaime read the accompanying text together, trying to decipher the meaning. While Ana listens to them, she starts to fill in her diagram. Shortly afterward, Emilio, Sergio, and Jaime, having deciphered the text, begin filling out their own Venn diagrams, helping each other with vocabulary and spelling. When the class reconvenes, Christina asks the groups to share their findings. Together the class provides input as Christina completes the left side of the large Venn diagram hanging on the board. Junie contributes, "Play dominoes." Yolanda offers, "Pray." Next Christina has the groups examine the two sides of the diagram and asks, "What are some similarities between you and the soldiers? What things are the same?" Each student uses the Venn diagram to compose statements of comparison and contrast about how the soldiers and the students in the class spend their free time. Claude responds, "I play dominoes, cards." Pierre says, "Drink beer." José calls out, "Pray." Christina writes their responses in the center of the Venn diagram while they record them on their individual diagrams. (field notes, December 5, 2008)

Referring to Figure 1 and the checklist (see Appendix), we can see how Christina incorporated MALP. The students were working on a topic immediately relevant to them, one that developed their interconnectedness as they learned more about each other and what they did in their free time. Christina further developed the sense of immediate relevance by having the SLIFE discover what they had in common with Civil War soldiers. Pierre became very excited when he saw a picture of a soldier whittling, which he explained was something he had learned from an uncle of his and which he went on to describe to the rest of the class. Yolanda and José felt that praying was important in their lives and were impressed that it had been central in the lives of many Civil War soldiers, too.

Again referring to Figure 1 and the MALP Checklist, we see that Christina provided opportunities to scaffold text through oral interaction. Students worked together to derive meaning from print on the computer, Christina wrote their oral responses, and students both spoke and wrote their contributions. Students read what they had written on their individual Venn diagrams and what Christina wrote on the class diagram.

With respect to shared responsibility and individual accountability, in this lesson SLIFE had opportunities to work together in small groups on their diagrams and the class worked together as a whole to complete the class Venn diagram. Yet each student was responsible for completing his or her own.

Finally, Christina worked on the academic task of comparing and contrasting through the use of the Venn diagram. Although the task was new to the SLIFE, by the time they worked on this, the language and content of this activity had become familiar.

The Research Questions

The research questions of this study were as follows: How could the implementation of MALP assist SLIFE in the development of literacy and academic thinking? Would the implementation of MALP improve the engagement and participation of SLIFE? To answer these questions, qualitative methods were used (Dörnyei, 2007). For the first question, we examined student work for development of literacy, English, and academic thinking by focusing on the type, quantity, and quality of their work. For the

second question, we compared and analyzed our respective notes referring to the elements of MALP as our theoretical framework.

Question 1

Over the course of the intervention, student work indicated an increased facility with print. For example, the students produced a variety of graphic organizers. Initially, students merely completed the organizers by copying short phrases or sentences from Christina's model. Early in the Civil War unit, during a class "filming the ideas" activity (Dodge, 1994), the students had side-by-side pictures of symbols from 1860 and 2008. Looking at the pictures as cues, the students brainstormed what to write on each side for each set of symbols. Christina wrote their ideas on the board and students entered them verbatim onto their charts.

Later in the intervention, the SLIFE were able to work through a series of guided questions to respond in writing independently, composing their own sentences. For example, in preparing a biography of a famous person from her country, Melisa wrote, "She protect the all people indigenous because in 1959 in this year was discriminated against"; Sergio wrote, "He first he was a doctor in guerilla encampment" (student work, January 15, 2009).

Findings also indicate that the SLIFE became more comfortable using Internet-based print as a resource. At the beginning of the intervention, working with the students in the computer lab, Christina provided each pair with a URL printed in large letters on an index card. The students, with their limited literacy skills, struggled to type the long address correctly and then, once on the web site, were not able to navigate the site, despite Christina's guidance. Near the end of the intervention, during the biography unit, the students were able to locate and extract information on their subject, both in their native languages and in English, with minimal help from Christina.

Finally, findings show that the SLIFE were developing academic thinking. In addition to the compare-and-contrast activity described earlier, Christina taught the skill of distinguishing between relevant and irrelevant facts. In their research on Abraham Lincoln, students

learned to separate personal information from information important to his work as president. They created T-charts showing the data in two columns. For example, Junie included “Lincoln had one sister” and “Lincoln married Mary Todd” in the personal column. In the other column, she wrote, “Lincoln stopped the South from separate [sic] from the US” and “He was president [sic] for 1 term but died his 2 term” (student work, January 1, 2009).

Question 2

With respect to the second research question, concerning an improvement in engagement and participation following the MALP intervention, in reviewing our field notes we found that the SLIFE became more active learners who were engaged in the material and, within the constraints imposed by economic and family realities, more committed to school.

Christina also noticed changes. As noted earlier, prior to the intervention she expressed her concerns in trying to reach these students. At the end of the intervention, she described how the amount and relative quality of their work surprised her, something that she had not seen in her previous classes of SLIFE. She stated that since beginning the MALP intervention, she had found the SLIFE to be more motivated in doing their work and that they seemed highly involved in the different activities. She remarked on how the SLIFE made comments to her when she had been absent, saying they had missed her—a first in her experience at North Randolph—and that “if they skip classes, they aren’t skipping mine; they’re either coming to my class or absent the whole day” (debriefing, December 15, 2008). Christina felt that this increased motivation and engagement was a result of her carefully incorporating all elements of the MALP instructional model.

These changes were evident even among those members of the class who were present less than 50% of the time during this intervention. Despite absences, when they did attend, these students also participated in the activities Christina planned, and she noticed that they were on task more than they had been before the intervention. It was not just academic progress per se, but rather that the quality of the instruction had changed and school had become more of a substantive endeavor for them.

Punctuality and attendance, chronic issues with these SLIFE, improved somewhat. Christina reported that the students had become more motivated, not only coming to class on time, but coming early and requesting additional class time to work on different tasks. During one of our last observations, Yolanda told Christina that she would be absent the next day, but that she wanted to find some additional time the following day to work on her PowerPoint presentation. Christina later related to us that Yolanda had never before told her when she was going to be absent, nor had she ever requested makeup time for missed class work. This is only one example, but it illustrates how SLIFE can become more committed to learning through MALP.

Sadly, economic constraints often cause SLIFE to have poor attendance or drop out of school, even when they are engaged and motivated. Some students had erratic attendance, depending on their work schedules; others left school to work full-time. A particularly poignant example was Emilio, one of Christina's best and most motivated students. Once spring came, Emilio told her that he had to leave school because he now had landscaping work and could not afford not to work, even though he wanted to stay in school. Not only was he responsible for supporting himself, but he still had to pay off the coyote who had helped him come into the country and send some money to his family back home. As Maslow (1943) points out, until people's basic physiological needs, such as food and shelter, are met, it is difficult for them to focus on more recondit pursuits, including education.

CONCLUSION

The findings, although preliminary, suggest that MALP is potentially a powerful new instructional model that can reach those ELLs most at risk. The three components of MALP—accept conditions for learning, combine processes for learning, and focus on academic tasks with familiar language and content—provide a framework for educators. In this way, teachers of SLIFE can systematically address differences in learning paradigms.

A major concern with any study such as the one described here is the generalizability of the findings (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2006; Stakes, 1995). Ideally, this study would be complemented by

quantitative data such as standardized test scores or graduation rates. However, such quantitative research requires a well-defined, stable participant sample (Dörnyei, 2007), and the nature of this population—highly transient SLIFE—made such data challenging to collect. The fluidity of the participant sample is an issue encountered by other researchers (Duff & Early, 1996; Rossiter, 2001). Nevertheless, this qualitative exploration of the impact of MALP on a small group of SLIFE with one teacher allowed us to gain valuable insights into growth in literacy skills, development of academic ways of thinking, and improved motivation and participation.

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APPENDIX: MUTUALLY ADAPTIVE LEARNING PARADIGM TEACHER PLANNING AND OBSERVATION CHECKLIST

A. Accept Conditions for Learning	
A1. I am making this lesson immediately relevant to my students.	<input type="checkbox"/>
A2. I am helping students develop and maintain interconnectedness.	<input type="checkbox"/>
B. Combine Processes for Learning	
B1. I am incorporating both shared responsibility and individual accountability.	<input type="checkbox"/>
B2. I am scaffolding the written word through oral interaction.	<input type="checkbox"/>
C. Focus on New Activities for Learning	
C1. I am focusing on tasks requiring academic ways of thinking.	<input type="checkbox"/>
C2. I am making these tasks accessible to my students with familiar language and content.	<input type="checkbox"/>

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