

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.

Hamline University

Saint Paul, Minnesota

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My research question for this capstone project is *what are the best practices for supporting and including SLIFE, Preliterate, Pashtun students in secondary Westernized classrooms?* 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). In this capstone project I will use preliterate to describe students who have limited or no literacy skills. This does not mean that students will never develop literacy skills, but during the duration of time where they are learning literacy. I discovered a need for information on this topic during my first year of teaching when the school I was teaching at received an influx of SLIFE, preliterate, Pashtun students.

This project will be presented in the form of a professional development aimed for all secondary teachers. 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, promoting literacy and Multiculturalism methods. Each session will be an hour and fifteen minutes long or one four hour session with breaks. 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 Pashtun students with SLIFE backgrounds.

In the first section of the professional development, there will be an overview of the definition of SLIFE, preliterate and Pashtun. After, this section will describe challenges that

SLIFE and preliterate students face in the classroom. An interview with two Pashtun educators, Ismail Ahmad and Muhammad Tayyeb will be shown, discussing Pashtun culture, education, literacy and challenges of Westernized education. To end, this section will have a reflection where teachers will be able to discuss their learnings together and ask any remaining questions.

The second 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.

The final 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.

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, Pashtun students since the spring of 2022. I have learned from my own mistakes, my own attempts at creating an inclusive classroom for my Pashtun 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 Pashtun 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 want to be able to hear teachers' frustrations and concerns about lack of knowledge of Pashtun language, culture and how to teach SLIFE, preliterate Pashtun students. I want to share with the members of the district the questions that teachers have had and the feelings that they felt due to lack of education and information on this topic. I want to be able to discuss any misconceptions, miscommunication, and questions that teachers have not had the opportunity to ask and talk about.

Secondly, as a white teacher with little experience with Pashtun culture, I want to incorporate voices of the Pashtu community. Therefore, recording the interview with Pashtun teachers, Ismail Ahmad and Muhammad Tayyeb is included in section one of the professional development. In this interview, questions on education, culture and literacy are discussed.

Third, I wanted the format of this professional development to provide a space for teachers to think about their classroom procedures, practices and community and find where it can be limited for SLIFE, Preliterate, 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.

Materials:

[Capstone Project Presentation](#)

[Interview Response Questions](#)

## Resources:

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- Merriam-Webster. (2023). *Preliterate definition & meaning*. Merriam-Webster. <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/preliterate>
- Pentón Herrera, L. J., Custodio, B., & O, L. J. (2022). Providing social-emotional and academic supports to SLIFE: What every teacher needs to know. *TESL-EJ*, 26(3), 1–17.

<https://doi-org.ezproxy.hamline.edu/10.55593/ej.26103a16>

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# **Best Practices: For Supporting and Including SLIFE, Preliterate, Pashtun Students in Secondary, Western, Classrooms**

Claire Madden

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Question:

What are the best practices to supporting SLIFE, Preliterate, Pashtun students in Secondary, Western Schools?

# WHAT IS SLIFE?

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## Students with Limited Formal Education

Students with Limited or Interrupted Formal Education (SLIFE) "are English language learners who have experienced interrupted education due to war, civil unrest, migration, or other factors; who have never had the opportunity to participate in any type of schooling before entering school in the United States; or who have experienced limited education in their home countries due to lack of resources or trained teachers, the type of schooling they participated in, or other circumstances." (DeCapua & Marshall, 2010, p.398)

# WHAT IS SLIFE?

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## Students with Limited Formal Education- Determining Factors

1. Comes from a home where the language usually spoken is other than English, or who usually speaks a language other than English.
2. Enters school in the United States after grade 6.
3. Has at least two years less schooling than the English learner's peers.
4. Functions at least two years below expected grade level in reading and mathematics.
5. May be preliterate in the English learner's native language.

(Minnesota Department of Education, 2023)

# WHAT DEFINES PRELITERATE?

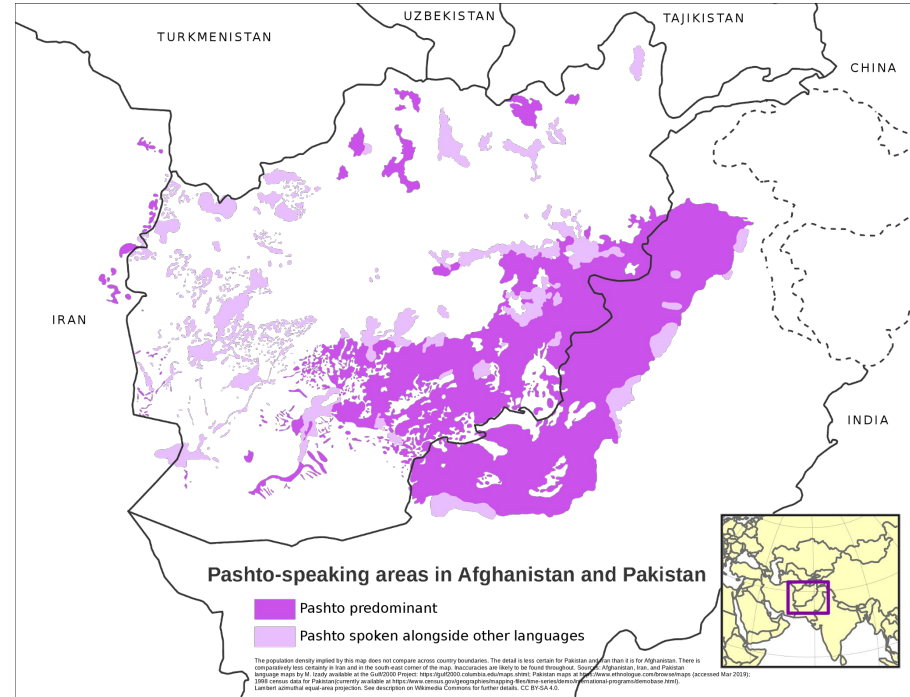
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- Preliterate is defined as lacking the ability to write. (Merriam-Webster, 2023)
- In this capstone I will use preliterate to describe students who have limited or no literacy skills in their first language (L1). This includes reading and writing
- This does not mean that students will never develop literacy skills, but during the duration of time where they are learning literacy

# WHAT IS PASHTUN

- A Cultural Group in Middle East
- Many names- Pashtu, Pashto, Pashtun, Pashtoon, Afghani

(Tainter&MacGregor, 2011)



(Wikimedia, 2023)



(Pashto, 2011)

# Salaam Alaikum

[SUH] + [LAAM] [ALE]+[KOOM]

Meaning: Peace be upon you



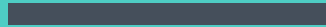
## Educators will learn how to...

- Understand some cultural norms of the Pashtun culture
- Conduct an accessible introduction activity
- Reflect on new information learned

We'll have a couple of places to stop for questions and breaks!

# Whv?

- **Personal Narrative**
- **Increase in Afghani immigrants into Western schools** (Minnesota Department of Human Services, 2023)
- **Lack of awareness** (O'Hara & Pritchard, 2008)





# WHY?

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- Personal Narrative

# Why?

## Increase in Afghani population in the United States

(Minnesota Department of Human Services, 2023)



# WHY?



- Lack of awareness  
(O'Hara & Pritchard, 2008)

# Introduction to Groups

Participate in  
a name game  
that is  
accessible to,  
SLIFE,  
preliterate  
Pashtun  
Students

# Name Tag

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Create a name tag!

**Favorite Animal**



Claire



**Favorite Food**

**Where your family is from**



**Favorite Activity**

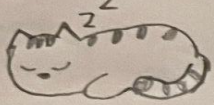


# Student Example

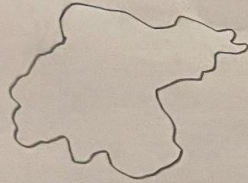


# Student Example

My favorite animal  
is: The cat

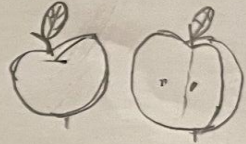


my family is from  
Guanajuato, Mexico

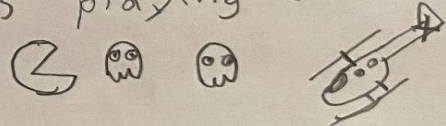


Felipe

my favorite food is  
apples



my favorite activity  
is playing videogames





# Student Example

Name: Uyen

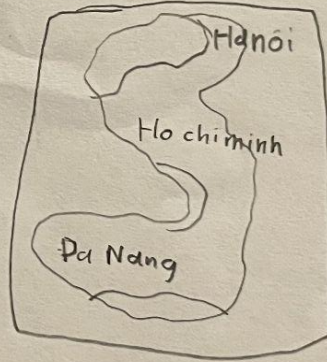
Favorite Animal:  
My favorite animal  
is cat



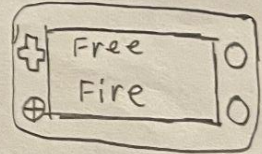
Favorite Food:  
My favorite  
food is spicy  
chicken feet



My family  
from Vietnam



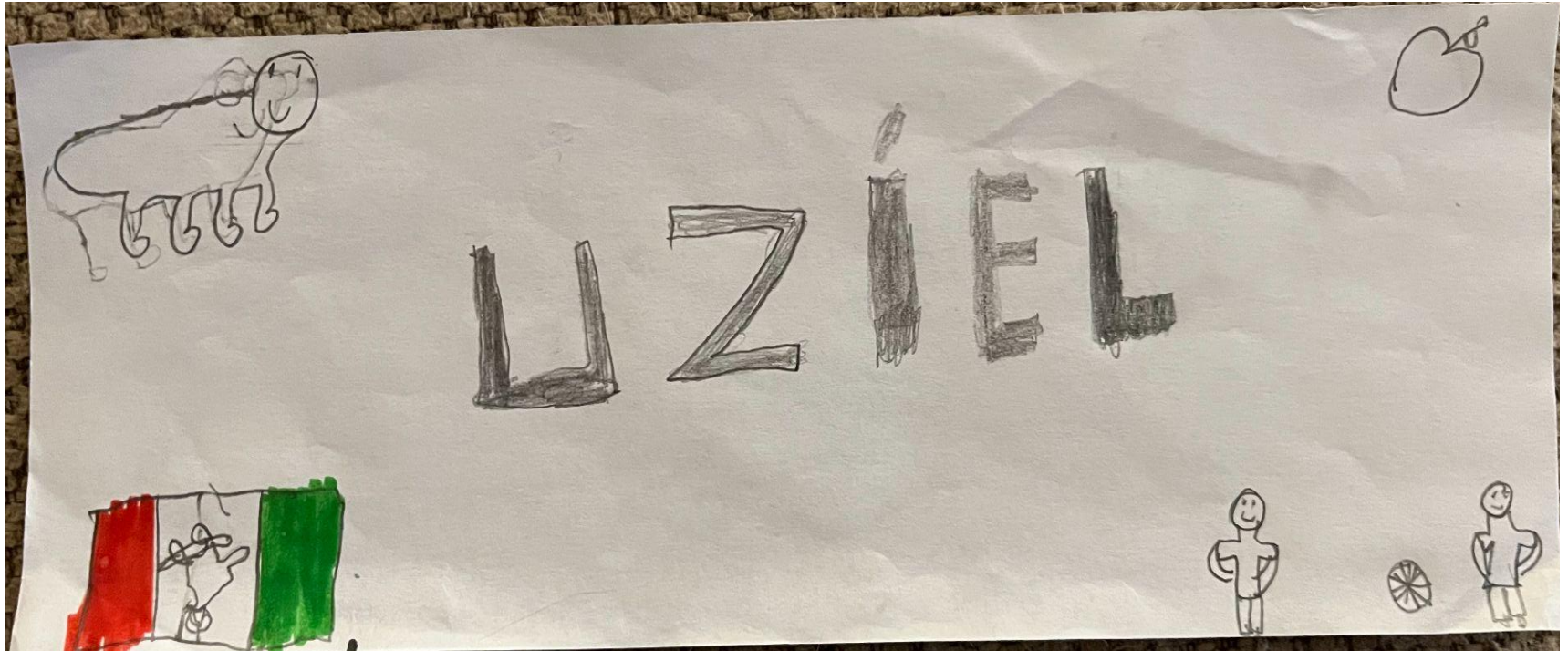
Favorite Activity:  
My favorite  
activity is playing  
game





# Student Example

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# Name Tag

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Create a name tag!

**Favorite Animal**



# Claire

**Favorite Food**



**Where you are from**



**Favorite Activity**



# Present Name Tag in Small Groups

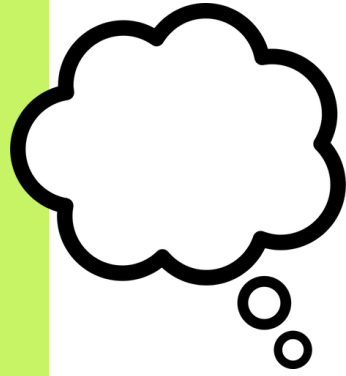
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- Try to make connections with each other and what is represented on the name tag



Why I  
believe this  
activity is  
successful

- Minimal need for literacy (Sticht, 1989)
- Low stakes activity (Pentón Herrera, 2022)
- Opportunity to express identity and culture (Pentón Herrera, 2022)



Thoughts or Questions?

# Interview

- Introduction  
(Who, what, where, when, why?)

# Interview Video

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- Ismail Ahmad and Muhammad Tayyeb
- Educators at Minneapolis Public Schools

(Interview and Cultural Presentation, 2023)

# Interview Reflection

Discuss in small groups: Interview Response Questions.



The tallest group member takes notes on learning







Thoughts or Questions?



# Closure

In your small groups, decide on one important takeaway from today's lesson to share with the whole group. One person from each group will share.



# Break

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# **Best Practices: For Supporting and Including SLIFE, Preliterate, Pashtun Students in Westernized Classrooms**

Claire Madden

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## Educators will learn...

- ▣ The challenges SLIFE students have in classrooms.
- ▣ Methods to support and scaffold for SLIFE, preliterate students.

We'll have a couple of places to stop for questions and breaks!

# WHAT DEFINES PRELITERATE?

---

- Preliterate is defined as lacking the ability to write. (Merriam-Webster, 2023)
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# Disclaimer

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It is important to identify that SLIFE and preliterate do not necessarily go hand in hand.

There are SLIFE students that are literate and there are preliterate students that are not defined as SLIFE.

However, in the case of my personal experience, the students are both SLIFE and preliterate.



# Challenges of SLIFE and Preliterate

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- Assumptions (Pentón Herrera, 2022)
  - Intelligence
  - Knowledge of Educational Practices
- Academic Exclusion (Lash, 2018)
  - Educator Knowledge(Banks, 1995)
  - Literacy (Sticht, 1989)
- Social Exclusion (Huerta, 1999)
  - Personal Relationships

# Assumptions

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- Intelligence
  - Language and literacy ability does not equate to intelligence. (Pentón Herrera, 2022)
  -

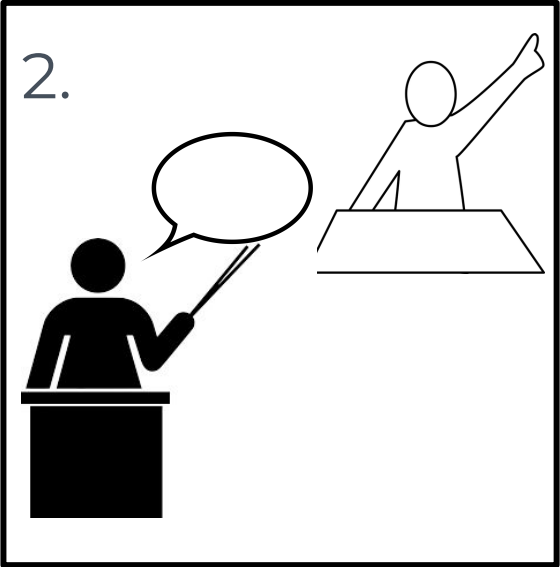
# Assumptions

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- ▣ Knowledge of Classroom and Cultural Norms
  - SLIFE students may not know the cultural expectations or classroom expectations (Pentón Herrera, 2022).
  - Extra patience and clear expectations (Pentón Herrera, 2022).

EX: A SLIFE student may not understand the classroom norm of raising their hand and waiting to be called on before speaking.

# Clear Expectations



(Google, 2023)

# You-Do

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What classroom routines do you rely on in your classes?  
How could you explicitly teach SLIFE and or preliterate students this routine?

Create a step by step visual (Complete on paper or computer). The goal is to be able to use it in the classroom



# Academic Exclusion

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- Multicultural Perspective (Lash, 2018).
  - Missing from Westernized education.
  - Students disconnected from curriculum
  - Diminishes success of other cultures.
- Educator Knowledge
  - Teacher Representation (Bitterman, Gray, and Goldring, 2014)
    - 80% of teachers are white while 50% of students are students of color.
    - Teaching through a white lens (Marrun, 2018)
    - Impacts student outcomes (Huerta, 1999).
  - Multiculturalism (Banks, 1995).
    - Teachers are not required to learn about multiculturalism
- Literacy
  - Exclusion from accessing academic materials (Sticht, 1989)

# Social Exclusion

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- Challenges of Developing Connections (Huerta, 1999)
  - Language Barrier
  - Cultural Differences
- Benefits of Personal Connection (Cothran, Kulinna & Garragy, 2003).
  - Social Benefits
  - Academic Benefits



Thoughts or Questions?



# Strategies and Methods to Support and Scaffold for SLIFE and Preliterate Learners

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- ▣ Scaffolding
  - Sentence Stems (Rodriguez-Mojica, Briceño, 2018)
  - Pictures and Symbols
  - Paragraph Organization
- ▣ Vocabulary Acquisition
  - Dialogue Journal
- ▣ Appropriate Texts
  - Graphic Novels
  - Diverse
  - Appropriate level with interesting and relevant content

# Scaffolding

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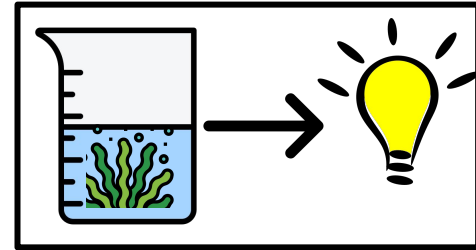
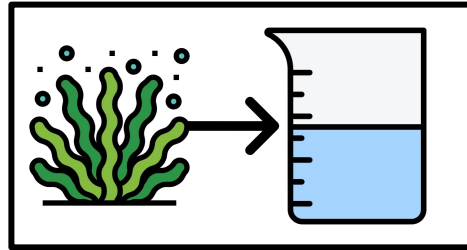
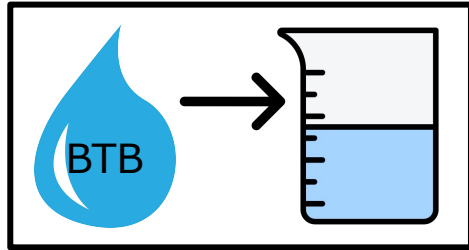
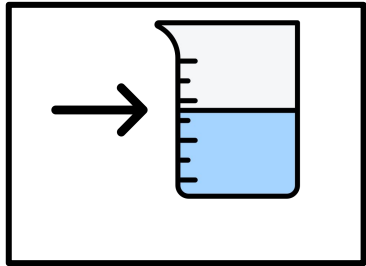
- ▣ Sentence Stems (Rodriguez-Mojica, Briceño, 2018)

EX:

- My name is \_\_\_\_\_. My favorite animal is \_\_\_\_\_ because \_\_\_\_\_. (Introduction)
- I agree/disagree with the author because \_\_\_\_\_. (Opinion)
- I think \_\_\_\_\_ will happen because \_\_\_\_\_. (Prediction)
- I know that this figure is a \_\_\_\_\_ because \_\_\_\_\_. (Geometry)

# Scaffolding

- Pictures and Symbols (Biology)



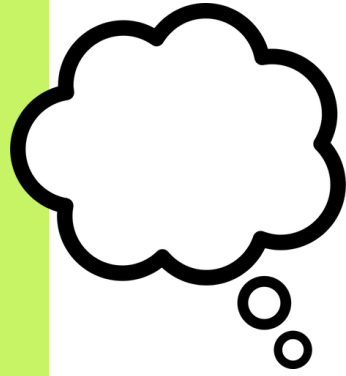
(Google, 2023)

# Work With Your Group on Scaffolding

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What sentence stems or pictures would be helpful in your class? Think of the lesson you are working on now or one where students struggle





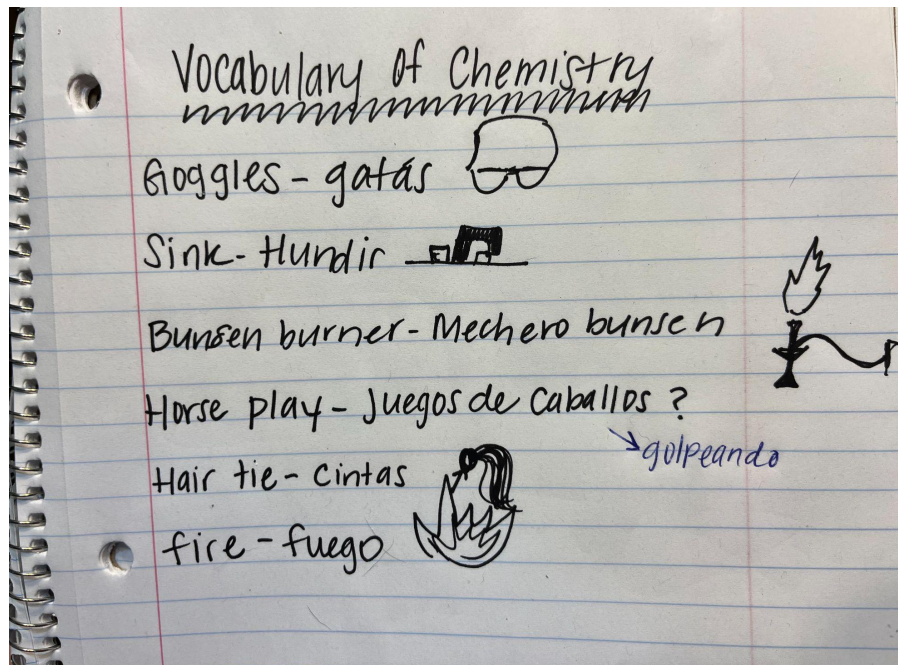
Thoughts or Questions?

# Vocabulary Acquisition

## □ Dialogue Journals

(Linares, 2019,)

- Vocabulary Acquisition
- Student
- Teacher connection
- Evaluative



(Student Example, 2023)

# Appropriate Texts

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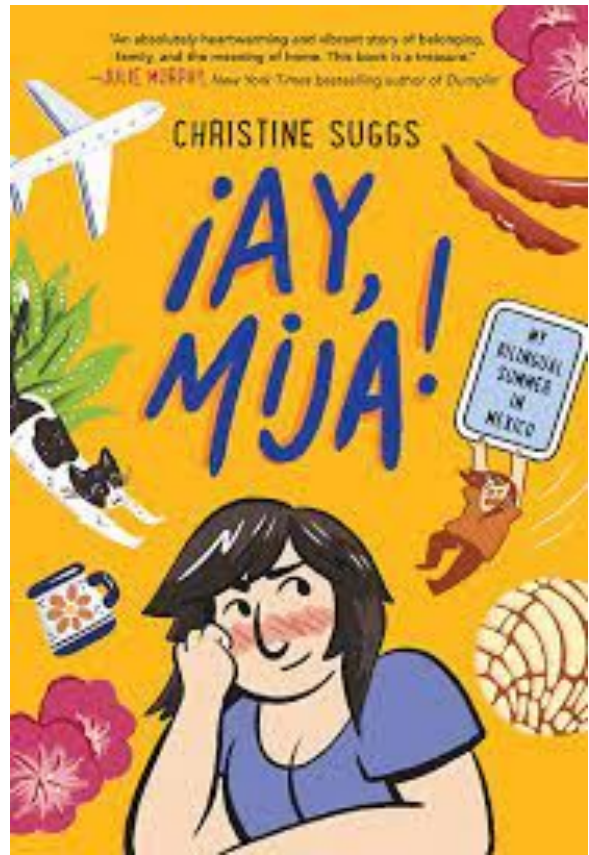
- ▣ Graphic Novels (Chang, 2012)
  - Benefits
    - Diverse
    - Accessible Level while still maintaining interesting and appropriate topics.
    - Vocabulary Development
    - Images

# Graphic Novels

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- Promotes Bilingualism (would be great to support Spanish speaking students)
- Discusses cultural confusion and identity.

(Suggs, 2023)

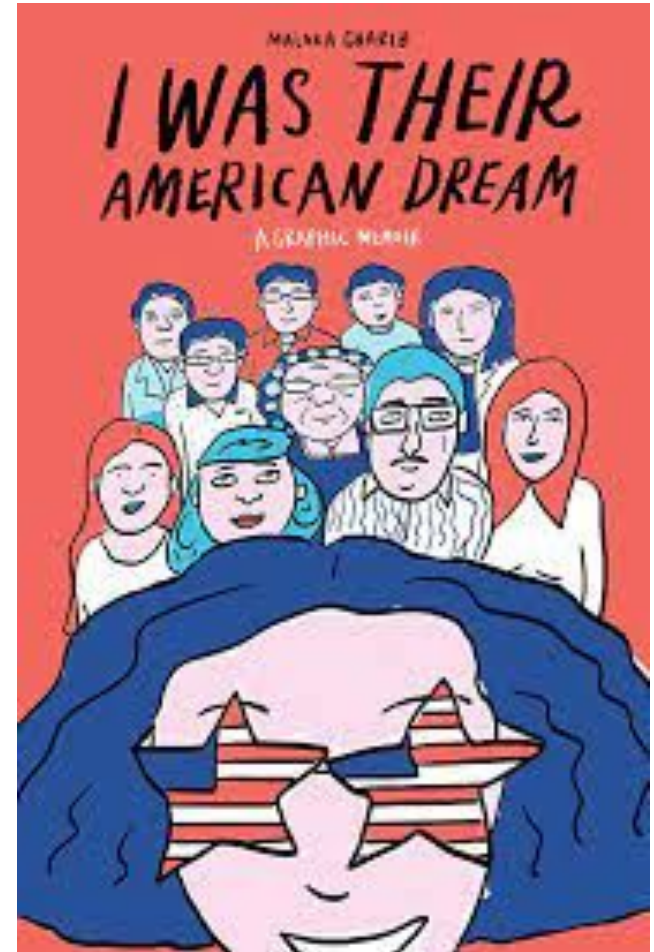




# Graphic Novels

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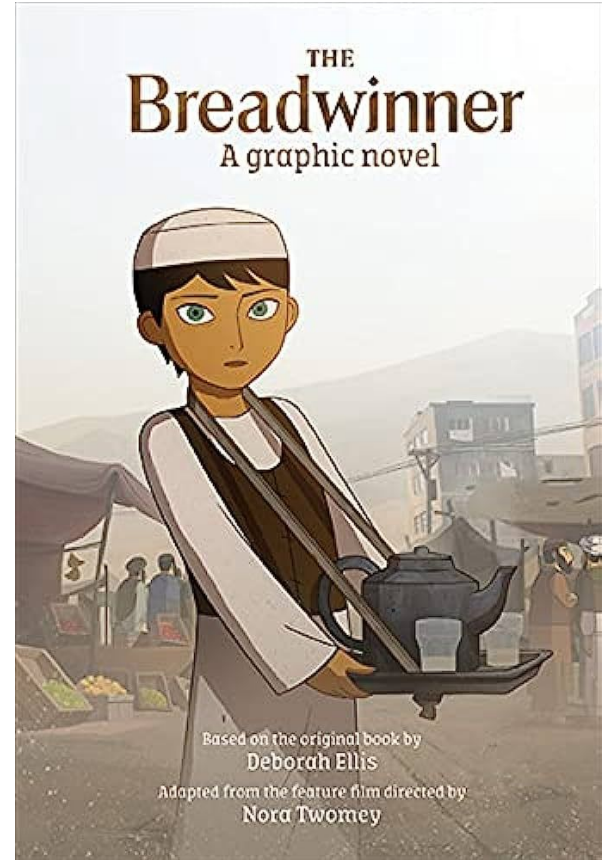
- Topics of multiculturalism, identity and complicated emotions.
- Story of a girl finding her place in a Egyptian-Filipino household while trying to be her family's “American Dream” (Gharib, 2019)



# Graphic Novels

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- Afghani girl working to save her family after Taliban imprisons her father.
- Story of perseverance and resilience. (Ellis, 2018)



# Work With Your Group on Vocab acquisition and Appropriate Texts

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Resources for Graphic Novels:

[thelearningtl.com](http://thelearningtl.com)

[edweek.org](http://edweek.org)



(thelearningtl, 2023)

(Cardno, 2012)



# Discuss with group

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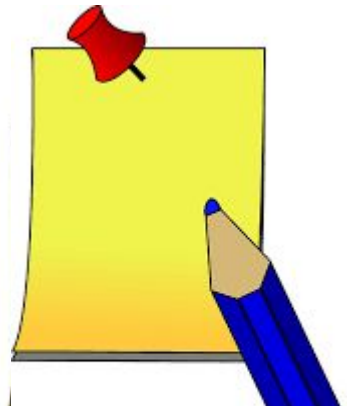
- What did methods did you choose? Graphic Novels, dialogue journals?
- Why did you choose this method?
- How could you incorporate the chosen method into your lessons?
- Do you think it would be beneficial to your classes? Why or why not?
- How will it fit into your curriculum and standards?

# Closure

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Write on a post it note, what you chose to apply to your classroom.

Place post it in the front of the classroom before you exit for break.



# Break

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# **Best Practices: For Supporting and Including SLIFE, Preliterate, Pashtun Students in Westernized Classrooms**

Claire Madden

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## Educators will learn...

- ▣ Past methods of teaching multicultural students
- ▣ Current practices of Multiculturalism
- ▣ Methods to incorporate Multiculturalism in the classroom.

We'll have a couple of places to stop for questions and breaks!



# Past Practices of Multicultural Teaching

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- ▣ Assimilation (Lash, 2018)
  - Detracts from Bilingualism
  - Minimizes student culture
  
- ▣ Why this is not effective (Lash, 2018)
  - Bilingualism benefits the student
  - Subtraction from student

# Group Discussion

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What methods does your school or department use to include multicultural learners?



# Recent Multicultural Theories

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- ▣ Critical Multicultural Education- CME (Lash, 2018)
  - Celebration of culture in the classroom
  
- ▣ Culturally Responsive Teaching- CRT
  - “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)

# Benefits of Multiculturalism

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- Inclusion of Different Perspectives (Stevens, 2008)
- Students learn to be accepting (Huerta, 1999)
- Beneficial for real world situations (Stevens, 2008)

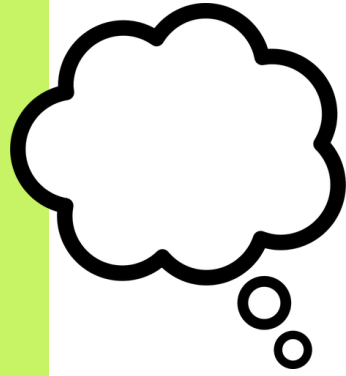
# Discussion

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- How could you change some of the events and procedures in schools (previously discussed?) to incorporate the new theories of multiculturalism?
- How could you incorporate multiculturalism in your curriculum?



**5:00**



Thoughts or Questions?

# Methods to Incorporate Multiculturalism

- **Experiential Learning** (Stevens, 1983).
  - Participating in Holidays or Festivities
  - Including or Introducing Students Traditions
- **Explicitly Teaching Culture** (Hos, Murray-Johnson, Correia, 2019)
  - Teaching the Culture of the School
  - Teaching Culture of the Greater Surrounding Area
- **Incorporating Food** (Stevens, 1983)
  - Culturally Relevant
  - Curriculum
    - Sequence Writing
    - Learning Commands
    - Reading Comprehension

# Experiential Learning

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- Participating in Holidays or Festivities (Stevens, 1983).
  - What holidays or festivities are important at your school?
    - Sports, theater, arts, agriculture, fairs, foods?

Examples:

- Soccer was a very popular sport in the community. Since this is a popular sport around the world, it tends to be a positive connection
- Participating in community events such as: Maple Syrup Festival



# Explicitly Teaching Culture

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- Teaching the Culture of the School (Hos, Murray-Johnson, Correia, 2019)

# Incorporating Food

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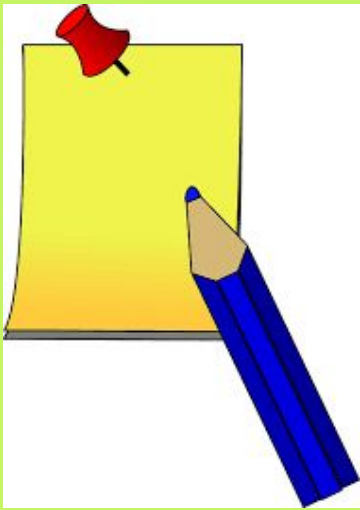
- ▣ Incorporating Food (Stevens, 1983)
  - Can be used in different curriculum
    - Sequence Writing
    - Vocabulary Acquisition
    - Presentation Skills or Speaking Skills
    - Reading Comprehension

# Discussion

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How can you incorporate some of these strategies into your classroom curriculum?





1. Write on a post it how you intend to include a multicultural strategy in the classroom.
2. Stick it to the white board in back
3. Take 5 minutes to read others





# Closure

Each group share an idea you connected to on the Post It wall.



# Questions?



# Thanks!



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