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# Cultivating a Culture of Bilingualism: Evaluating a Home Language Arts Curriculum for SIFE

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**Abstract:** This study is a mixed-methods exploratory study of a Spanish Home Language Arts (HLA) pilot curriculum designed for Students with Interrupted Education (SIFE) as it was implemented across six different schools in New York State during the 2019–2020 school year before the onset of COVID-19. The focus of the study was to observe whether the HLA curriculum improved teacher practice in the increased use of the gradual release of responsibility and the curriculum-prescribed protocols. Another goal was to examine whether the use of the curriculum helped to improve student writing and bilingual literacy. A final goal of the study was to survey teachers on their perceptions of the curriculum, especially in how the lesson design fostered student engagement and collaboration with others. The results of the internal evaluation showed that the teachers improved in their practice, especially in the areas of gradual release and increased student time on task. The students were able to develop specific text analysis and writing skills using instructional protocols used in the home language and in English that were transferable across classroom contexts. In addition, the lessons encouraged students to leverage literacy skills and background knowledge in Spanish as a way to support learning new skills in both Spanish and English. Finally, the study showed that the use of the curriculum increased student engagement and collaboration in the classroom.

**Keywords:** English learners; bilingual education; multilingual learners; curriculum; teaching and learning



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## 1. Introduction

Students with Interrupted Formal Education (SIFE) and Newcomer English Language Learners are a unique group of students within bilingual education programs in the United States public education system. These students have large gaps in their formal education due to political unrest, trauma, violence, or financial constraints in their home countries (Custodio and O'Loughlin 2017; Hos 2016) and tend to be years behind their same-age peers in reading comprehension and writing in their first language (Decapua and Marshall 2011; Menken 2013; Ruiz-de-Velasco and Fix 2000). SIFE also have diverse needs outside of the classroom that impact in-class performance, especially as compared to their same-age mainstream peers; they frequently need to work, take care of siblings or their own children, and have residual trauma and a host of other issues that may lead to disengagement or frequent absence from school (Auslander 2019). All of these factors taken together suggest that a culturally relevant curriculum is especially important for SIFE, both for encouraging translanguaging between the home language and English as the new language and for fostering an environment that is culturally responsive and sensitive to the needs of SIFE (Cioè-Peña and Snell 2015).

Bridges to Academic Success, a project of the Graduate Center, CUNY, is comprised of an interdisciplinary team of researchers, curriculum developers, and instructional coaches who, working under the direction and funding of the New York State Department of Education, developed several curricula for SIFE, specifically those scoring at the third

grade or below in home-language literacy, as measured by the Multilingual SIFE Screener (Martohardjono 2015). In 2019, the team was contracted to develop a Home Language Arts (HLA) curriculum with a focus on Spanish language instruction that could be implemented in existing New York State secondary classrooms. One of the design goals for this curriculum was to develop it in alignment with the team's existing English Language Arts (ELA) and English as a New Language (ENL) curriculum in order to build in similar instructional strategies that could be leveraged across classrooms. The team drew upon existing research and literature about SIFE and English learners as well as surveys of HLA teachers in the field to better understand the needs of SIFE in these classroom settings.

### *1.1. The HLA Curriculum, Training and Implementation*

The HLA curriculum in Spanish is a one-unit curriculum comprised of four different sets, each of which provides foundational skills for the next. The entire curriculum is 72 lessons long and there is an even focus between reading, writing, speaking, and listening in Spanish. This curriculum uses some of the same strategies, protocols, and themes as our English as a New Language curriculum and is designed to reinforce strategies and topics in both classrooms. The design is intended to be culturally responsive, in content, texts, and the translanguaging skills it fosters. In terms of the content, the curriculum features a wide range of Spanish and Latin American authors of diverse backgrounds through both fictional and informational texts. This curriculum also focuses on the cultural and historical roots of many under-represented cultural groups in Latin America so that students from different parts of Latin America can learn about and more deeply appreciate each other's cultural and historical roots.

The curriculum team developed the HLA curriculum to help students improve literacy in their home language (see Supplementary Materials). For SIFE specifically, this may be their first time learning more advanced academic skills, such as decoding, reading for evidence, or identifying main ideas. Therefore, the curriculum integrates reading, writing, and speaking skills in Spanish through interactive and collaborative activities among the students. This curriculum also integrates the ideas of identity, culture, and historical roots within the texts and materials used to support the students in a more culturally responsive manner. The ideal implementation of this curriculum also involves concurrent instruction in English that focuses on both the grammar and the language instruction in the English language along with more complex academic literacy skills.

In order to implement the curriculum, the teachers participated in online training that occurred remotely and was provided by the team HLA curriculum developer with live online sessions held throughout the year. In addition, teachers could also consult the HLA team, who responded to questions and provided support. There were limited in-person coaching sessions provided for all but one participant teacher before the onset of COVID-19. As the curriculum was piloted in several schools, two researchers from the project team designed a mixed-methods exploratory study to examine the initial implementation of the curriculum and the implications for revisions.

### *1.2. Defining Home Language Arts*

Home Language Arts (HLA) is instruction in the student's home language in addition to the instruction they are receiving in English. There are a variety of different approaches to bilingual education within different school contexts. These approaches are on a continuum from completely discouraging any use of the home language to complete bilingual immersion (García and Wei 2014). One of the biggest benefits of incorporating both the students' home language and their new instruction in English is that this supports a process of translanguaging in which students can leverage the skills, grammatical structures, and understandings they have in their home language to support what they are newly learning in English (Vogel and García 2017). Helping students learn in their home language supports students in being well-rounded and has even been found to increase creativity, which can have a huge impact on what determines their personal lives and professional outcomes

(Kayumova et al. 2019). Another reason that HLA is an important component of bilingual instruction is the increase in equity in schools; students need to be taught in their home language to be able to access the material, especially when they are newcomers and have no easy entry point into English from their home language (Hudelson 1987). This is especially true if the student's home language does not share a common alphabet or orthography with English (Kwon 1999).

Additionally, there are many educational contexts in which English Language Learners (ELLs) are discouraged from speaking or using their home language and are expected to only speak English; this privileging of English-only pedagogy makes ELLs rethink the importance of their own language and, to some extent, culture, which can be detrimental to student development (Fredricks and Warriner 2016). Essentially, when educators deemphasize or discredit the use of the home language for multilingual learners, they are discounting a fundamental part of that student's identity and creating an environment that may feel unwelcoming to students and their families. If the school or classroom privileges a monolingual belief structure that privileges English over the ELL's home language, this contributes to a deficit school environment that also negatively impacts the ELL's academic achievement (Vang 2006). Home Language Arts is a powerful tool for communicating to students that their home language is valued, which also acknowledges their identity and heritage. In addition, these practices also help students to feel that they belong within that classroom community because they have an access point. Starting in a new school in a new country is overwhelming for any student; giving students an opportunity to access the classroom on their terms using their familiar language is one place for students to feel comfortable and accepted.

### *1.3. Translanguaging and Using Home Language*

Translanguaging is a process in which the two or more languages of the multilingual speaker interact and are in a dynamic relationship with each other such that the features of both languages are integrated into one language (García and Wei 2014). Translanguaging is especially useful within the multilingual classroom and in bilingual education programs in classrooms (Fu et al. 2019). Translanguaging strategies are distinct from traditional second-language acquisition strategies as they specifically focus on leveraging the home language to access the new language while also realizing that there is a dynamic relationship between the first and the new language. In the process, the teacher and the student use the home language(s) as a key to learning English by leveraging the original language.

Teachers need to encourage their students to rely on their home language as needed as a method for accessing the new language of study. One example of this is giving students a vocabulary list in English and then encouraging the students to annotate these words in their home language so they can have a scaffold for accessing the language within the unit (Auslander 2019). The teacher can also encourage translanguaging in the literacy classroom by allowing students to reply to prompts in their home language, to support them in being able to share their ideas in their home language (Pacheco and Miller 2016). Another use of translanguaging is to include it as part of a multisensory style of pedagogy that helps students to engage all of their senses and languages towards learning a new set of vocabulary and concepts (Lau 2020). Overall, the more that the teacher can support their students in leveraging both of their languages, the more that each can support the other towards being able to integrate both languages.

### *1.4. Culturally Responsive Teaching*

In addition to encouraging translanguaging, an appropriate context for SIFE is one that is heavily invested in culturally responsive teaching. A culturally responsive classroom environment in which the teacher celebrates the students' diverse cultures and strengths and leverages these to best support student learning is one in which all students can thrive (Ladson-Billings 1994; Gay 2010, 2013). This can be enacted within a bilingual classroom in many ways, such as by honoring the students' histories or supplementing classroom

readings with stories from other cultures' authors. One of the largest barriers to being able to enact culturally responsive teaching is the fact that the majority of teachers in public schools are white women who have likely had very little past experience of many of their students' cultural backgrounds; one way of encouraging culturally responsive teaching is to help these teachers to better understand how to have culturally appropriate conversations within their classrooms which can help them minimize their prejudicial beliefs about these students (Mellom et al. 2018). In addition, many teachers need support with learning how to enact culturally responsive teaching strategies so that they have the self-efficacy and confidence to be able to enact these skills with the students (Siwatu 2011). More needs to be done around supporting classroom teachers to be culturally responsive, which is another rationale for developing this curriculum and the accompanying training materials.

### *1.5. Study Objectives*

The major objective of the study was to examine the pilot of a newly created Home Language Arts (HLA) curriculum for students with Spanish as one of their first languages. The goal of developing this curriculum was to serve as a complement to the existing English Language Arts (ELA) curricula our team created to teach English to SIFE and newcomers.

Our research questions were as follows:

1. What is the teacher perception of curriculum implementation in HLA classrooms?
2. Are there examples of gradual release and teacher-student interaction in the HLA classroom? If so, what are the characteristics of this practice?
3. What does student engagement look like in the HLA classroom?
4. Is there evidence of student learning in the HLA classroom? If so, what?
5. Are there clear connections and observed connections between the HLA and the ENL/ELA curricula?

## 2. Materials and Methods

This study was not designed to test a specific intervention, but rather to capture scenarios of students at work, their progress, and their experiences related to the implementation of this curriculum. The literature shows that a holistic approach to working with SIFE and other newcomers is important in both the classroom and the school environment, including attending to student academic and social-emotional needs in addition to language and literacy (U.S. Department of Education, Office of English Language Acquisition 2016). As a result, we used a variety of methods, including observations, analyzing student work, interviews, and collecting assessment data.

### *2.1. Data Collection*

Both researchers participated in the data collection; however, one of us took the lead in the data collection due to her higher language proficiency in Spanish. We worked with a team coach and each classroom teacher to collect the data. For the qualitative aspect of this study, researchers carefully documented classroom practices and interviewed stakeholders across each school to better understand the ways that educators approached their work, the struggles they faced, and how they managed their efforts to support this population of students. In addition, we documented ways that the curriculum lent support to any other strategies, techniques, and structures that demonstrated effectiveness in creating an environment that supported SIFE. These data were gathered from observations, in interviews with educators, and also, wherever possible, drew on student work samples. We observed all of the teachers within their classrooms. All the teachers were observed at least once by the researchers and/or coaching staff; one via a recording of the lesson. The visits were assessed using our team teacher observation protocol to look for areas of growth in teacher practice (see Supplementary Materials). We also analyzed transcriptions and notes taken by the coaches and researchers.

Our plan to analyze student quantitative writing results was to collect the seven assessments and one final performance task included as part of the curriculum for each class

and assess on the accompanying curriculum-imbedded rubrics. However, the appearance of COVID-19 and the subsequent school shutdown meant that no teacher fully completed the curriculum or was able to administer all of the assessments or the final performance task. The data presented in the results include the assessments that we were able to collect while schools were conducted on site before March 2020.

### *2.2. Participants*

All the participating teachers in this pilot began teaching this one-unit Spanish HLA curriculum during Fall 2019 and were intending to finish during Spring 2020. The eight teachers who participated in this study were selected from those of a larger cohort of schools implementing the existing English Language Arts (ELA) curriculum. The schools were selected based on several characteristics. All sites had five or more students. These were all Spanish-speaking teachers with multiple years of experience working with this population of English language learners. All had at least five-to-seven years of experience, and two of the teachers had been teaching for 16 years or more. School leaders and teachers at all the sites opted into the study, demonstrating willingness to implement the newly developed curricular unit, to collect data about the student progress based on one or more assessments from the curriculum; to undergo classroom observations; and to share their experiences and perceptions of the implementation through a survey and an individual interview. Table 1 shows the number of participating teachers, school geographic regions, and the number of students and countries they represented.

**Table 1.** Demographic Information by School.

| School | Geographic Region | Number of Teachers |
|---|---|---|
| A | New York City, metropolitan area HS | 2 |
| B | Long Island MS | 1 |
| C | Long Island HS1 | 2 |
| D | Long Island HS2 | 1 |
| E | West New York HS | 1 |
| F | Long Island HS3 | 1 |

### *2.3. Instruments*

In order to gauge teacher perception around their experience of implementation, all of the teachers also filled out an online Survey Monkey questionnaire sharing their experiences with the curriculum and the general feedback (see Supplementary Materials). Six of the eight teachers also completed an individual interview with a researcher. All of these interviews were conducted by phone in English and then transcribed and analyzed for trends.

In addition, researchers and coaches used an observation protocol incorporating elements of the *Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol (SIOP)* (Echevarria et al. 2017) and concepts of the gradual release of responsibility (Fisher and Frey 2014). The observation protocol was reviewed both internally and externally and aligned to curricular examples to support implementation of the field (Supplementary Materials). These observations were collected and aggregated throughout the year to better identify trends in implementation.

In order to assess writing progress in the Integrated ELA course and the Spanish HLA courses, intake scores were collected on the Multilingual SIFE Screener in Spanish (Martohardjono 2015) to support programming decisions at the school for the placement of students into HLA classes. Researchers then collected student work samples from the curricular unit across all classrooms. To assess writing progress, researchers used the 6+1 writing rubric developed by the Northwest Regional Education Lab (Culham 2003, 2005), published by Scholastic and adapted by the curriculum team for SIFE in 2018 (Supplementary Materials).

### *2.4. Reliability*

The same interview protocol was used with the teachers across all the school sites, as was the same observation protocol throughout the year; we conducted thematic analysis and coding of observations and analyzed interviews and observational data using a codebook manual to determine which patterns emerged from the data around the implementation practices and observations (Saldana 2009).

We normed on the first- and second-round codes that we used in order to unpack and define their meaning to the study. After every set of school observations, we wrote analytic memos to reflect on the research observations and artifacts to help with the interim analysis (Emerson et al. 2011).

To ensure reliability, we created a common database for researchers to use when documenting all fieldwork and to facilitate norming around the procedures (Yin 2009). The researcher team normed around the interrater reliability of the observation protocol during a common classroom visit to ensure the observation protocol was used in similar ways when observing practice. On the scale of one to four, a score of four represented three or more instances of evidence of practice in one classroom observation. A score of three represented two or more instances of evidence and a score of two represented only one instance of evidence. If the rater scored a one in the classroom, there was no evidence of the practice used.

In scoring student work on the points-based rubric, the two raters scored independently of one another on each trait of the writing rubric, and a third rater was brought in for any differences of two or more points.

### *2.5. Internal Validity*

Regarding our observational work, we maintained an ongoing log of reflective discussion about our own role as researchers (who in some cases served as participant observers) in order to note, wherever possible, how our own perspectives as members of the team—-as well as our own racial, cultural, and linguistic biases—-affected our research. In addition, when two or more raters observed the same classroom session, both filled out the observation protocol independently, and then any gaps of more than two points were justified and addressed with evidence until a score could be agreed on. We also debriefed each classroom session that was observed by two or more team members to discuss our ratings.

### *2.6. Analysis*

We aggregated survey and interview results, coded them, and sought out themes across the teacher feedback. In addition, we aggregated the observation data across all the categories of our observational rubric for individual teacher observations. We then aggregated this data across the sites to identify trends in classrooms specifically regarding student engagement, gradual release of responsibility, and alignment between the ELA and HLA curricula. These data are outlined in the results section about teacher implementation practices related to the curriculum.

A codebook was created to analyze all the transcriptions and notes, which were coded, and the researchers created code summaries. In undergoing the coding process, we identified about eleven first-round codes to provide us with a starting point in the analysis (Glaser 1978), and from there we were able to make decisions about what was salient across the sites in terms of our research questions. After another round of coding, we narrowed our codes into five major codes with subcodes based on the frequency used across data types in order to further guide analysis and capture trends in both the classrooms and across transcripts. See Table 2 for the first-round codes and Supplementary Materials for the full list.

**Table 2.** Qualitative Coding Schema.

| Main Code/Question | Subcodes |
| --- | --- |
| What is teacher perception of implementation in HLA classrooms? | • Positive teacher perception of curriculum<br>• Negative teacher perception of curriculum<br>• Teacher feedback on curriculum<br>• HLA Teacher PD Needs |
| What does student engagement look like in the HLA classroom? | • Students actively engaged in the lesson/model<br>• Students actively engaged in a small group with teacher<br>• Students actively working with a partner |
| Are there examples of gradual release and student interaction in the HLA classroom? If so, what are the characteristics of this practice? | • Teacher begins the class with a model<br>• Teacher engages in a model with the class<br>• Teacher releases students to work independently or in small groups<br>• Teacher demonstrates "catch and release"<br>• Student completes the present task with minimal prompting |
| Are there clear connections to ENL/ELA curriculum? | • Teacher uses protocol from ENL/STA<br>• Teacher mentions themes from ENL/STA |
| Positive, targeted teacher feedback and welcoming class culture | N/A |

Regarding the research question on teacher perception, we finalized subcodes for the following: strengths in the unit, gaps in the unit, training and support required, and further curriculum development resources required. In the area of classroom pedagogical strategies related to the curriculum, we grouped the codes into five major codes relating to *Engagement, Gradual Release, Collaboration practices, Classroom Culture, the Physical Environment, and Assessment* that aligned with our instructional rubric used in the classroom observations as well as the major characteristics of the curriculum. The second round of codes referred to the concrete strategies and practices we observed related to these five categories. Regarding the research question focused on student engagement, we identified two subcodes that were most relevant to the findings, including *Time on Task* and *Engagement*. Finally, with regard to the research question on connections between the ELA and HLA curricula, our subcodes referenced the number of times that the researchers observed similar protocols used in both classrooms and the number of times that the teachers mentioned themes from both subject areas.

After each round of observations, researchers wrote analytic memos to help process the information and identify themes or areas for further investigation (Charmaz 2006). Analytic memos also provided a reflective tool throughout the research study to identify the themes that emerged from the classroom, as well as any unconscious biases held by researchers documenting the process.

We then gauged how students performed on writing assessments by scoring the student writing based on each trait over a one-semester period and comparing performance from the beginning to the end of the semester. Within the rubric, there are four different categories: ideas, organization, word choice, and sentence fluency. Ideas is scored based on the clarity and complexity of the ideas the student demonstrates and develops throughout their essay. Organization is scored based on whether the essay has a definitive beginning, middle, and end with a variety of transitions used. Word choice is scored based on the student using a variety of common and academic language and choosing the precise language in the correct context. Finally, sentence fluency is scored based on using a variety of sentence formats that are precise and have minimal errors. We engaged in simple statistical analysis to analyze the results.

## 3. Results

### *3.1. Teacher Perception*

We surveyed the teachers about their perceptions around the curriculum. Out of the eight teachers who took the survey, four (50%) believed that Set 1 was the most engaging for students. One teacher said, "The students were able to express their own experiences and share with the class. And there were more activity-based lessons". Another teacher who stated that Set 1 was the most engaging said, "I think the content about identity is very relatable for students. African Roots/Indigenous Roots were interesting for them historically, but they didn't always seem to connect personally". In addition, two (25%) of the teachers said that Set 2 was the most engaging. One teacher who chose this one said, "The text was about a topic students identify with more easily (music), as opposed to the Mirna text which is about organization and her aspiration of a career in the sciences". Finally, two (25%) of the teachers believed that Set 3 was the most engaging; one said, "The kids are learning new things about their own cultures as well as their classmates' [cultures]". Overall, according to the teacher perceptions, these sets engaged students and got them to think about their identity and their culture, as well as that of their classmates.

When surveyed, all teachers believed that the curriculum was well-developed with detailed lesson descriptions and materials and was easy to use. One major area of approval was that the prepared lesson plans saved time, allowing teachers to "focus more on the implementation and strategic execution of each lesson", including differentiating materials for the range of student levels in class. Teachers commented that in addition to saving time, the lessons built on each other in a predictable schedule to more strongly build student independence, even for students at the lowest literacy levels.

During individual interviews, the teachers had overall positive feedback around the curriculum and its features. In fact, there were 23 positive comments across all of the interviews compared to eight negative comments around curricular features. In general, teachers liked the protocols and the scaffolded nature of the curriculum. They also noted that the curriculum consistently improved student skills across the unit; for example, one teacher spoke about how the curriculum supported two of her struggling students:

> Out of the group of twelve students, I would say two students ... are at a lower literacy scale and level. They just struggle a lot when it comes to reading comprehension. When we first read about Manolo, they were just focusing on only one aspect of Manolo, instead of getting the general idea. Then, once they started annotating, once we were reading it just for the gist and then reading it to get more information and once they would look over their notes and use their annotations and use their graphic organizers or concept map to explain it.

In addition, the curriculum also features eleven different protocols that all support student learning of the material within the lesson types. Of these, 100% of the teachers said that our thinking map protocol and "See-Think-Wonder" protocol had most impacted student learning. In addition, five (62.5%) said that "Think-Pair-Share" was also impacting their students' learning. One teacher summarized her ideas by saying, "I have noticed a major impact within my classes. This impact is shown in the improvement of their grades, the amount of class participation that is being shown, the teamwork that they are showing is a great improvement and, most importantly, their comprehension of the lessons has improved, and it has shown in their increasing grades".

In addition, several teachers mentioned that the curriculum really improved their students' writing and reading skills across the unit. One said, "You can definitely see their writing improve over time. Even having them use academic vocabulary. Sometimes it sticks with them, and they are able to use it in the right context..".. Another teacher echoed that same sentiment around her students' writing:

> I had a student . . . last year. I was using my own material, and I was so concerned this year because even though I did a lot of work with him, in the beginning of the year he still was not reading. Sometimes he even failed to identify letters,

> so when we started the curriculum there were some activities with identifying syllables and organizing sentences. Then, he started reading and loves coming to school because even his peers say, "wow, you are reading". Now, he is so proud of himself, he is not even refusing to read and take chances.

According to the teacher survey and interview data, the students made progress in both reading and writing skills largely due to the structure, materials, and protocols found in the curriculum. Student writing was reported to be most impacted by the academic vocabulary and graphic organizers provided in the curriculum, whereas foundational reading skills were impacted by the initial activities around letter-sound correspondence and basic sentence structure provided within the curriculum, with the intention of best supporting SIFE by improving literacy skills in Spanish.

### *3.2. Classsroom Interaction and Student Engagement*

Throughout the course of the fall semester, the team observers rated teacher practice on the team-designed observation protocol. All of the teachers were observed at least once by either researchers or project staff across all classrooms. Three of these teachers were observed twice so that their classroom instruction had a pre- and post-observation rating on the observation protocol across competencies. Their overall change scores are reported below. These ratings are for two visits with, at most, two months between visits. See Table 3 for more details on each area of instruction and the alignment between the HLA and the ELA instruction.

Overall, each teacher made growth in at least one category. The area where teachers made the most growth was in assessment and instruction. Teachers needed training and support on the types of assessments available in the curriculum; once trained, they were able to access the assessments and implement them more effectively. Regarding classroom culture, the observations showed that the teachers established a strong rapport with their students during the semester, some of which was facilitated by activities in the curriculum, including a lesson that explicitly taught skills on collaborative work. In relation to instruction, there was an increased use of student centers during the semester across observations, and the accompanying graphic organizers related to each center. Teachers changed the way they structured their classes over the course of the semester with increased focus on student facilitation and decreased teacher time at the front of the classroom. One area of challenge for the teachers was the increased use of the physical environment to facilitate learning for their students. Teachers participating in the study did not have their own classroom and reported that sharing a classroom often became an impediment to using the physical space as part of their lesson in meaningful ways.

Observers documented more evidence of teacher use of language structures provided by the curriculum and observed increased student use of these language structures in the classroom. Teachers appeared more comfortable with the curricular routines and were more likely to use them by the end of the semester. Overall, observations revealed that the implementation of the curriculum had a positive impact on the teacher's pedagogy in the use of routines, increased class time for student practice, and increased focus on language structures. They also noticed that after the semester of working with the new curriculum and coaches these teachers were better at their gradual release for scaffolding and supporting students towards being able to work independently or in small groups. Finally, culturally responsive lessons and texts resulted in high engagement for the majority of students, particularly through the discussion of identity. One lesson in particular included a class share about Latin American countries and cultures. Another teacher had the students from each country share out their country's flag, national bird, etc., and this was a highly engaging lesson.

**Table 3.** Changes in Score Across Competencies Between Two Visits for Three Teachers.

| Category | Sub-Category | Teacher 1 | Teacher 2 | Teacher 3 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Classroom Culture | There is respectful interaction with and among students in the classroom | 0 | −1 | −0.5 |
| | Teacher promotes appreciation, respect, and active interest in all students' home languages and cultures | +2 | −3 | −0.5 |
| | Routines exist that support development of school habits and independence in the classroom. | 0 | −1 | −1 |
| Physical Environment | The physical classroom is a resource for learning academic content, language, and thinking skills. | 0 | −2 | −1 |
| | The physical environment demonstrates an appreciation for diversity. | +1 | −3 | −1.5 |
| Instruction | Direct Instruction: Teacher models a process, product, and/or thinking using comprehensible input. | −1 | −3 | −1 |
| | Shared instruction: Teacher models a task or strategy in collaboration with students. | −2 | −2 | −2 |
| | Collaborative practice:Students work collaboratively in groups or with partners | +3 | 0 | −2 |
| | Independent practice: Students have opportunities to apply their learning in independent practice | 0 | 0 | +2 |
| | Teacher demonstrates flexibility and responsiveness | +2 | −2 | −1 |
| Assessment | Learning is informally and formally assessed throughout the lesson | +3 | −1 | −1 |
| | Students are provided opportunities to self-assess | +2 | 0 | +1 |
| | Regular and strategic feedback is provided to students | −1 | +1 | +1.5 |
| | Written and visual exemplars and/or student-friendly rubrics are used | 0 | −3 | −2.5 |
| Alignment | There is alignment between themes touched upon in the Integrated ENL/ELA curriculum | +2 | −1 | −0.5 |
| | There is an alignment between the protocols used in ENL/ELA and those used in HLA. | 0 | −1 | −0.5 |

### *3.3. Student Growth in Writing*

The curriculum was designed with beginning- and end-of-unit writing assessments along with a summative performance task as part of the Sets 4 and 5 additional writing assessments that took place across the unit. One teacher administered the beginning-of-year assessment and two administered the beginning-of-year assessment along with three other assessments from the curriculum. Assessment of student growth was severely disrupted by COVID-19. However, looking across writing assessments from the unit through to mid-semester, students scored in the following ways by writing trait on the rubric included with the curriculum (Table 4).

**Table 4.** Results as Measured by Writing Rubric.

| Name of Assessment | Number of Students Assessed | Average Ideas Score | Average Organization Score | Average Word Choice Score | Average Sentence Fluency Score |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| L10 | 30 | 1.87 | 1.53 | 1.5 | 1.5 |
| L19 | 23 | 1.70 | 1.52 | 1.57 | 1.65 |
| L27 | 25 | 2.64 | 1.68 | 2.48 | 2.32 |

Table 4 shows that in *Ideas* there was an average growth of 0.94 across these assessments. All of Set 2 is very focused on idea generation around the topic of identity, and

that emphasis is reflected. In *Word Choice*, the average increase was 0.98. Both Set 1 and Set 2 include a vocabulary component, which is likely to be why this is the writing trait that had the largest average increase overall. *Sentence Fluency* increased an average of 0.67 points across this time period. There are specific lessons around parts of speech and sentence structure seen across Set 1 and Set 2 that likely account for this improvement. *Organization* increased the least, but there was still an average increase of 0.16 across these lessons. Direct instruction on longer paragraph writing occurs in Lesson 22, so the students may need more time to incorporate these skills into their writing.

Observations revealed one of the biggest areas of growth was the amount of time students spent focused and engaged in classroom tasks throughout the year. Observers attributed this to 1) familiarity with classroom routines as the year progressed, including curricular protocols; and 2) stronger routines around management of classroom materials. We observed students using their binders to refer to old handouts for support with current lessons towards the end of the semester. Teachers increased their use of curricular language frames. There was also evidence of student growth in their understanding of identity as a topic and their use of appropriate academic language, graphic organizers, and language structures.

### *3.4. Alignment of HLA to the ENL/ELA Curriculum*

One of our research questions addressed the alignment and the observed connections between the ELA curriculum and the HLA curriculum. We assessed whether there were skills or content areas that were reinforced between the HLA and the ELA classes, and found that themes, instructional tools, and protocols from the ELA curriculum were also used in the HLA classrooms we observed. In both curricula, the theme of identity was the most prevalent. Overall, we observed six different HLA class sessions centered around the theme of identity. We also observed three teachers who used the identity maps and one who used "See-Think-Wonder", an instructional protocol embedded in both curricula (see Table 5 for definitions).

Based on the observations, the protocols used most often in classroom instruction in both the ELA and the HLA classrooms included common instructional protocols such as See-Think-Wonder and Think-Pair-Share (Table 5) as well as graphic organizers such as Thinking Maps. In addressing practices to improve alignment, one teacher said, "[I need] more prep time so both departments can collaborate in order to keep the lessons aligned". We also asked the teachers if they saw any specific areas in which they saw crossover in student performance; one said, "Yes I do especially with 'Who-Do-More Information.' The students are really understanding the concept of this when they see it both in their ENL and HLA classes". Another teacher said:

> Yes, I do see a transfer of learning from one class to another. For example, I taught a lesson a few weeks ago which the students actually spoke up and informed me that they were very familiar with it [the protocol] because it was taught in their ELA class, which made the transition into HLA much easier, the students were excited that it was incorporated in both classes, and it reinforces their understanding.

During the interviews, the teachers mentioned the alignment and crossover they experienced in the classrooms. For example, Alana said:

> For us, it was the different protocols and just the fact that we had all these resources like the graphic organizers that helped with the students. We really loved the See, Think, Wonder and what we did with the vocabulary logging, the different strategies for word detecting: basically, all those protocols that were given, especially the use of thinking maps because they were already using it in their ENL portion of the Curriculum. Doing it in the HLA curriculum was reinforcing it.

Another teacher also reported:

> The fact that students already took the Curriculum (ENL/ELA) in the first semester with Sandra and the other teacher, they walk into this class and they already know the mechanics. . . . They already know what is expected of them and what they can expect from the class.

The teachers stated that the more the students already knew a protocol in their ELA classes, the more likely they were to be successful with this protocol in their HLA course. In addition, Rosa also mentioned the added benefit that having her students' ENL/ELA teacher as a co-teacher within her class supported the transition of routines and protocols from one classroom to another.

**Table 5.** Instructional Protocols used in HLA and ELA classes.

| Instructional Protocol | Definition |
| --- | --- |
| See-Think-Wonder | A routine that stimulates curiosity and inquiry through observations. (Project Zero 2019 (See Supplementary Materials)) |
| Think-Pair-Share | Think-pair-share (TPS) is a collaborative learning strategy where students work together to solve a problem or answer a question about an assigned reading (Lightner and Tomaswick 2017 (See Supplementary Materials)) |
| Read-Retell-Respond | Routine involving reading in home language, retelling in the new language where applicable, and annotating words. (Brown and Cambourne 1990) |

The researchers observed that the teachers and students made connections between the two sets of curricula in a variety of different lesson types. One of the most obvious of these was the use of centers in HLA, specifically the reading center, because of the aligned design with the stand-alone ENL classroom. The observers also noticed that the "See-Think-Wonder" protocol was used more often within the HLA classrooms, which is another example of the connections between the ENL/ELA and the HLA curricula (Table 5). Most of the teachers used the theme of identity across their classes; these teachers also used identity maps and had complex discussions around what identity means. Finally, one of the observers visited both an ENL classroom and an HLA classroom at one site and noticed that one student remembered how to do sentence labeling in her ENL class and was able to transfer this knowledge to her HLA class.

### *3.5. Limitations*

The research study included all the data from all six schools. This study was not designed to measure the impact of specific aspects of the curriculum, but rather to capture specific strategies in the curriculum that could be identified as potential best practices and that could be identified for later impact studies. This study, therefore, was exploratory in nature and designed to provide trends in student and educator experiences, as well as perceptions from the implementing school sites. The teachers were new to the implementation and experienced a learning curve in the process of learning both the methods and the strategies. For example, one common struggle was internalizing the routine and steps of some of the instructional methods. Finally, the onset of COVID-19 created school closures that prevented us from gaining quantitative student data for the entire year; thus, the next step would be to pilot the full set of writing materials to gauge student progress across multiple writing traits in assessments across a full year of implementation.

## 4. Discussion

Through interviews, survey observations, and preliminary assessment data, a few initial conclusions can be drawn from our exploratory study. First, integrating age-appropriate topics into the curriculum to teach content and language supported access and engagement for students, particularly when using relatable themes such as identity that draw on the students' backgrounds and interests. In addition, teacher integration of the gradual release of responsibility facilitated increased time on tasks and engagement; however,

integral to this process is developing and providing the appropriate scaffolds for a variety of levels and differentiations, including, but not limited to, foundational levels of literacy. Third, adapting the curriculum to include texts and practices that are culturally responsive were key to making the HLA curriculum successful across multiple contexts where the student interest and the Spanish cultural and linguistic backgrounds may vary. Fourth, the student writing data suggest that while the curriculum helps students focus on ideas and increase vocabulary, additional lesson support is needed to support student sentence fluency and organization. Finally, both the student assessment data and the observations suggest that the instructional protocols used in both the HLA and the ELA classrooms helped engage student learning in both languages and facilitated increased oral language production and writing. However, in order for any of these curriculum components to be used with fidelity, professional learning for teachers is key, particularly the incorporation of job-embedded learning and coaching in addition to traditional professional-development workshop models. These topics will all be explored in more detail below.

### *4.1. Implications for Home Language Arts Pedagogy and Translanguaging*

The largest implication of our work is for the HLA pedagogy at large. One of the biggest of these is simply that allowing students to have the experience of learning in and about their home language was critical to making these students feel welcomed into their classrooms and school environments. Having students learn in both languages is implicitly telling students that they and their cultures are valuable (Fredricks and Warriner 2016), which in turn helps students to feel like valued members of the classroom. We found through observations that as the students felt more comfortable and accepted, they were more likely to participate and engage with the classroom materials, which is an important addition to the pedagogy.

Additionally, many of the protocols and activities that were recommended by the curriculum were found to be successful within the classroom; this included the use of the gradual release of responsibility that incorporates the SIOP model (Echevarria et al. 2017), which was especially successful within the classroom in that this structured the class structure for both the English Language Learners and their teachers alike. The use of gradual release also supported students across different kinds of lessons so that they could get more or less support before turning to the collaborative practice, depending on the difficulty or novelty of the content. Overall, the implications of this observational study are that the HLA classroom needs consistent routines and protocols to best support these students, and the SIOP model (Echevarria et al. 2017) is an especially useful framework for structuring the activities of the HLA classroom, which facilitates growth in reading and writing in their home language.

In addition to the work on the HLA pedagogy, we saw some specific instances of translanguaging supporting these students within these classrooms and through the teachers' self-reports. In line with García and Wei (2014), we also believe that the students need to be able to use both of their languages within both the HLA and the English as a New Language (ENL) classroom contexts to be able to best learn the material. One example of this is that we used the same instructional protocols between our ELA curriculum and the HLA curriculum (which will be discussed below), so that the students had a common toolkit of skills that was transferrable across classrooms. The teachers also noted that when students had the individual grammatical and letter-sound correspondence skills in Spanish, they were able to transfer within the English classroom context. Finally, according to one teacher, as students gained the ability to read within the Spanish classroom context, students gained the academic self-efficacy to feel increased confidence in reading and participating in other classrooms. Through the use of pedagogical strategies and the development of academic skills through the curriculum, newcomers and SIFE were better able to access material in the HLA classroom and beyond during their semester.

### *4.2. Increasing Engagement through Culturally Responsive Teaching*

In addition to the pedagogical structures supporting the HLA learning, the curriculum was designed to include cultural structures and strategies recommended in culturally responsive teaching theory (Ladson-Billings 1994; Gay 2010, 2013). This included the use of texts that described cultural experiences that tapped into the students' heterogeneous racial and ethnic backgrounds. Through observations and teacher reports, we learned that the majority of students were engaged with these topics in discussion. We also noticed through many of our observations that creating a welcoming and culturally responsive classroom culture helped the students to feel more engaged and supported within the classroom where they felt safe enough to share out their work and take risks when asked open-ended questions. Overall, the use of texts and materials that are relevant to the students' own backgrounds and acknowledging and incorporating the students' cultural knowledge makes the classroom a richer and safer place for newcomers to share their own connections to text and content.

### *4.3. Connections between ELA/ENL and HLA Classrooms*

Turning more towards specific connections between the ELA and the HLA curriculum, we saw a lot of use of the protocols that connected across classrooms. Teachers reported that students frequently knew what to do with a specific graphic organizer or protocol because they had already practiced it a few times in their ELA classrooms. In addition, in speaking with the HLA teachers, many said that they would like to receive more in-depth instruction about the ELA curriculum content so that they could even better leverage some of the themes across units to create additional support for their students. Several teachers also said that they would like common planning time with the ELA teachers or at least a pacing calendar that aligned to both curricula so that they could more thoroughly help their students develop these connections. Overall, the teachers and students were able to make many connections between the two curricula, but more school-based professional teaming and professional learning is required to strengthen this alignment and facilitate increased biliteracy for students participating in both classes.

### *4.4. Implications for Team Curriculum Design and Professional Learning*

Based on the teacher feedback and observations, we recommend developing a rubric that is more student-friendly, including very simple language or pictures to allow ease of use and help students to receive and comprehend feedback from their teachers on each writing trait. We recommend revision of the vocabulary suggested for each lesson to include fewer high-level Spanish academic vocabulary words and an increase in basic academic and colloquial vocabulary. Our recommendation regarding the texts is to vary the content of the reading so that there is a more balanced mixture of fiction and nonfiction texts, especially as the teachers said that the nonfiction text is an important skill for approaching standardized testing. Furthermore, we recommend differentiating the texts so that they are more accessible for a wider variety of learners. We also propose writing additional lessons targeting foundational skills to better support new-to-print students who cannot access the texts.

Finally, teacher recommendations point to including coaching and professional development activities for pilot teachers, including seminars and teaming opportunities to better support the sharing of best practices with each other.

Based on the analysis of the student writing, the theme of identity in the first set of the curriculum engaged the students to grapple with ideas and engage in discussion, and this was reflected in their writing scores on the Idea trait. From the writing samples, we saw that the students increased their scores on the trait of Word Choice, which may be associated with the inclusion of the academic vocabulary guidance provided in Sets 1 and 2. Although the students improved in sentence fluency, their lower scores in this trait led us to recommend that additional lessons be provided to support sentence writing. The most significant recommendation for team revisions is to improve the writing assessments

embedded in the curriculum so that there are formative assessments to better support increased student writing and stamina in the classroom.

### *4.5. Next Steps*

Our next step for research is to finalize data collection for pilot schools at the end of the following school year and integrate coaching observations and feedback as well as additional student assessment data collected from classrooms to inform the revisions process and the professional learning. These recommendations from the study and the additional data collected will contribute to increasing the effectiveness of our curriculum implementation so that SIFE and newcomers can access and transfer their home language skills, accelerate English language production, and be more successful in their academic careers in the United States.

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