SUPPORTING LATINO STUDENTS WITH INTERRUPTED FORMAL EDUCATION

a guide for teachers
SUPPORTING LATINO STUDENTS WITH INTERRUPTED FORMAL EDUCATION (SIFE)

A GUIDE FOR TEACHERS

The Institute of Latin American Studies (ILAS) at Columbia University has commissioned the production of this curriculum guide to serve as a resource for K-12 teachers in New York City. This guide aims to strengthen educators’ background knowledge and instructional strategies so they can better support Spanish-speaking students with interrupted formal education (SIFE) from Latin America and the Caribbean.

The ILAS K-12 Outreach Program strives to enhance the professional capacity of teachers in a multicultural New York City environment and promote the inclusion of Latin American and Caribbean history and culture in their classrooms and students’ daily lives. The program draws on the expertise and support of faculty and students across Columbia University to offer educators resources and opportunities to learn about creative ways of incorporating Latin American and Caribbean history and culture into their curriculum.

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I first heard these words from a 14-year-old Honduran female in June, 2012. She was an unaccompanied minor in the care of Baptist Child and Family Services (BCFS) via the International Children’s Shelter, a federal emergency shelter for unaccompanied minors in San Antonio, Texas. She had come to the U.S. looking for her family and hoping to create a new life, having tragically never attended school in her home country. A teacher in the shelter at the time, I began teaching her—and many others with limited formal education also housed at BCFS—how to read and write in Spanish, unknowingly developing the foundations for what would become a Spanish-language literacy curriculum and academic program that would later evolve into a year-long research project on the native-language literacy needs and Spanish literacy growth potential of secondary-aged Latino immigrants. From 2013 to 2017, I served as the Spanish literacy teacher and Spanish literacy curriculum developer at a public high school in the Bronx exclusively designed for newcomer immigrants who had been in the country for less than two years. Many of those students shared the same experiences as the young woman I met in the shelter in 2012 and, in fact, several of them had come up to New York after a brief stay in the same shelter in San Antonio.
It has been nearly seven years since I first heard that young woman speak those words, and no longer do they surprise me. During my years in the Bronx, I heard them every year from at least one student who walked through my classroom door. I would quickly come to learn that she and my other students were part of a unique group of immigrant students known as Students with Interrupted or Inconsistent Formal Education (SIFE). However, unlike most SIFE, who often have some foundational literacy in their native language, those students often have none (NYSED, 2015).

My time in the Bronx also pushed me to conduct a 4.5-year longitudinal study centered on the Spanish-language needs of Latino SIFE and the effectiveness of an age-, level-, and culturally appropriate Spanish literacy curriculum on their Spanish literacy development. I implemented several types of instructional interventions and developed both a foundational Spanish literacy assessment as well as a number of curricular resources based on my ongoing knowledge and experience with this population. With my data and findings, I sought to establish the beginnings of a body of research on the Spanish literacy growth that secondary-aged Latino SIFE can achieve within certain timeframes and conditions.

I also hoped to offer the start of potential Spanish literacy solutions for this highly vulnerable population, with the ultimate goal of helping other teachers gain knowledge and understanding of a student who walks through their door saying the same thing: Pero Miss/Mister, no sé leer ni escribir mi nombre.

This guide is based on my research and hopes to serve you, teacher, to better educate Latino SIFE students. I hope you get good use out of it.

Sarah Digby, M.A.

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This guide aims to provide K-12 educators with knowledge of Latino SIFE as well as a range of general activities and measures educators can take to better accommodate and support those students in the classroom regardless of age. While it is virtually impossible to meet every need of the population—particularly given the amount of academic years that some students must recuperate and the level of socioemotional attention that many require—schools must still strive to build on the tremendous strengths of Latino SIFE and allow them to grow and thrive in safe, secure, and nurturing school environments. The potential for this population to prosper within schools while also enriching their school communities is both enormous and exciting.

The primary focus of the guide is on secondary-aged or over-aged (15- to 18-year-old) Latino SIFE who are new to print (NTP), which means that they entered school unable to read or write in Spanish. Focused on the Spanish literacy growth and milestones that NTP SIFE can obtain within a certain time frame, the introduction of this guide seeks to both familiarize educators with the strengths and capabilities of NTP Latino SIFE (see Figures 1-4). The inspiring results and work put forth by this most vulnerable subset of Latino SIFE in recent research (see Digby, 2017) inspired the creation of this guide: if these students can attain such degrees of progress, then the progress Latino SIFE in general can attain even higher levels when teachers have insight and knowledge into effective strategies for accommodating this population. On pages 9 and 10 are some examples of how SIFE students can improve in school if their needs are considered (Figs. 1, 2, 3, and 4).
**FIGURE 1.** Writing development over a period of 11 months of an 18-year-old Honduran male SIFE who had attended school until the third grade and received an Individualized Education Plan (IEP). About 10 months into his literacy interventions, he recorded sounds and used word spaces more accurately when writing on a computer.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time Period</th>
<th>Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2 months</td>
<td>2.6.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 months</td>
<td>7.9.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 months</td>
<td>11.12.14</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. Mi fui a parque con mi amigo.
2. A yer fue mediodía.
3. Miss Sarah men seño a leer.
4. Mi mamá está en Honturas.
5. yo fue a patinar en yelo.

---

**FIGURE 2.** Writing development over a period of 13 months of an 18-year-old Honduran male SIFE who had attended school until third grade.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Initial Assessment</th>
<th>Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.12.16</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time Period</th>
<th>Date</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2 months</td>
<td>2.6.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 months</td>
<td>7.9.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12-15 months</td>
<td>3.8.17</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

¿Qué quieres ser cuando seas grande?

Quiero ser graduado.
FIGURE 3. English writing development of the same student in Figure 2, who began to respond to reading and writing instructions in English after 7 months of Spanish literacy interventions.

Using a mix of Spanish and English, the student completed a higher level assessment from his English content class involving types of characterization.

Essay on Romeo & Juliet written for the student’s regular English class in a mix of English and Spanish.

FIGURE 4. Writing development over a period of 6 months of a 16-year-old Dominican male SIFE who attended school until 5th grade. School records show he had repeated three times. Interventions began in October, 2016.

Initial Assessment - 1 month
9.14.16 and 10.7.16

2 months
11.15.16

6 months
3.28.17
With this information in mind, **Part I** of this guide begins with a general overview of SIFE and then delves specifically into Latino immigrants and Latino SIFE. Educators will learn about the home-country experiences of Latino SIFE, primary reasons for interrupted schooling, and general education attainment levels in their countries of origin. Next, they will explore the education levels of Latino SIFE and read more about their Spanish literacy levels upon arriving in the U.S. Various components of the migration experiences of Latino SIFE will be described: complex resettlement experiences, trauma, familial adjustments, pressures to find employment, navigating a complicated legal system, and confronting educational challenges in the U.S. school system.

**Part II** of this guide provides educators with a series of 10 reflective and interactive lessons designed to help them engage in conversations with themselves. These self-reflective exercises seek to help teachers better position themselves to understand not only the complex academic and socioemotional needs of Latino SIFE, but also their immense strengths. The ultimate goal being to help educators meet the unique needs and experiences of Latino SIFE in the classroom, part II strives to equip teaching staff with the initial tools, knowledge, and examples needed to continue their own self-reflection journeys, practice new ways to target the needs of SIFE, and discover methods of harnessing their strengths to enhance the overall classroom community.
WHO ARE SPANISH-SPEAKING SIFE FROM LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN?
Students with Interrupted Formal Education (SIFE) are a subset of emergent bilinguals/emergent multilinguals, also known as English Language Learners (ELLs). The difference between emergent bilinguals and SIFE is that SIFE are students “who have attended schools in the U.S. for less than 12 months and who, upon initial enrollment…, are two or more years below grade level in [home language] literacy … or math due to inconsistent or interrupted schooling” upon arrival in the U.S. (NYSED, 2015). While New York State officially uses the term SIFE, the term Students with Limited or Inconsistent Formal Education (SLIFE) may also be used to denote the same subset of students (Minnesota Department of Education, 2018). Within this subset of SIFE exists another subset, called SIFE with Developing Literacy (SDL), who possess reading levels of 3rd-grade or below in their home language (NYSED, 2017). Figure 5 below breaks down how SIFE and SDL fit into the group of emergent bilinguals/ELLs.

Table 1 describes the different types of newcomers and the ways in which late-arrival SIFE compare to other newcomers, particularly with regard to home-language literacy levels and academic content knowledge.

Many SIFE arrive during adolescence, and for some, their first introduction to formal schooling starts when they enter middle school or high school in the U.S. (Yip, 2013). Yip (2013) asserts that most SIFE only receive education in the U.S. for brief periods of time because of those circumstances. Despite their late arrivals and older ages, U.S. school systems still expect SIFE to master complicated high school curricula in a foreign language (English) and achieve the same academic milestones within the same time frames as their U.S.-born peers (Suárez-Orozco et al., 2008 as cited in Yip, 2013).

Yip (2013) also describes the ways in which limited education backgrounds leave SIFE unprepared for the rigor of secondary-level content classes (Suárez-Orozco, et al. 2008; Short & Boyson, 2012 as cited in Yip, 2013). In addition to home-country schooling experiences placing SIFE at a disadvantage for conquering higher-level content in the U.S., the limited formal education experiences of SIFE can also leave them with limited or no home-language literacy (Advocates for Children, 2010). In the case of Latino SIFE, that would mean little or no Spanish literacy.
### TABLE 1.

Types of newcomer students.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>First-language (L1) literacy</th>
<th>Grade-level content knowledge</th>
<th>English literacy development (compared to other newcomers)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Literate</strong> (full schooling)</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Literate</strong> (partial schooling)</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Students with Interrupted Formal Education (SIFE)</strong></td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Short & Boynton (2012)

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**LEARN MORE ABOUT:**

**SIFE**

Visit English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) for more information on SIFE:

https://www.esolinhighered.org/

Educators may also visit the ESOL YouTube video channel, which features several videos defining SIFE:

https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLrEC3WwWXAnQk94FVznmHByp6MLQOH4Fx

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**SIFE in New York State**

Despite the fact that SIFE comprise a significant (nearly 10%) percentage of emergent bilinguals, troubling gaps in both the research and academic literature around their needs perhaps best characterizes them. Traditionally overlooked and underserved, SIFE often fall through the cracks in the U.S. education system, and institutions and schools have conducted very little research on this seemingly invisible population (Lukes, 2015). It is important to remember that a lack of published research does not indicate a lack of SIFE, a lack of challenges in meeting their needs, and lack of strengths they inherently bring into their classroom communities.

Regardless of these troubling gaps, New York State has conducted steady research and produced several publications on the SIFE population within its boundaries. That work can help shed light onto the demographics of this population: in 2016, newcomers comprised 63.3% and SIFE comprised 8.7% of the emergent bilingual subgroup.
in New York State (NYSED, 2017). Within this 8.7% of SIFE, NYSED (2015) found that 64% spoke Spanish as their native language. In other words, while SIFE arrive from a variety of countries worldwide, SIFE in New York State overwhelmingly come from Latin American and Caribbean countries.

### Dropout Rates Among Latino Immigrants

Adolescent Latino immigrants have the highest dropout rates upon arrival to the U.S., with 24% dropping out of school at age 17 and 16% dropping out of school at age 16 (Lukes, 2015). It is important to highlight the important difference made by the age of immigration (see Figure 6): Latino immigrants who arrive in early childhood have significantly lower high school dropout rates (5–8%) that place them roughly on-par with the high school dropout rates of U.S.-born children (3-6%) (Lukes, 2015). Dropout rates are even more staggering for SIFE: as high as 70% of SIFE are expected not to finish high school (Fry, 2005). Much of that graduation crisis among SIFE is due to the rigorous nature of secondary content and skills, coupled with the failure of educational policies to help those students graduate (Yip, 2013).

It is also important to note that the percentages of 18- to 26-year olds with incomplete high school educations after arriving in the U.S. are highest among students from Mexico, Central America, and South America (Lukes, 2015). In New York City, the Department of Education recently confirmed that SIFE in public schools are twice as likely to be enrolled at the secondary level than the primary (NYCDOE, 2013). Those data reveal that Latino SIFE are not only more likely to arrive at adolescent ages, but that they are also at a significantly higher risk of dropping out of school, underscoring the critical role that our nation’s high schools—and the educators within them—play in enabling the academic success of Latino immigrant students and Latino SIFE.

![Figure 6](source: Fry (2005))

**Figure 6.** Percentage of dropout rates among Latino immigrants based on their age of immigration.
1.2 HOME-COUNTRY EXPERIENCES FOR LATINO AND CARIBBEAN SIFE

The home-country experiences of Latino and Caribbean SIFE are often fraught with economic hardship, emotional trauma, and familial separation. Central American SIFE in particular have often experienced extreme poverty, gang violence, narcotrafficking violence, and police and government corruption in their home countries.

Figures 7-10, drawn by a 16-year-old Honduran SIFE who arrived as an unaccompanied minor, detail his home-country experiences in Honduras before immigrating alone to the United States. His images depict violence he witnessed on the streets, as well as memories from his early schooling experiences. While this particular student left school in the third grade, his drawings from his home-country schooling experiences (Figures 9 and 10) provide insight into the ways in which early schooling experiences of SIFE can drastically differ from schooling experiences in the U.S. In this case, that difference in schooling experiences led to a disparity in what the student assumed was appropriate behavior among peers. He had inappropriately touched a girl on the shoulder at school in the U.S., causing the girl to become upset. In an effort to understand why this student acted in this way, he was asked to draw pictures of what he believed was appropriate school behavior based on his prior schooling experiences:

Note: This particular student left school in third grade and could not read or write in Spanish at the time of these drawings. The captions for these images contain a dialogue held between the student and the teacher as he explained in Spanish what he had drawn (Digby, 2017).

FIGURE 7 Drawing of a murder the student witnessed at a bus station at age 12.

Translated from Spanish:

STUDENT: This is when a man was killed at the bus station. I saw him when he was killed.
TEACHER: How old were you when you saw that?
STUDENT: I was 12.
TEACHER: That was something very serious to see as a 12-year-old child. Did it affect you?
STUDENT: Yes, I was traumatized.
While aggressively touching or grabbing another student is inappropriate in the U.S., for students from other countries, such behavior may have been perceived as “normal” before. In this student’s eyes, as long as he did not touch sexually touch a female classmate, his behavior fell within the bounds of what was appropriate. Teachers should be especially mindful of practicing patience, understanding, and empathy when handling with behavioral challenges and adjustments in SIFE.
Reasons for Inconsistent or Interrupted Schooling

Many SIFE do not attend school due to a number of issues: some may live too far from the closest school, the route to school may be plagued by violence and unsafe to travel, some may need to begin working at young ages to support their families. Additionally, Lukes (2015) recently identified three key reasons for incomplete schooling in SIFE (see Figure 11). The first, identified by 47.3% of participants, was a lack of economic resources: participants either needed to leave school to contribute economically to their families, or their families could not afford to place them in school to begin with. The second major cause of interrupted schooling, identified by 45.7% of participants, was migration north to the U.S. Lastly, 6.9% of participants identified pregnancy (one's own or that of a female partner) as the cause for interrupted schooling.

FIGURE 11, Reasons given by study participants for incomplete or interrupted schooling in home countries.

Source: Lukes (2015)

Education Attainment in Latin America

According to the Pew Research Center (2018), the top Latin American countries sending immigrants to the United States are Mexico, El Salvador, Cuba, the Dominican Republic, Guatemala, Colombia, Honduras, Peru, and Ecuador. In general, education attainment in Latin America falls below the education attainment of industrialized countries (Lukes, 2015). In 2010, the average level of educational attainment for Latin America and the Caribbean was 8 years of schooling, compared with 11 years of schooling in other industrialized countries (Lukes, 2015). For the major migrant-sending Latin American nations, the educational attainment and school-enrollment percentages provide a stark contrast to those of the U.S. As explained in Table 2, for almost all major migrant-sending Latin American nations, less than half of the population aged 25 or older completed secondary education. In addition, with the exception of three of the nine countries below, less than 40% of the eligible population was enrolled in tertiary (or university) education.

Latino immigrants and SIFE generally come from educationally disadvantaged countries, rendering their probability of high education attainment abroad even more challenging. It is important for educators to remain mindful of the home-country backgrounds of those students, as well as the importance of creating intentionally designed supports targeted at both encouraging and increasing education attainment in the U.S.
Education Levels

While the formal definition of SIFE identifies them as performing two or more years below grade level, Latino SIFE possess varying levels of education: some have no formal schooling, some attended school through 2nd or 3rd grade, some have repeated lower elementary grades for many years before dropping out at pre-teen ages, and some may have attended school up to the secondary level, missing only a year or two before immigrating to the United States (Digby, 2017). Despite varying levels of education, in severe cases, some Latino SIFE have spent nearly a decade out of school before arriving in the U.S. (Digby, 2017). Unfortunately, as previously mentioned, there is little

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>% of population aged 25+ who completed secondary education, 2015</th>
<th>University enrollment: % of eligible population, 2016</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>United States</td>
<td>88.4%</td>
<td>85.8% (2015)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cuba</td>
<td>57.4% (2012)</td>
<td>34%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peru</td>
<td>55.5% (2014)</td>
<td>34% (2006)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colombia</td>
<td>45.4%</td>
<td>58.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ecuador</td>
<td>42.25%</td>
<td>45.5% (2015)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dominican Republic</td>
<td>34.86%</td>
<td>52.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mexico</td>
<td>33.35%</td>
<td>36.85%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>El Salvador</td>
<td>26.98% (2013)</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Honduras</td>
<td>23% (2014)</td>
<td>20.5% (2015)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sources:

to no reliable data on this subset of the population, mainly because research agendas on Latino immigrants continue to overlook those particular individuals (Lukes, 2015).

While there is no universal academic or socioemotional profile for Latino SIFE, a common trait shared between the majority of them are low levels of language and literacy in their home language. When discussing approaches to teaching SIFE, it is important to establish the ways in which first-language (L1) development affects second-language (L2) development, given that the level of L2 competence attained by an emergent bilingual is “partially a function of the type of competence the [individual] has developed in L1 at the time when intensive exposure to L2 begins” (Cummins 1979, p. 223). In other words, the level of English that Latino SIFE achieve is directly related to their competency level in Spanish at the time they begin to acquire English as a second language. Therefore, a strong foundation in Spanish is central to effective acquisition of sufficient levels of English. García and Kleifgen (2010) confirm that “the strongest predictor of English language achievement [is] the amount of formal schooling the students received in the home language” (p. 48). The importance of Spanish with respect to English development is vital when contemplating best practices for educating Latino SIFE.

The education levels of Latino SIFE, along with their skill levels upon arrival in the U.S., are vastly unpredictable. Some students may have attended school for 2–3 years, may already possess knowledge of Spanish letter sounds, and may have some knowledge of basic mathematical operations; other students may have never attended school, possess no knowledge of the Spanish alphabet, and required complete dedication to learning letter sounds. When it comes to literacy growth for Latino SIFE, teachers may be initiating or continuing a student’s journey to literacy and, for students in the second case, literacy needs often rest at different stages of development and require different levels of needs-assessment and targeted instruction.

### 1.3 MIGRATION EXPERIENCES

For unaccompanied minors from Central America, the journey through to the U.S. is an irrefutable landmine of traumatic experiences. The majority of those children witness or are victims of physical or sexual violence; they travel in fear of narcotrafficking gangs who target migrants headed for the U.S.; they are alone, or often in the hands of a smuggler who will later take advantage of them, betray them, or abandon them in the desert for a sudden “lack of payment”; they travel thousands of miles on the tops of trains or inside crowded tractor-trailers; they leave behind their families not knowing when or if they will ever see them again. Most of all, they are children, vulnerable to everyone and everything around them.

It is imperative to consider the various psychological and socioemotional needs of unaccompanied minors and how the aftereffects of traumatic experiences incurred on their journeys affect their learning and school experiences (Digby, 2017). In Figure 1, a 17-year-old Honduran male who arrived in the U.S. as an unaccompanied minor chronicles his migration experience crossing the border in Texas, which included having to work for the Zeta drug cartel in order to earn money while waiting to cross the border:
FIGURE 12. Description by a 17-year-old Honduran male SIFE of his unaccompanied journey to the U.S.

Translated from Spanish:

I came from Honduras to Mexico in a convoy. Afterwards, I arrived at a bed in Mexico, and after that, I went to San Luis, where I stayed for two months in my aunt’s house lying around (waiting to cross). I was selling marijuana with the Zeta cartel. After they gave me my money, I spent it (on shoes). Afterwards, I left San Luis for the border.

Resettlement experiences for Latino SIFE are often characterized by difficult periods of adjustment, longing for their home countries, re-traumatization, adjustments to new families, pressure to find work, educational obstacles in U.S. schools, and challenges navigating a complicated legal system. Central to helping those students feel safe amongst the upheaval of their lives is a reliable and secure school environment that can help serve as an anchor for these students to their new communities.

Trauma and Family Adjustments

While undocumented SIFE often obtain temporary documentation to remain in the U.S., their resettlement experiences are besieged with difficulties in trying to adjust to new families or reconnect with family members they have not seen for most of their lives (Digby, 2017). For undocumented and unaccompanied SIFE, some may arrive in the U.S. through the federal shelter system only to quickly learn that their sponsors or family members who promised to care of them in the U.S. will not claim them. In that case, those students enter foster care or live in group homes (Digby, 2017). Other times, they are successfully connected with familial sponsors, who are almost always an older extended relative (i.e., not the student’s mother or father).

If resettlement occurs with a parent, oftentimes this parent has been in the U.S. for quite some time, remarried, and has additional children. For those students, their new life in the U.S. means also meeting new siblings for the first time and trying to find their places in their new family units (Digby, 2017). While reunification is often a joyous moment for those children, it can also be fraught with contradictory emotions: depending on the length of separation, children may feel disoriented or may feel they do not recognize the parent anymore (Suárez-Orozco, Todorova, & Louie, 2001). In other cases, parents or primary caretakers may remain in the students’ home countries, causing extreme difficulties with separation and the fear of not knowing if they will ever see their loved ones again.
Work

Particularly for secondary-aged or older SIFE, many arrive in the U.S. with a primary motivation to work and earn money. As a result, many students work one or more jobs after school hours. They can often have demanding work schedules far from their homes and school, which can complicate student attendance and academic progress (Digby, 2017). It is not uncommon for a student to attend school during the day, work at night, sleep for a few hours, and then return to school the next day to begin the cycle anew. The physical, emotional, and academic impacts of contributing to their family’s income in the U.S. create difficult circumstances for SIFE trying to securely establish themselves not only in a new country, but also in a new school system.

Legal Status

Many unaccompanied minors who resettle through federal shelters eventually receive asylum or Special Immigrant Juvenile Status (SIJS) with the help of an attorney. SIJS is a special legal status that provides a legal pathway to live and work in the U.S. and is designated exclusively for children who have been abused, neglected, or abandoned in their home countries (USCIS, 2016). Court appointments and hearings to officially obtain SIJS can take a number of years depending on the legal backlog in the student’s city of residence. Others who do not resettle through the federal shelter system may remain undocumented indefinitely or, if they have the means and resources, they can hire a lawyer to help petition for asylum if they can prove there is a credible threat to their safety in their home country. There are also a handful of SIFE, often from the Dominican Republic, who immigrate legally through family-based immigration if they have an immediate relative living in the United States (U.S. Embassy in the Dominican Republic, n.d.).

Educational Obstacles in the U.S.

A central problem with SIFE when they arrive in U.S. schools is that their grade-placement corresponds to their age rather than their education levels. For secondary-aged and older SIFE, the practice of placing these students into high school may appear logical, but it can have dire consequences because their academic background does not correspond to the new system’s standards (Lukes, 2015).

Across U.S. schools, there remains a large disconnect between responding to the dual age- and grade-level needs of this population. For that reason, immigrants and SIFE who arrive as adolescents in the U.S. have the highest dropout rate of any immigrant group in the U.S. (Fry, 2005). Despite overall decreasing dropout rates among most major racial groups in the U.S., emergent bilinguals also graduate at drastically disproportionate rates: the nationwide graduation rate of emergent bilinguals is 63%, compared with the overall nationwide graduation rate of 82% (Sanchez, 2017). In New York State specifically, the numbers are even more dire: only 37% of emergent bilinguals graduate high school (Sanchez, 2017).

Even schools designed for immigrants and refugees can sometimes find themselves alarmingly unprepared to handle the gamut of academic needs represented by Latino SIFE, including recognizing these when they arrive in U.S. classrooms. Lukes (2015) attests that a “lack of data on [SIFE] is the greatest challenge to identifying [SIFE],
making it very easy to overlook their experiences" (p. 38). For example, in 2009 in New York City, "although 16,000 students entering ninth grade … had been identified as [SIFE]…procedures to identify and keep track of these students were new and applied inconsistently, making tracking their progress within the system a challenge" (Lukes 2015, p. 38). A 2010 study of Latino SIFE in New York City public schools produced similar findings, revealing that out of 98 Latino SIFE in five public schools, none was identified by school staff as SIFE, nor was any student directed towards SIFE services (Advocates for Children of New York, 2010). Furthermore, almost all of the schools “were unprepared to address [the] intensive needs [of SIFE] and [their] lack of experience with a formal school environment” (Advocates for Children of New York, 2010, p. 25). The shocking report underscored the inability of New York City public schools to provide effective solutions for SIFE, given that these schools could properly identify the population they need to serve in the first place.
part 2

HOW CAN K-12 TEACHERS BETTER SERVE SPANISH-SPEAKING LATIN AMERICAN AND CARIBBEAN SIFE?
Part II of this guide contains a series of 10 lessons, each of which functions as a personal and reflective exercise for teachers of Latino SIFE, with the ultimate goal of helping them gain insight into their current classroom practices, as well as reflecting on how they can better accommodate Latino SIFE moving forward. The lessons encompass the following five thematic areas:

1. Teacher intro- and extrospection
2. Trauma
3. SIFE and the school environment
4. SIFE programming and scheduling
5. Teacher responsibilities outside the classroom

Intended to serve as an interactive workbook that encourages intro- and extrospective processes, teachers may use the blank spaces provided in each lesson to record their thoughts, answer questions, and write down any additional ideas or strategies that may come to mind.

Each lesson adheres to the following structure:

1. A short lesson summary.
2. A guiding question.
3. An initial self-reflection question, indicated by a □.
4. Background information on the topic at hand.
5. A strategy (or strategies) dealing with the topic, including classroom examples when applicable.
6. Action steps, indicated by a ⭐, encouraging teachers to reflect on the knowledge and self-insight gained in the lesson to develop a plan for students in future classroom practices.

Following a list of suggestions or strategies, teachers will occasionally see a + next to an empty response box encouraging them to think of other ideas or suggestions based on their own knowledge of their Latino SIFE populations, as well as any other suggestions that may have come to mind while engaging in the lesson content. Additionally, a lesson may contain multiple reflection questions, which are always indicated by a □.
Lesson 1: Exploring Biases, Assumptions, and Expectations for SIFE

In this lesson, teachers will reflect inward, engaging in introspective exercises in order to examine their own biases, assumptions, and expectations on Latino SIFE—as well as how their unexplored and perhaps unconscious biases may hinder their abilities to connect with and best serve Latino SIFE in the classroom. With a heavy focus on introspection and self-reflection, this lesson also serves as foundational groundwork for the inherent self-examinatory practices in the upcoming lessons.

**GUIDING QUESTION** How does a better understanding of my own experiences and beliefs help me better provide for Latino SIFE, both academically and socioemotionally?

What are my current expectations, biases, or assumptions about my Latino SIFE population?
**Background information**

For most SIFE educators, their lived experiences greatly differ from the lived cultural and, more than often, socioeconomic experiences of their students. As a result, it can be exceptionally difficult for SIFE educators to fully empathize, understand, and grasp the academic and socioemotional struggles carried by their students, nor the remarkable strength and resiliency found in this population. Many Latino SIFE educators may have grown up in homes that guaranteed food, shelter, support, and a sense of routine, and they therefore may not consider the essential components of food, shelter, support, and routine that school can provide.

Before entering a classroom of diverse students with diverse needs and strengths, it is of utmost importance that educators first understand themselves, their attitudes towards school, and any inherent biases and assumptions are around different student populations. Whether consciously or unconsciously, the lived experiences and backgrounds of educators invariably affect the ways in which they interact and communicate with students. For example, while teachers from upper-middle-class families may equate school with “good grades”, “academic benchmarks”, or “increased opportunities”, for Latino SIFE, school may contain a myriad of possible purposes and definitions unknown or unfamiliar to their teachers.

Before examining the needs, strengths, and experiences of students, educators should first begin with a reflection inward onto themselves. Extrospection and introspection must go hand-in-hand in order to create a classroom environment best suited to meet the complex needs of SIFE.

**Strategy #1: Looking at oneself**

Self-examination can assist educators in considering how their own experiences and personal histories may impact their abilities to effectively interact with and accommodate Latino SIFE. Below are some preliminary reflection questions that teachers can both ask and answer themselves in order to develop an initial understanding of how their own histories may generate unconscious biases or expectations towards student populations that differ from their own.

- **Where am I from? What kind of neighborhood and/or city did I grow up in? What is my ethnic and cultural background?**
How might my answers differ from those of my Latino SIFE population?

What type(s) of school(s) did I attend for K-12 education (e.g., public, private, charter) and what were the demographics of my school(s)?

How might my schooling experiences and the demographics of my school(s) differ from those of Latino SIFE in my classroom?
Who helped and supported me emotionally when I was younger and upset (e.g., family members, friends, teachers)?

Do my experiences perhaps lead me to make assumptions about who may help my Latino SIFE when they are feeling upset?

Who helped and supported me academically when I struggled with assignments or concepts in school (e.g., family members, friends, teachers)?
Do my experiences lead me to make assumptions about who may help my Latino SIFE with similar academic struggles?

What were my classmates and I able to do academically when I was in the grade I currently teach, and do I expect my Latino SIFE to perform similarly? What are my expectations of Latino SIFE and what they should be able to do by the end of the year?

How do I feel when I see students not achieving what I was able to achieve, or what I may expect of them, at this age or grade level? How might my history impact my expectations of my Latino SIFE or of my students in general, regardless of immigration status?
Are my emotions or feelings around teaching to my SIFE students impacted by differences in my background, expectations and support systems with which I grew up (e.g., feeling overwhelmed by, unprepared for, or resentful toward having to take on multiple roles as an educator)?

Do I have effective or adaptive ways of managing challenging emotions associated with my role as a SIFE educator? If not, who could I reach out to for support in my current role (e.g., principals, guidance counselors, other staff members)?
**Strategy #2: What does school mean to me?**

In addition to examining their personal backgrounds, teachers should also reflect on their formal schooling experiences and how they value education. It is important to better understand the meanings that “school” and “academic performance” held when growing up, as well as what these meanings meant to families and communities.

What did school mean to me growing up? Why did I believe it was important to go to school? What did my pursuits and performance in school mean to me, my family, and/or my community?

How might my definition of school, as well as my reasons for believing it was important to attend it, differ from what it means to my Latino SIFE population? How might my answer also differ from those of their families and/or communities?

A better understanding of educators’ own values and meanings of school is significant because their Latino SIFE population may harbor varied and different meanings of school. Table 3 features many purposes the term “school” can serve not only for Latino SIFE, but also for immigrant students in general:
**TABLE 3.** Meanings and purposes of school for Latino SIFE and immigrant students.

In no particular order, "school" can mean any of the following for Latino SIFE and immigrant students:

- A place to learn academically
- A place where two meals are guaranteed, or at least food, 5 days a week
- A place of consistency and routine
- A place to make friends
- A way to learn about a new country and its culture
- A way to learn how to read and write (often in Spanish and in English)
- An anchor to a new community
- A means of staying off the street
- A means of staying out of jail
- A guaranteed safe physical space for 8 hours (e.g. for children in abusive homes, school is a place where they will not be hit for 8 hours—oftentimes, this aspect of being in school is more powerful and impactful on a child than any academic lesson they may learn in the classroom)
- A place of love and care from teachers or other school staff
- A place to interact, learn, and grow socially with peers and classmates
- A place to experiment socially and academically
- A place to learn about oneself, talents, and interests
- A place to be exposed to a new language (i.e., gradually gain understanding of a new language without being able to communicate in it, yet)
- A place to learn to communicate, either orally or in writing, in a new language
- A place to develop various types of second-language proficiency (e.g., conversational, academic, etc.)
- A place to feel part of a community and exchange strengths and interests with others
What are some other roles that school may play for Latino SIFE in my classroom?

In reflecting on Table 3, it is crucial for teachers to remember that academics, while important, are not the only purpose of school. Whereas it is true that Latino SIFE often also face an academic race against time, educators should remain mindful of the ways in which they are meeting other important needs of this population.

What are (at least) three unexpected things I learned about myself with relation to my biases, assumptions, or expectations around Latino SIFE? How did I feel by my responses (e.g., surprised, dismayed, reflective, encouraged, pleased)?

How can I remain mindful of any new introspective and extrospective knowledge I gained about myself, my attitudes towards Latino SIFE, and/or my attitudes towards being an educator of SIFE to best accommodate the needs of Latino SIFE, both academic and socioemotional, in the classroom?
2.2 TACKLING TRAUMA

Lesson 2: Recognizing Signs of Trauma

In this lesson, teachers will learn about the various indicators of trauma in students. They will also examine the ways in which they can use those indicators to identify SIFE or other students who may be struggling with their past.

GUIDING QUESTION How can educators learn to recognize signs of trauma in immigrant students and SIFE?

What are the indicators or signs I currently look for in order to identify students with trauma in my classroom? What do I already know about the traumatic experiences my students or Latino SIFE population have experienced?

Background information

The National Child Traumatic Stress Network (NCTSN) Schools Committee (2008) has identified common signs of trauma in children and adolescents. Table 4 contains a summary of these trauma indicators:
In addition to common symptoms, students with particularly severe trauma can experience flashbacks. A flashback occurs when an individual vividly relives a traumatic experience in his or her mind such that the “emotions, sounds, images, thoughts, and physical sensations related to the trauma take on a life of their own” (Van Der Kolk 2014, p. 66). In some ways, flashbacks can be worse than the original trauma itself because, while a traumatic event has a beginning and an end, a flashback can occur at any time, and the individual has no way to know when or if the flashback will occur again, nor how long it will last (Van Der Kolk, 2014). Sometimes, innocuous events, subtle cues, or slight sensations reminiscent of these traumatic memories can trigger flashbacks. For example, loud and sudden noises may trigger a flashback episode for a student who witnessed or experienced gun violence in his or her home country. Survivors of physical or sexual abuse may react to an unexpected physical touch—such as a seemingly innocuous tap on the shoulder or pat on the back.

**TABLE 4.** Common signs of trauma in children and adolescents.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Somatic issues (headaches, stomach aches, hives, cold sweats, etc.)</th>
<th>Poor regulation of emotions</th>
<th>Inconsistent academic performance</th>
<th>Unpredictable or impulsive behavior</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Over- or under-reactions to physical stimulation or physical contact</td>
<td>Fighting or aggressive behavior</td>
<td>Explosive responses to authority figures</td>
<td>Resistance to transition or change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotional numbing or dissociation</td>
<td>Difficulty sleeping</td>
<td>Anxiety</td>
<td>Worries about safety</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hyper-arousal</td>
<td>Statements alluding to trauma</td>
<td>Withdrawal or social isolation</td>
<td>Decreased attention and concentration</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: National Child Traumatic Stress Network (NCTSN), 2008

**LEARN MORE ABOUT:**

Visit the Anxiety and Depression Association of America (ADAA) to learn more about the signs of PTSD:

Signs of flashbacks vary because, during a flashback, the brain goes into fight, flight, or freeze mode. Table 5 contains symptoms related to each of the three modes the brain may activate when reliving a traumatic experience:

**TABLE 5.** Symptoms of fight, flight, and freeze responses.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FIGHT</th>
<th>FLIGHT</th>
<th>FREEZE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Crying</td>
<td>Restless legs, feet /numbness in legs</td>
<td>Feeling stuck in some part of body</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hands in fists, desire to punch, rip</td>
<td>Anxiety/shallow breathing</td>
<td>Feeling cold/frozen, numb, pale skin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flexed/tight jaw, grinding teeth, snarl</td>
<td>Big/darting eyes</td>
<td>Sense of stiffness, heaviness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fight in eyes, glaring, fight in voice</td>
<td>Leg/foot movement</td>
<td>Holding breath/restricted breathing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Desire to stomp, kick, smash with legs, feet</td>
<td>Reported or observed fidgety-ness, restlessness, feeling trapped, tenseness</td>
<td>Sense of dread, heart pounding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feelings of anger/rage</td>
<td>Sense of “running” in life, from one activity to the next</td>
<td>Decreased or increased heart rate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Homicidal/suicidal feelings</td>
<td>Excessive exercise</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knotted stomach/nausea, burning stomach</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Source: Manitoba Trauma Information and Education Center, 2013.</td>
<td>From <a href="http://trauma-recovery.ca/impact-effects-of-trauma/fight-flight-freeze-responses/">http://trauma-recovery.ca/impact-effects-of-trauma/fight-flight-freeze-responses/</a></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: Fight-flight-freeze responses are not exclusively experienced during a flashback. They can also be common reactions to events for children who have experienced trauma.*

When a child experiences a flashback, there is a sudden shift in his or her demeanor. The part of the brain that processes language can suddenly become disengaged, rendering the child able only to think in images or pictures; their brains are “hijacked by images, feelings, and sounds” from past memories (Van Der Kolk, 2014, p. 40). When this happens, the body’s fight-flight-freeze response activates, and students can find themselves trapped in a speechless horror (Van Der Kolk, 2014). Latino SIFE with histories of abuse, neglect, and/or abandonment may display common signs of trauma or experience flashbacks.

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**LEARN MORE ABOUT:**

**TRAUMA**

To learn more about trauma and how it manifests in the body, read *The Body Keeps the Score: Brain, Mind, Body in the Healing of Trauma* (2014) by Bessel van der Kolk.
Were any of the signs and symptoms of trauma mentioned above surprising or new to me? Do any of my students frequently display some of these symptoms or indicators? If so, which ones?

**Strategy and Classroom Example**

Assessing and monitoring students for trauma can be overwhelming, especially in a large classroom of students with a diverse range of needs and backgrounds. One suggestion is to create a running list or template for symptoms and students. Teachers can begin with the students they already know suffer from trauma, and they can then add to the list as they see additional students exhibit other signs or indicators. Figure 13 reveals an example of a template teachers could use to track the signs and symptoms of trauma most relevant to their students each week.

Teachers could begin with all students’ names at the top, or only the names of those they want to closely monitor for the time being. They could also list all symptoms of trauma, or start with the symptoms they already know students exhibit, adding any additional symptoms as they may appear. In terms of using the data sheet, teachers could use one check mark per incident or exhibition of a trauma indicator, visually allowing them—by the end of the week—to begin forming a picture or profile of students who may be dealing with significant trauma.

The template in Figure 13 is one suggestion of a strategy. Teachers could alternatively devise a way to track signs and symptoms by day, or they could create an entire data sheet per child (particularly if there is a child with a significant and known trauma history). The daily practice of recording indicators of trauma—or even of mentally noting them before formally writing them down—will help teachers be more mindful and aware of signs of trauma that may have otherwise gone unnoticed. After a while, educators will likely find that they will have internalized ways of formally or informally identifying certain hallmarks of trauma. The practice of monitoring students will likely seem less daunting and instead feel like another aspect of the daily classroom routine. Consistency and follow-up are key: educators should ensure they are regularly mindful of student behavior, referring students to appropriate socioemotional services, and using consistent methods of assessment to determine if these services are helping decrease student disruptions and improve overall socioemotional well-being in school.
FIGURE 13. Example of a template to track signs of trauma in students.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week of September 1.</th>
<th>Almar</th>
<th>José</th>
<th>Liliana</th>
<th>Miriam</th>
<th>Jorge</th>
<th>Gisela</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Stomach ache</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hives</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotion regulation</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inconsistent academics</td>
<td>❌</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Impulsivity</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Over/underreaction</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aggression</td>
<td>❌❌❌❌</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Explosiveness</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resistance to transition</td>
<td>❌❌❌</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dissociation</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anxiety</td>
<td>❌❌❌ ❌</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sleep problems</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social withdrawal</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hyperarousal</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flashback symptoms</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

How do I plan to track, monitor, or assess signs of trauma in students, particularly Latino SIFE on a consistent basis?
Lesson 3: Creating a Trauma-Sensitive Classroom

In this lesson, teachers will learn about trauma-informed pedagogy, as well as examine a number of protocols and routines they can implement in their classrooms to support the socioemotional needs of SIFE and other immigrant students.

**GUIDING QUESTION** What is trauma-informed pedagogy, and how can teachers create classroom environments that are responsive to students who have experienced short- and long-term trauma?

How do I believe my current classroom and classroom procedures create a safe environment for SIFE who have experienced trauma?

---

**Background Information**

Trauma-informed critical pedagogy contends that learning spaces are opportunities for sharing, putting students' needs at the core of educational experiences, and creating restorative and healing practices (Cities of Peace, 2018). With Latino SIFE, it is essential that educators remain sensitive and responsive to students' past and current traumatic experiences in order to “break the cycle of trauma, prevent re-traumatization, and engage a child in learning and finding success in school” (McInerney & McLindon, 2015, p. 2).

At the core of trauma-informed pedagogy is “the belief that students’ actions are a direct result of their experiences”. In other words, when students “act out or disengage, the question we should ask is not ‘what’s wrong with you’ but rather ‘what happened to you’” (McInerney & McLindon, 2015, p. 2). A more compassionate and empathetic approach fosters a sense of safety in students and can help prevent them from feeling as if they themselves are “bad”—a core belief that many individuals with trauma histories already carry deep within them.

Students are at high risk for re-traumatization when teachers or schools punish them for behavioral outbursts that may in reality stem from complicated and complex trauma histories. Educators must work to practice empathy, compassion, and understanding, specifically with regard to difficult behavior, negative repetitions of trauma (e.g., physical or violent outbursts), and trauma-related stressors such as loud noises and mentions of death in the classroom (National Child Traumatic Stress Network Schools Committee, 2008). For unaccompanied students, these stressors could also include images of trains or the police, which are often involved in frightening experiences in the journey North from Central America.
**Strategy**

There are a number of protocols schools can follow to ensure they meet the socioemotional needs of SIFE with varying levels of trauma. It is important that schools establish welcoming environments for newly enrolled immigrants and refugees, recruit mental health professionals to provide training and education to staff on the experiences of unaccompanied minors, and reach out to families through school systems to help them navigate unknown systems—such as the mental healthcare system or general healthcare arena (Alvarez & Alegría, 2016).

Proven to lead to a decrease in depression, socioemotional distress, and other mental health issues, an increased sense of school belonging can improve a traumatized student’s sense of self-efficacy, motivation, and academic achievement. By providing socioemotional supports to SIFE, teachers effectively communicate to these students that they are part of the community, that they belong to the school, and that they are worth the school’s time and investment (Bull, 2016).

According to the NCTSN Schools Committee (2008), the elements in Table 6 prove essential to creating safe classroom spaces for students with trauma histories. While reading over the protocols in Table 6, teachers should do the following:

- Put a ✓ next to strategies they currently implement well
- Put a * next to strategies they currently implement but would also like to improve upon
- Place a ○ under strategies they had not thought of before but that they would like to implement

**TABLE 6.** Protocols for a trauma-sensitive classroom, based on NCTSN (2008).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>maintaining routines</th>
<th>giving students choices in their learning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>increasing support and encouragement</td>
<td>modifying teaching strategies depending on child need (e.g., delaying major assignments or exams)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>establishing firm limits and boundaries</td>
<td>providing safe spaces for students to process and discuss trauma (e.g., with guidance counselors, one-on-one time with teachers)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>anticipating difficult moments—such as transitions—in the classroom, and preparing students for those moments</td>
<td>raising awareness across staff about student trauma histories and how to sensitively react to trauma</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>warning children ahead of time of any aspects of the day that may deviate from their usual school routine</td>
<td>supporting families (e.g., through counseling programs, information sessions on trauma, and community resources)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Particularly for SIFE who come from unstable households, or who may have histories of prolonged childhood trauma, routines, consistency and predictable schedules can be a crucial anchor for them in their new environments, especially considering that many SIFE are still adjusting to school in general.

The National Child Traumatic Stress Network has developed a tool may be useful in a short professional development or basic teacher introduction setting regarding steps teachers and school personnel can take in order to assist refugee students in the school environment. For more information, visit:


★ What are (at least) three new strategies I believe would be beneficial to my SIFE population, and how do I plan to implement them in the classroom?

★ What are some methods or self-accountability measures I can draw upon to ensure that I will not stray from my classroom routines and maintain consistency for my students?
Lesson 4: Sensitivity to Socioemotional Needs in Latino SIFE

In this lesson, teachers will gain insight into effective ways of responding to the socioemotional needs of SIFE, particularly when constructing lessons and planning activities.

GUIDING QUESTION: How can careful construction of lesson plans and alternative classroom activities foster safe environments for SIFE with high socioemotional needs and with extensive trauma histories?

How are my current lesson and activity planning practices sensitive to the socioemotional needs and trauma histories of my students?

Background Information

The socioemotional needs of SIFE are as equally—if not more—important as their academic needs. As previously discussed, immigrants in general are at risk of experiencing a number of psychological challenges and emotional traumas simply by migrating and relocating to another country. In addition to the common socioemotional needs experienced by immigrant students, SIFE by definition have experienced great neglect of the social and academic needs met by continuous formal education. Furthermore, SIFE possess unique socioemotional needs that can often stem from poverty, poor health, and family separation (Kester, 2017).

By drawing on principles of trauma-informed critical pedagogy, educators and schools can seek to address and accommodate the complex socioemotional needs of SIFE. These students need targeted and constructive socioemotional support (i.e., effective while at the same time not “over-coddling” or “rescuing”), as well as skilled teachers and counselors who can offer the support this population needs. Considering there is already a baseline of trauma that immigrant students experience when adjusting to life in a new country, it is safe to assume that the majority of SIFE—particularly undocumented SIFE—possess vast degrees of trauma that unquestionably affect their abilities to perform, learn, and grow in a mainstream classroom. In order to feel safe enough to both exist and express themselves in their learning spaces, SIFE need to feel that their learning spaces acknowledge, recognize, and validate their socioemotional needs.


**Strategy and Classroom Example**

It is critical that educators are sensitive to activities that may inadvertently cause emotional distress to immigrant students or be aware of topics that could be challenging for Latino SIFE to confront. Those topics could include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Migration experiences (documented or undocumented)
- Students’ families
- Students’ home countries
- Poverty
- War
- Abuse
- Corruption
- Violence

What are some other topics or categories you may want to add to this list based on your knowledge of your Latino SIFE population?

While a lesson encouraging students to either draw or write about their challenging experiences can certainly possess therapeutic value by allowing students to process difficult feelings or memories, it is important to remember that all students process trauma and emotional challenges differently. When designing activities or creating lessons plans, teachers can reflect on a number of important SIFE- or immigrant-specific questions in order to ensure they are remaining sensitive to the socioemotional needs of their students. Listed below are questions teachers can ask themselves before releasing an activity or lesson to students.
Would this activity, lesson, video, exercise, discussion, book, etc.:

- upset a child who travelled alone, witnessed violence, or was separated from his or her family?
- unfairly disadvantage students whose literacy levels are significantly lower than their peers’ and thereby potentially expose feelings of shame, inadequacy, or embarrassment around academic abilities?
- cause emotional disturbance to students who may already be hyper-aroused, overstimulated, emotionally dysregulated, or frustrated in the classroom?

What other questions would I add to this list when constructing lessons or activities?

In addition to carefully reflecting and thinking through lesson and activity planning, teachers should be prepared to do the following once students are engaged in the lesson:

1. Monitor student reactions for signs of emotional disturbance or challenges during lessons.
2. Be prepared to offer alternative activities to students who may experience difficulties with particular topics.

For a global studies project, an 18-year-old male SIFE—who arrived as an unaccompanied minor from Honduras—had to write about his migration journey. Normally eager and compliant during his individualized pull-out classes, the student repeatedly found ways to avoid the activity or leave the classroom. He also displayed dramatic shifts in demeanor, along with typical signs of a “freeze” response (reviewed in Lesson 2) when it came time to write. It was first and foremost important not to assume that the student’s behaviors indicated a lack of willingness to participate in the activity. In reality, the student was likely experiencing several “fight-flight-freeze” symptoms upon having to recall his recent journey to the U.S.

As a result of the student’s repeated reaction, the teacher changed the direction of the lessons. The student instead was allowed to engage in his favorite Spanish reading games (see Figure 14) in order to help ground him back into his current environment and away from the “waking nightmare” of the past.
Soon after, modifications were made to the original lesson. Rather than have the student write about his migration journey, the question was turned onto him: “What do you want to write about?” Turning the question onto the student is one example of how to give students choices in their learning—an important tenet of a trauma-sensitive classroom. The student chose to write about Honduran food, sports, and his favorite sites in his country. The writing was productive and fruitful; he felt safe and supported in his learning environment, and he did not feel intimidated by the content.

This example demonstrates how a lack of knowledge around socioemotional needs and student trauma can leave teachers at risk of inadvertently causing students to relive difficult memories—and all for comparatively smaller academic tasks, such as writing a paragraph. There are a multitude of other ways to have a student write a paragraph; re-traumatization does not have to be one of them.
How can I use current knowledge of my students’ backgrounds and socioemotional needs to inform my planning or instruction?

Start a list of alternative lessons, activities, games, or content themes you could be prepared to offer students who may have adverse responses to certain lesson themes or assignments.
Lesson 5: Challenges of Literacy Development at Adolescent and Adult Ages

In this lesson, teachers will examine the challenges associated with literacy development at older ages, reflect on the socioemotional difficulties associated with later-in-life literacy learning, and brainstorm ways they can employ this knowledge in their classroom in order to help create safe learning environments for older Latino SIFE with developing literacy.

GUIDING QUESTION How do the challenges of later-in-life literacy development impact the learning experiences of SIFE, and how can reflective practices on the part of educators help to accommodate the unique challenges experienced by Latino SIFE with developing literacy?

What do I currently know about the challenges of learning first-language foundational literacy skills at older ages, and how do I use this knowledge in my classroom to compassionately and patiently approach Latino SIFE who are still developing Spanish literacy?

Background Information

Before discussing adult literacy development, it is important to first review Table 7, which outlines the five main tenets of reading (Antunez, 2018):
TABLE 7. The five components of reading development.

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Phonemic Awareness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>the ability to hear, manipulate, and identify individual sounds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Phonics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>the symbolic relationship between letters and sounds and how those relationships create words</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Fluency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>the ability to read accurately, quickly, and with appropriate expression</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Vocabulary Development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>the necessary words to communicate effectively</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Comprehension</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>the culmination of the above reading strategies and the ultimate goal of reading: the ability to understand and gain meaning from what has been read</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

READING DEVELOPMENT

Reading Rockets provides more information on the five components of reading development as they relate specifically to English Language Learners/Emergent Bilinguals:


LEARN MORE ABOUT:

Whereas Antunez (2018) focuses on reading, this guide also considers writing as an integral sixth component when examining the overall scope of literacy development, as defined in Table 8 below:

TABLE 8. An additional sixth component of literacy development, highlighted by this guide.

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>Writing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>the ability to apply the above five components to record sounds and produce meaningful written products</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Latino SIFE who are developing literacy in Spanish must not only work on acquiring and integrating the above components of reading and writing, but also face the added challenges confronted by adolescent and adult literacy learners. While the mechanical aspects of reading (e.g., letter-sound recognition and reading fluency) require great amounts of work, it is important to also highlight the role that vocabulary development, and therefore reading-comprehension, play for Latino SIFE. In general, SIFE possess native-language reading comprehension and reading vocabulary skills that are four grade years below grade level (Advocates for Children of New York, 2010). Seemingly
“simple” words to educators, such as culture, limit, or insect, have been known to be lost on Latino SIFE (Digby, 2017). Strategy #2 of this lesson delves further into the struggles and importance of vocabulary development.

In order to better understand the developmental processes undergone by older Latino SIFE, educators must also examine challenges of adult literacy. Adult and overage literacy learners essentially live in two worlds: a public and a private sphere (Fingeret & Drennon, 1997). The private sphere is generally where these learners feel most comfortable, as it is the domain in which they have lived for most of their lives. Most older students are accustomed to revealing their literacy abilities only in contained and predictable settings in front of trusted individuals, such as close friends or family members (Fingeret & Drennon, 1997). On the contrary, the public sphere poses significant challenges to older learners: they are at high risk of exposing not only their literacy abilities to unfamiliar and less trusted individuals, but also the stigma they have privately carried most of their lives (Fingeret & Drennon, 1997).

Once these learners begin to acquire literacy, their shame begins to lessen, their confidence begins to increase, and they begin to reconstruct their views of the “literate vs. non-literate” world; they begin to acquire flexibility in crossing this public–private boundary—a key process in the development of adult literacy (Fingeret & Drennon, 1997). Figure 15 depicts the process the adult or adolescent literacy learner must undergo from the private to the public sphere, feeling gradually safe enough to flexibly cross this boundary.

**FIGURE 15.** Representation of the private-to-public sphere that adult and adolescent learners must eventually cross.

Teachers should be mindful of how peer interaction may actually disservice these students if they have not yet begun to experiment with crossing the private-public boundary. The goal for Latino SIFE learning to read and write in Spanish is to mediate movement across those boundaries. Increased vulnerability may discourage them from engaging in literacy practices in either realm.
### Strategy #1: Facilitating public-private boundary crossing

Educators or support staff responsible for fostering literacy growth in older Latino SIFE build trusting relationships with new readers, position students as knowledgeable, and facilitate diverse and rich experiences with literacy, allowing students to decide why, how, when, and for what purpose they will eventually read and write. Once teachers have established a secure and safe relationship in the private sphere, they can help facilitate student movement across the private-public boundary in the following ways:

- Having the student read a work they have produced to a small group of other peers or adults, such as teachers or administrators, who the student trusts.
- Having the student present a project to an important figure of the school—such as the principal or a vice principal (given of course that these are seen as trustworthy). The one-on-one interaction with an important school figure can additionally help the student feel special and that their skills are important enough to warrant the individual attention of a central school figure.
- Inviting a trusted teacher into the individual workspace where the student has been learning to read and write—thus keeping the student in their safe and trusted “private” physical space—and reading a page or two of their favorite story to this trusted teacher or individual.

Given my knowledge of my school’s administrators, staff, student body, and Latino SIFE learning to read and write in Spanish, what other ideas come to mind about how to help them cross the private-public boundary?

What are some ways that I, or those in charge of teaching Latino SIFE at my school to read and write in Spanish, can help build safe learning spaces and help students gain flexibility in traversing the public-private boundaries of adult literacy?
Strategy #2: Working to understand student challenges

For teachers whose education was in their home language and who have held high levels of literary proficiency for most of their lives, it can be difficult—if not impossible—to remember the physical and mental challenges associated with learning to read and write. Most adults have sight-word recognition (i.e., immediate recognition) of most words, meaning they do not have to engage the deeper cognitive faculties of both decoding and making meaning of new words, which Latino SIFE learning to read and write must engage each time they read. The gap in literacy experiences between teachers and Latino SIFE can make it almost impossible for teachers to empathize and understand these challenges. While educators do not have the ability to forget their language and learn to read anew, below are potential exercises that may help educators better understand the experiences of Latino SIFE who are still developing one or more of the core tenets of reading—either in English or Spanish.

EXERCISE 1: SECOND-LANGUAGE READING

Teachers with a degree of proficiency in a non-native language can find a text above their reading level in that language easier to read. For example, a teacher with a beginning level of proficiency in French can read excerpts from an intermediate or advanced French text—or even search online for a news article from a French news outlet. However, while reading, teachers should stay mindful of the obstacles which could prevent those who are not proficient from reading the text with ease. Some questions teachers can ask themselves as they read include:

- Are long words difficult for me to decode?
- How do I feel emotionally (e.g., bored, disinterested) when reading a text that is above my current reading level in this language?
- How do I feel physically (e.g., tired, drained, eyes hurting) when reading a text that requires me to use certain cognitive and linguistic faculties I do not normally use?

EXERCISE 2: DIFFICULT ENGLISH READING

Teachers who do not have proficiency in another language—and even those who do—can have an experience similar to that of Latino SIFE learning to read in Spanish by reading a complicated English text filled with syntax and jargon that are not immediately recognizable or understandable. Medical journals, mathematics journals, and science journals are a few examples of sources filled with texts that are full of complex and (presumably) never-before-read terms. Such an exercise could help teachers empathize with the struggles encountered by beginning readers, for example, engaging their decoding skills and meaning-making faculties in ways to which they are not accustomed. Teachers will find that it is significantly harder to engage with unfamiliar words and texts, which in essence is the experience Latino SIFE who are emerging readers undergo each day when learning to read in their own language.

In this exercise, teachers will read an excerpt from a bioengineering article, following the same rules expected from students learning to read and write. Teachers must:
read every sound;
read every word;
not "gloss over" or skip past words that look long, boring, or that they feel have no “real-world” semantic value to them; and
try their best to comprehend the material they are reading, despite obvious gaps in knowledge of content vocabulary.

As they read, teachers should remain mindful of their emotional and physical reactions, as well as general reading difficulties—these challenges are the same obstacles NTP Latino SIFE, or Latino SIFE with developing literacy, encounter when first learning to read words.

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TITLE: Accelerated Bioprocess Development of Endopolygalacturonase-Production with Saccharomyces cerevisiae Using Multivariate Prediction in a 48 Mini-Bioreactor Automated Platform

In this study, the characterization of Saccharomyces cerevisiae AH22 secreting recombinant endopolygalacturonase is performed, running and comparing 16 experimental conditions in triplicate. Data-driven multivariate methods were developed to allow for fast, automated decision making as well as online predictive data analysis regarding endopolygalacturonase production. [...] As a case study, S. cerevisiae AH22 secreting a pectinase from Aspergillus niger [23] serves as an example organism for development of recombinant production processes. [...] S. cerevisiae has been a production host for recombinant products such as insulin, Hepatitis B vaccine as well as growth hormones since the 1980s [24] and is still used for a wide range of products, e.g., therapeutic compounds [25], the antioxidant resveratrol [26], and also for production of enzymes in the food industry, for instance pectinases. Besides rapid growth and a well-characterized genome, S. cerevisiae offers greater robustness in industrial processes, GRAS (Generally Regarded As Safe)-status, secretion of very few endogenous proteins and direction of recombinant proteins correctly-folded into the culture supernatant, which simplifies purification [23,25,27,28]. Yeasts are capable of posttranslational modifications, even though the glycosylation pattern is high in mannose [24] and genetic engineering of the secretory pathways in S. cerevisiae is difficult [29,30].


How did I feel reading this text that is (presumably) in my first language? What surprised me? Would I feel comfortable reading and explaining this text in front of the authors who wrote it? (In other words, would I feel comfortable reading and explaining this text in front of people who possess the reading levels and vocabulary knowledge necessary to fluently read and comprehend the text?)
Educators should employ the knowledge gained from this experience to reflect on their own expectations of Latino SIFE still learning to read and write in Spanish. Teachers can use the following reflective questions as guidelines when an activity in the classroom requires an emerging reader and writer to publicly perform literacy tasks in Spanish:

If I were learning how to read and write in my language for the first time, would...

- this text be physically taxing for me to read?
- this text contain vocabulary hindering my ability to comprehend it?
- cause me to feel embarrassment or shame if forced to read it to a small group of peers with stronger reading levels?

Can I think of other reflective questions to add to this list?

While understanding that I can never fully empathize with the processes undergone by Latino SIFE learning to read and write in Spanish, how can I draw on my personal experiences in these exercises—as well as my new knowledge of the challenges these learners face—to facilitate accommodating appropriate literacy activities in the classroom?
Lesson 6: Strengthening Student Funds of Knowledge

In this lesson, teachers will learn about student funds of knowledge in Latino SIFE, the inherent strengths and values they bring into the classroom, and how to harness their lived experiences in order not only to optimize learning outcomes, but also to help build on and develop the strengths these students intrinsically bring with them.

**GUIDING QUESTION** How can teachers gain a better understanding of the inherent strengths of Latino SIFE, draw upon them, and include them in the construction of lessons and activities in order to enhance both the student’s learning and personal growth?

What do I currently know about the lived experiences of the Latino SIFE in my classroom, as well as their strengths and interests, both academic and personal?

---

**Background Information**

Immigrant students possess a separate set of knowledge—often referred to as “funds of knowledge”—that U.S. schools often ignore, overlook, or do not value (Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez, 1992). A student’s funds of knowledge encompass the knowledge, skills, and experiences they gain through historical and cultural interactions in their communities, as well as their family lives as a part of everyday experiences (Estes, 2017).

For Latino SIFE, it is important to validate and recognize the cultural capital and funds of knowledge they bring into the classroom. Educators must build on the identities and diverse skill sets brought in by students and work to create classroom environments that are inclusive of the social capital inherently brought in by SIFE.
Strategy #1: Reflect on your own funds of knowledge

- What are my own funds of knowledge, and how do I feel when they are valued in certain environments (e.g., personal, professional, etc.)?

- How would I feel if I spoke a different language and my teachers seemed to ignore it? How would this make me feel about my language? (Alternatively, have I ever had an experience in a foreign country where my language was unknown, not spoken, or unacknowledged? How did this make me feel?)

- If I were still a student, what types of actions, activities, gestures or behaviors by my teachers would help me feel like there were space in my classroom environment to share with them who I am, what my interests are, and aspects of my background?
Do I engage in those behaviors as a teacher with my Latino SIFE?

How can I use experiences wherein I feel others value my own funds of knowledge and my own cultural background to replicate similar behaviors with Latino SIFE while also enriching the overall classroom environment?

Strategy #2: Develop, integrate, and enrich funds of knowledge in Latino SIFE

With regard to student funds of knowledge, educators must first and foremost help students build and strengthen the connection they have with themselves, their cultures, and their backgrounds. The goal is not to erase those connections, but rather to add to them and harness them. Student funds of knowledge are critical elements that students can bring to the school and that teachers can draw upon to enhance the overall school environment and culture. When students feel seen and treated as experts on certain subjects based on their lived experiences—apart from academics—teachers can bolster student self-esteem and indicate to the student and their peers that everyone has valuable knowledge.

Ways teachers can assess and develop student funds of knowledge can include the following:

- Building proficiency in Spanish and drawing on Spanish in curricular practices. This can help combat the divisive and polarizing English-only educational practices that often isolate students from their previous connections—both to their countries and to themselves.
• Engaging in informal Spanish conversations to gauge the student’s general knowledge on everyday topics related to foundational content subjects. Below are initial ideas for topics of conversation, organized by content area, that could help assess student knowledge. These initial suggestions also emphasize areas with which Latino SIFE may be more familiar or knowledgeable:

- **Science:** animals, the environment, seasons, global warming, space, farming, electricity, weather, and technical fields in which students may have real-world work experience in their home countries (e.g., as plumbers, electricians, construction workers—and therefore materials used in construction, etc.).

- **Math:** time, date, money (in particular, counting money, which some SIFE learned after years of working), grocery shopping on a budget, managing a store, going to the market, measuring travel time between home and school, birthdays, ages of siblings or family members, or home-country economic systems (e.g., farming or farm-to-market expenses and costs).

- **Language and the Arts:** poetry, cultural songs, cultural dances, books, Facebook/social media, newspapers, magazines, or uses of print and writing (including images and pictures in students’ home countries).

- **Social Studies:** current events, immigration issues, refugee camps, politics (either in the U.S. or in their countries of origin (e.g., the 2017 presidential election in Honduras), war, poverty, economic inequality, policies between the U.S. and Latin America (e.g., Banana Republic of the 1970's or the history of U.S. exploitation of Latin American resources).

• Grounding curriculum and activities in student interests.

• Developing resources that are age-, level-, and culture-sensitive (explained more in Lesson 8).

What are (at least) three ways in which I plan to assess funds of knowledge in Latino SIFE, and what are (at least) three ways through which I can honor and integrate their funds of knowledge into my classroom and/or curricular content?
Lesson 7: Connecting Students With Curricular Content

In this lesson, teachers will learn about the importance of allowing SIFE to see themselves and their interests reflected in age-, level-, and culturally appropriate curricular content, as well as how connections between SIFE and relatable curricular content can enhance learning outcomes and foster more inclusive classroom experiences.

GUIDING QUESTION How can teachers modify and adapt instruction and resources in order to help students see themselves reflected in curricular content and, at the same time, forge connections with it?

How do I currently modify or adapt content and/or resources so that they are age-, level-, and culturally appropriate for Latino SIFE? What do I believe I am doing well in this area, and what do I believe I could improve?

Background Information

Depending on the learning environment (e.g., small-group pullout, small classroom, individual pullout), teachers can particularly build upon student funds of knowledge by grounding curriculum in their interests and language. Allowing for both exploration of new topics in Spanish and the growth of Spanish literacy skills, schools and educators can pave the way for Latino SIFE to feel connected to their learning and occupy a space in it.

Uncovering the interests of Latino SIFE or engaging them in critical inquiry can often take time (Digby, 2017). Educators should be mindful of any questions or sparks of interests in SIFE and capitalize on those moments to explore potential topics of interest. A simple question from a Latino SIFE during a science lesson (“A sun is a star?”) opened a portal of new information and discovery for a student who had never before asked a question or expressed curiosity in the school environment (Digby, 2017). Teachers can take advantage of moments such as this one by creating or finding additional resources about the Sun, space, stars, and other related topics to help the student learn more about them. Field trips to museums can also be an opportunity for new discoveries and questions. Educators should listen carefully and watch closely for reactions in SIFE to new learning experiences and, wherever possible, they should integrate the newfound areas of interest into intervention activities or classroom content.
Strategy and Classroom Examples

The creation and acquisition of age-, level-, and culturally appropriate content and materials is critical to fostering continuous critical inquiry and interest in academic content. Many Latino SIFE read below 2nd- or 3rd-grade levels in Spanish; however, Spanish books written at those levels are almost always clearly designed for children between pre-k and third-grade ages. Teachers can seek to reconcile this noticeable difference by remembering the following when creating resources for Latino SIFE:

- Use real-life, high-definition images (i.e., no cartoons).
- Use culturally appropriate images. For example, if teachers are looking for a picture of a beach or a house, they should look for a picture of a beach or a house in Latin America.
- Wherever possible, use images of people who look like the students.
- Do not write more than 1-2 short sentences per page.
- Use a large font that will not strain students’ eyes.
- Especially for students beginning to learn to read, use fonts that use the lowercase handwritten a.
- Stay away from “young-ish” or “cartoon-ish” fonts like Comic Sans. Instead, use a font like Century Gothic or a different Sans Serif font that is more age-appropriate.

Figures 16-19 show examples of teacher-created books and posters specifically targeting the needs of Latino SIFE by featuring age-, level-, and culturally appropriate content. While many of these resources were created in advanced programs such as Photoshop, teachers can use Microsoft PowerPoint or Microsoft Word to create similar material.
FIGURE 16. Sample pages from books created based on student interest.

A book about whales

© Sarah Digby

A beginning reader pattern book featuring relatable items and images from Honduras.

FIGURE 17. Sample pages from books adapted and aligned to core content classes.

A book about Ancient Egypt

© Sarah Digby

A book about the Incas
FIGURE 18. Comparison of common Spanish alphabet poster with alphabet posters featuring age- and culturally appropriate images of people and scenes from Latin America.

© Doodles & Kreations
https://www.teacherspayteachers.com/Product/Spanish-Alphabet-Charts-192701

FIGURE 19. Comparison of a common Spanish poster of the four seasons with a similar poster sensitive to the older ages of Latino SIFE.

© The Language Stickers Company
http://languagestickersonline.com/acatalog/Spanish_A4_posters.html
To view the resources featured above and other resources for SIFE, visit Bilingual Classroom Solutions for SIFE and Emergent Bilinguals at Teachers Pay Teachers at [www.teacherspayteachers.com/Store/Bilingual-Classroom-Solutions-For-SIFE-And-Ebs](http://www.teacherspayteachers.com/Store/Bilingual-Classroom-Solutions-For-SIFE-And-Ebs).

The American Reading Company has developed a vast classroom library under their Spanish Solutions curriculum. This library consists in part of leveled informational books that are age-appropriate for Latino SIFE. For more information, visit: [www.americanreading.com/products/spanish/](http://www.americanreading.com/products/spanish/).

★ What are (at least) three areas where I would like to modify and adapt content to be more appropriate and accessible for my Latino SIFE population? What concrete steps can I take towards achieving those goals?
Lesson 8: Connecting Students With the School Environment

In this lesson, teachers will build on the content learned in the previous lesson by examining the principles of social capital and additive schooling practices as they relate to the integration of Latino SIFE in the school environment.

GUIDING QUESTION: What is the impact on SIFE of feeling connected to their learning processes and the school environment, and how can educators help facilitate those connections?

How do I (or how does my school) currently help Latino SIFE feel they are connected to both their learning processes and their larger school network of staff and peers?

Background Information

Creating meaningful education opportunities for SIFE begins with the belief that students should feel connected to all aspects of their learning processes and school environment. An effective approach to educating Latino SIFE can be found through the lens of social capital and the idea of additive schooling as defined by Bartlett & Garcia (2011), who demonstrate the positive correlation between student achievement in Latino immigrants and the integration of student language—particularly Spanish—and culture in the classroom.

In the context of school environment, social capital “refers to the social ties that connect students to each other (peer social capital) and the relationships developed with adults at the school or other educational support organizations” (Bartlett & Garcia, 2011, p. 189). Therefore, social capital, as it pertains to Latino SIFE in the school setting, means creating a culture of community wherein students feel connected to those around them, and where schools build on the cultural and linguistic foundations brought in by diverse populations.
Strategy and Classroom Examples

For Latino SIFE, teachers should help shape strong networks of communication across content areas with student academic teams. Those networks may include, but are not limited to, guidance counselors, administration, support staff, intervention teachers, and students’ other content teachers. When the nexus of educators and school officials entrusted with meeting the needs of Latino SIFE is in synchrony, students feel a stronger sense of connection within a school that both is and feels designed for them to thrive and exist securely.

Particularly for Latino SIFE with developing literacy, Spanish literacy instruction and attention to Spanish literacy growth is an integral component of a meaningful, inclusive, and dignified educational experience. Teachers should focus heavily on student funds of knowledge and build on the Spanish abilities of Latino SIFE, helping them to recuperate the years of limited or lost education in their home countries before thrusting them into an English-only world filled with higher-level content that is mostly inaccessible to them.

Figures 20–22 feature writing excerpts from a 15-year-old Latino SIFE from the Dominican Republic who entered school unable to read or write in Spanish. At the time of Spanish literacy interventions in February 2013, he had begun to drop out of school. By the start of the 2014-2015 school year—less than 6 months of receiving services appropriate to his needs—, he began using writing to express positive attitudes towards school and his teachers, as well as a desire to pass his classes, and sadness about weekends when he was not able to come to school.

By looking at his writing, it became evident that this student began to feel a sense of connection and belonging amongst his school environment and educators. That connection ultimately led to a desire to improve in school, put forth his best effort in his classes, and a dramatic rise in his attendance (which was near perfect for the 2014-2015 school year—a remarkable feat considering he had essentially dropped out halfway through the previous school year).

**FIGURE 20.** Student expressing positive attitudes towards school and his teachers in his writing.

Translation:

I am happy you are here because you are helping us. Thank you, Miss. I am always going to say thank you very much. I am happy :). How beautiful it is to learn. And how was your day yesterday, Miss? My day was good, Miss. Miss O--- was acting bad also. I'm angry with her, Miss :)
FIGURE 21. Student expressing a desire to pass his classes in his writing.

Translation:
I learned a lot in Mr. A’s class. I want to pass my classes, Miss :(. I don’t want to repeat my classes, Miss.

FIGURE 22. Student expressing a connection to being in school, as well as sadness for when the weekend arrives.

Translation:
I miss my school, Miss, when the [school] week ends, I don’t know where to go, Miss :(.  

★ Who are the individuals involved in the education of Latino SIFE at my school, and what are steps we can take as a school to form a unified team and a collaboration system that enables us to stay in continuous communication around the progress, needs, difficulties, and strengths of those students?
Lesson 9: Creating Designated Workspaces for SIFE

In this lesson, teachers will learn about the importance of creating designated workspaces for SIFE, as well as how to transform school areas into safe learning spaces to engage with sensitive content and material.

**GUIDING QUESTION** What is the impact of individualized and designated workspaces on the progress of Latino SIFE who are recuperating foundational skills in Spanish?

Where do Latino SIFE currently learn foundational Spanish skills? Do I feel this is efficient and supportive for students? If not, what would I like to change about the physical setup of their workspaces?

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**Background Information**

For high-need Latino SIFE, ideal and safe learning conditions include small-group or individual instruction where students feel comfortable working with age- and content-sensitive material, making mistakes, and practicing new skills such as reading and writing in Spanish.

Interventions wherein schools allocate individual physical space, time, and resources to the highest-needs Latino SIFE can significantly bolster those students’ sense of self-worth and belonging. When provided with individualized instruction and designated spaces, Latino SIFE learning to read and write in Spanish may experience tremendous gains upon finding a safe and secure space in the school environment. Figure 23 shows the oral reading fluency progress of a 15-year old Latino SIFE from the Dominican Republic who was learning to read and write in Spanish for the first time. The solid line in the graph indicates his oral reading fluency progress once he moved from an open-air table to a makeshift closet that had been transformed into an individual working space. His reading fluency in Spanish nearly doubled over the next five individual classes after moving into his new “classroom”.

Closed-off workspaces, as opposed to open-air workspaces, which often are in close proximity to other students who are learning more advanced content, help foster a safe, supportive, and welcoming classroom environment for Latino SIFE, such as the student in Figure 24. Designated spaces not only allow for privacy, but also help increase
the consistency of student growth and attendance as students know they have a fixed space that belongs to them and their learning. When students feel they have a space in school where they belong, their learning and performance have the potential to increase.

**FIGURE 23.** Graph demarcating the differences in a student’s Spanish reading fluency progress upon moving into a private learning space.

![Graph showing oral reading fluency development](image)

Although many schools do not have access to the ideal resources, on a smaller scale, there are actions that schools and teachers can take to help find and create environments that are more sensitive to the particular needs of Latino SIFE.

**Strategy and Classroom Examples**

In an ideal situation, schools could provide and create designated workspaces for learning age- and content- sensitive material; at the same time, however, many schools are often limited in space and resources to accommodate Latino SIFE who need secure spaces to recuperate and learn foundational Spanish skills. Figure 24 provides an example of how schools can transform once-disregarded and small spaces into closed-off, safe, and accommodating learning labs for Latino SIFE learning to read and write in Spanish.
**FIGURE 24.** A designated learning space, in the form of a closet-turned-classroom, designed specifically to support the needs of Latino SIFE still learning to read, write, and count in Spanish.

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**BEFORE**

Small empty closet in the back of a guidance suite.

**AFTER**

Individualized learning space for Latino SIFE learning to read in Spanish, including a small library in the corner.

What spaces in my school or classroom could I transform into safe learning spaces for Latino SIFE? What are the obstacles (e.g., limited space, limited staff) to create closed-off learning spaces, and what are some potential creative solutions that may be available to me or my school to help achieve similar learning environments for Latino SIFE in need of designated workspaces?
2.5 CONCLUSION: TEACHER RESPONSIBILITIES BEYOND THE CLASSROOM

Lesson 10: Becoming an Advocate for Latino SIFE

In this lesson, educators will reflect on their dual responsibilities as both educators and advocates for Latino SIFE, as well as explore various steps teachers can take to both advocate for them.

GUIDING QUESTION: How can teachers help spread awareness about Latino SIFE and their needs in school, as well as act as advocates for this population?

How do I currently help spread awareness about Latino SIFE, their needs and strengths, and classroom strategies to support them? How would I like to ideally serve as an advocate for SIFE?

Background Information

If there ever were a more unnoticed population in this country, it would be a group of undocumented, undereducated, and overage immigrants. Educators and individuals who work with Latino SIFE have an obligation to advocate for them by educating colleagues, peers, and society in general on the unseen crisis of Latino SIFE occurring in U.S. school systems.

Invisibility will only continue to disservice Latino SIFE and those who work so devotedly to educate them if nothing is done. Becoming an advocate for Latino SIFE and spreading awareness about this population can result in positive outcomes and lead to more people—educators and organizations alike—coming together to create action plans and form solutions.
Strategy

For educators, having enough spare time to raise awareness about any cause—including the cause of SIFE—can often be a challenge. Below are some suggestions on how to become an everyday advocate for this population:

- **Initiate conversations or dialogues with colleagues**, ideally those in other education fields who may not have much exposure to SIFE.

- **Initiate conversations or dialogues about SIFE with friends** or those not in the education field.

- **Publish personal anecdotes on blogs and social media posts** to initiate conversations and increase the number of people exposed not only to SIFE as a population, but also to their strengths, needs, and experiences in the classroom—no platform is too informal to discuss on SIFE.

- **On social media, educators can post a picture of their classroom** (with the faces of students blurred or blacked out for confidentiality), and write a caption describing a heartwarming achievement that would grab the attention of others in their social network.

- **Digitally document student work throughout the school year**: scan or take photos of student work that demonstrate how students are progressing over time in their academic skills. Teachers can post the photo array on social media, personalizing the experience in the caption by describing the student’s dedication and motivation to accomplish such a degree of progress. Educators must make sure to black out the names of students on the top of the paper, as well as any other identifying information. Teachers may also share those progressions with family, friends, and other close members of their communities to demonstrate the strengths of SIFE as learners.

- **Teachers could speak openly with their higher-ups (principals, superintendents, vice principals, etc.) about the strengths and needs of SIFE**, as well as the support they could use from them in their district. Educators can also use their digital documentation as proof of why it is worthwhile to invest in resources, additional support staff members, or individual learning spaces for SIFE.
Are there other strategies I can think of in my everyday life to add to this list?

What are (at least) three action steps I plan to take in my everyday life to help raise awareness about SIFE, share my experiences with them, and act as an advocate for this population?


REFERENCES


