

Supporting Students with Interrupted/ Inconsistent Formal Education in New York State

About this Document

This document contains three different sections which provide resources for administrators and educators working with Multilingual Learners/English Language Learners (MLLs/ELLs).

- The first section is a topic brief that addresses questions such as: Who are students with interrupted/inconsistent formal education? What are the Educational Services available to this group of students? It also provides examples of promising practices to support students with interrupted/inconsistent formal education in schools.
- The second section presents profiles of students with interrupted/inconsistent formal education to encourage educators in New York to think about how unique each of their students are, regardless of the labels that they have received.
- The third and last section offers an annotated bibliography.

These sections complement each other, but can also be read and used as separate document

Who are Students with Interrupted/Inconsistent Formal Education (SIFE)?

New York State Education Department defines Students with Interrupted/Inconsistent Formal Education (SIFE) as Multilingual Learners/English Language Learners (MLLs/ELLs)¹ who have attended school in the U.S. for fewer than 12 months, and are two or more years below grade level in home language literacy and/or math due to inconsistent or interrupted schooling prior to their arrival (New York State Education Department, 2014, CR Section 154-2.2). SIFE are a sub-group of MLLs/ELLs. In the 2015–2016 school year, 21,037 students in New York State public schools were identified as SIFE, comprising 8.7% of the total population of MLLs/ELLs. The top spoken languages within the SIFE population are Spanish, Arabic, Chinese, Haitian Creole, Bengali, Urdu, Karen, French, and Nepali, and Russian (New York State Education Department, 2016).

Students identified as SIFE often come to school with a wealth of experiences in non-academic settings. Some of them have experience contributing to their household economies by working, or have participated in their communities in a variety of ways. They are often very resilient and motivated to learn. It is important that schools spend time learning about the student's life experiences upon their arrival. Many students might have learned content-related skills

¹ Multilingual Learners/English Language Learners (MLLs/ELLs) are defined as children who “by reason of foreign birth or ancestry, speak or understand a language other than English...and require support in order to become proficient in English” (New York State Education Department, 2014, p. 17).

through life experiences, such as learning mathematics through selling in a market, or learning about the water cycle in an agricultural setting.

Students identified as SIFE in New York are entitled to receive English-language supports through Bilingual Education, or English as a New Language (ENL). However, their needs are distinctly complex because they are at least two years behind their peers in New York schools, thus needing additional supports beyond that of any other MLLs/ELLs. Like other MLLs/ELLs, SIFE need to develop mastery of the English language and apply their existing knowledge and skills to learning new content in English. SIFE also need additional support to develop literacy in their home language, and accelerated instruction in core content knowledge to reach grade-level; furthermore, they are expected to catch up in a short period of time. SIFE may have experienced a lack of understanding of the rich experiences that they bring into the classroom. (Klein & Martohardjono, 2009).

Students identified as SIFE are not a homogenous set, but are incredibly diverse with regard to home language, amount of English language exposure, cultural experiences, social status, and psychological-emotional needs. These students come from a variety of backgrounds—some may have had limited schooling due to political or social circumstances in their home country; others may arrive from areas where formal education was absent or unavailable beyond the early years or where students attend school consistently, but have non-parallel schooling experiences to the United States. Some students, particularly those who arrive as refugees, may be affected by circumstances of poverty, disaster, or political unrest that suspended or impeded educational opportunities and development (DeCapua & Marshall, 2010).

With this complex background, SIFE are uniquely vulnerable in their educational setting, and are at high-risk for being under-served and eventually drop out.

How do SIFE Background Experiences Affect Their Learning?

- **Oral language:** Many SIFE come from cultures with rich oral language traditions that can be a foundation for literacy development.
- **Content related skills through life experiences:** SIFE often have firsthand knowledge of content taught in schools. For example, they might have experienced shifts in weather patterns or understand how the cycle of the seasons affects concepts taught in science. Or they might have experienced political unrest and changes in government institutions, which ties into social studies curricula.
- **Educational/literacy gaps:** Many SIFE have limited literacy skills, and may not be able to read or write in their home language. They may also need greater support in some content knowledge and academic skills due to their inconsistent schooling experience.
- **Social/emotional needs:** SIFE arrive from many different circumstances, and some may arrive from situations where political unrest, social persecution, poverty, or other adversities have directly impacted not only their education, but also their emotional wellbeing. Adding to this, the strain of adapting to a new social environment, and frustration that he/she is not academically on par with his/her peers may be overwhelming.

Many students identified as SIFE may have high levels of oracy, because their past formal or informal learning experiences may have been mainly through listening and speaking, and often occurred outside of schools. To participate meaningfully in the classroom, they may need instruction that leverages their experiences and prepares them for text-based academic learning.

How are SIFE Identified?

A student must first be identified as an English Language Learner/Multilingual Learner (MLL/ELL) before being identified as a SIFE. The initial identification process consist of the administration of the SIFE Home Language Questionnaire (HLQ), an individual interview conducted in English and in the student's home language by qualified personnel, and administration of the New York State Identification Test for English Language Learners (NYSITELL). If a student is identified as an MLL/ELL and potential SIFE during this initial process, qualified personnel must administer a SIFE Oral Interview Questionnaire in English and in the student's home language. If the results of the SIFE Oral Interview Questionnaire indicate the student is a potential SIFE, qualified personnel then administer the Multilingual Literacy Survey (MLS). Finally, the Writing Screener is administered to determine the student's basic writing skill in his or her home or primary language Please refer to the [SIFE Identification process \(http://www.nysed.gov/common/nysed/files/programs/bilingual-ed/sifeflowchart9_20_16.pdf\)](http://www.nysed.gov/common/nysed/files/programs/bilingual-ed/sifeflowchart9_20_16.pdf). These resources can be used to verify whether a student is a SIFE, and determine program placement and instructional supports that will best support the student's needs. These resources, and guidance on how to use them, are described below and are also available on the [NYSED SIFE webpage \(http://www.nysed.gov/bilingual-ed/schools/students-interruptedinconsistent-formal-education-sife\)](http://www.nysed.gov/bilingual-ed/schools/students-interruptedinconsistent-formal-education-sife).

SIFE Oral Interview Questionnaire and Guidance Document. The [SIFE Oral Interview Questionnaire \(http://www.nysed.gov/common/nysed/files/programs/bilingual-ed/en_quest_sife.pdf\)](http://www.nysed.gov/common/nysed/files/programs/bilingual-ed/en_quest_sife.pdf) is designed to gather information about students who are potentially SIFE and provides an opportunity to learn more about the student's family and home background, educational history, and literacy practices. The SIFE Oral Interview Questionnaire and Guidance documents are currently available in English and in the following languages that are the top spoken by New York State's SIFE, listed here alphabetically: Arabic, Bengali/Bangla, Chinese-Simplified, Chinese-Traditional, Haitian Creole, Maay Maay, S'gaw Karen, Spanish, and Urdu. This document and others will be soon translated to the following seven new languages: Burmese, French, Fula, Nepali, Russian, Somali, and Swahili.

Multilingual Literacy Screener (MLS). The MLS is a multilingual screening tool designed to inform teachers and administrators of the home-language literacy skills their SIFE bring with them when they begin schooling in New York State. See the [NYSED SIFE Assessment and the Multilingual Literacy Screener \(MLS\) box below](#) for additional details.

Writing Screener. The [Writing Screener \(http://www.nysed.gov/common/nysed/files/programs/bilingual-ed/en_writing-](http://www.nysed.gov/common/nysed/files/programs/bilingual-ed/en_writing-)

[assessment.pdf](#)) provides a quick way to assess students' basic writing skills in their home language. This tool can be administered individually as well as in a group, and students are given a maximum of 15 minutes to complete their writing. Writing Screeners are available in the following languages: Arabic, Bengali/Bangla, Chinese-Simplified, Chinese-Traditional, English, Haitian-Creole, Maay Maay, S'gaw Karen, Spanish, and Urdu.

NYSED SIFE Assessment and the Multilingual Literacy Screener (MLS)

New York State is one of the first states in the nation to propose the use of a set of assessment tools that provide a framework for the appropriate instructional support of SIFE. NYSED has developed a set of resources and an assessment timeline to assist administrators in determining first whether a student is a multilingual learner and then whether he or she is SIFE.

A key tool in this suite is the Multilingual Literacy SIFE Screener (MLS), a statewide diagnostic tool. The screener allows educators to determine literacy levels in a student's home language in order to provide or design appropriate instruction for these students. The MLS is a semi-adaptive computer-based assessment that provides individualized results about the students' reading comprehension level and math level. The reading comprehension portion is available in nine languages, and the math component is available in seven languages.

Two professional development webinars on the MLS (developed by [Bridges to Academic Success](http://bridges-sifeproject.com/) (<http://bridges-sifeproject.com/>) and the [Research Institute for Study of Language in Urban Society](https://www.gc.cuny.edu/Page-Elements/Academics-Research-Centers-Initiatives/Centers-and-Institutes/Research-Institute-for-the-Study-of-Language-in-Urban-Society-(RISLUS)) ([https://www.gc.cuny.edu/Page-Elements/Academics-Research-Centers-Initiatives/Centers-and-Institutes/Research-Institute-for-the-Study-of-Language-in-Urban-Society-\(RISLUS\)](https://www.gc.cuny.edu/Page-Elements/Academics-Research-Centers-Initiatives/Centers-and-Institutes/Research-Institute-for-the-Study-of-Language-in-Urban-Society-(RISLUS)))), at The Graduate Center, CUNY, in collaboration with NYSED) can be accessed via the NYSED SIFE webpage. A general webinar with an overview of the MLS is available [here](http://www.nysed.gov/bilingual-ed/schools/webinar-introduction-multilingual-literacy-sife-screener-identification) (<http://www.nysed.gov/bilingual-ed/schools/webinar-introduction-multilingual-literacy-sife-screener-identification>) and a webinar on the math component of the MLS is available [here](http://www.nysed.gov/bilingual-ed/schools/webinar-multilingual-literacy-sife-screener-math) (<http://www.nysed.gov/bilingual-ed/schools/webinar-multilingual-literacy-sife-screener-math>).

The early and accurate identification of SIFE is critical, since these students may face additional challenges when placed into services adapted for a different student population. Because SIFE are a subset of MLLs/ELLs, they may be classified into the larger set of multilingual learners, and thus not given the specific support they need to progress. SIFE may also be misidentified as students with disabilities, and placed in special education settings that are typically not oriented to specialized literacy support.

For students who have been correctly identified as SIFE, there are many promising school-wide and classroom-specific practices that can help these students develop their academic and literacy skills in an optimal environment.

What are some promising practices to support SIFE?

It is critical for students to be correctly identified as SIFE as early as possible, to minimize additional difficulties caused by inappropriate or inadequate support. These students should be matched with a program or support system that is able to address not only their educational

needs, but is also sensitive to their complex social and emotional concerns, and can provide adequate support. Despite their limited formal education, SIFE have often acquired a great deal of experiential knowledge that can be leveraged to promote and reinforce new content learning. By investing in learning more about these students' histories, educators can take advantage of this rich cultural and functional knowledge in the classroom, while conveying to students that their background and language can be treated as resources, not shortcomings. It is crucial to not only maintain high expectations for SIFE, but to encourage positive attitudes toward education in English and their home languages, as well as motivate students to pursue future success via continued learning.

Embracing dynamic language practices that provide multiple opportunities to use home language as a resource. The academic skills that students develop in any language—home or new—are universal skills that they can draw upon regardless of which language they are currently using. Conceptual processing in one linguistic context facilitates learning in another, and new language practices emerge in interrelationship with old language practices (Cummins, 2000, García, 2009). In the context of the classroom, it is important to create opportunities for students to use their entire linguistic repertoire, in particular, when students are making sense of new concepts (Kibler, 2010; Menken, 2013).

Integrating language instruction across content areas. Given that many SIFE students need to build their literacy and academic skills due to their inconsistent schooling experience, it is important that schools integrate language instruction into all subject areas. They can begin by using and developing students' oral language skills to build reading and writing skills through the curriculum, so students can use texts as resources to learn and build conceptual knowledge (Marshall, DeCapua, & Antolini, 2010).

Create structures for peer support. Many schools utilize a system in which they pair SIFE and newcomers who do not have interrupted education with other students who speak their languages and may have similar backgrounds and experiences. SIFE students are experiencing a range of emotional and cognitive adjustments, and in many cases, have left family and friends behind. Connecting to peers with similar experiences who can help them learn school routines and daily schedules can provide much-needed understanding and emotional support as they navigate their new setting. Peer tutoring is particularly beneficial for SIFE students because the student-tutors can relate to their peers' needs and better identify ways to help them based on their own experiences. They may also act as role models for students who are new to the country and might feel overwhelmed by the academic demands of the U.S. educational system (Sánchez, Espinet, & Seltzer, 2014).

Promising Practices for Which SIFE?

SIFE are present in classrooms in New York State throughout elementary, middle, and high schools and most of them are also newcomers. This Topic Brief includes examples that draw from middle and high school. However, teachers might adapt them to suit younger children as well. Practitioners working with SIFE in special education settings may consult the Topic Brief on this subject, as well as the Topic Brief on Newcomer Students. We remind readers that these categorizations only provide guidelines, and it is best practice to focus on student needs, rather than on the system's labels for them.

School-Based Practices

Schools create a rich, supportive learning environment for SIFE, and a coherent, consistent experience by supporting them to cultivate a sense of ownership and belonging in the school environment. Practices for doing so include:

Creating sheltered programs. The challenge for educators is to develop appropriate interventions to carry SIFE through the educational trajectory, from limited (or no) participation in academic contexts to full participation. In many contexts, the challenges that SIFE students face are compounded by the structure of traditional middle and high schools. SIFE students are not only learning to navigate a new school system and its demands, but are also learning to navigate a new country as they learn a language. Although these students arrive with a wealth of knowledge and experience and high levels of oracy, their experience has often not prepared them for a classroom where text is used as a resource to learn. To participate meaningfully in middle and high school classrooms, the best environment for SIFE students is within a sheltered program with dedicated classes specifically designed to meet their language, literacy, academic, socio-cultural, and emotional needs. This is particularly important for low literacy students who are some of the most at-risk students in middle and high school classrooms. (Custodian & O'Loughlin, 2017)

Are There Special Programs Available for SIFE?

The Bridges to Academic Success program offers comprehensive curriculum resources and professional development designed for SIFE with Developing Literacy—a subpopulation of students identified as SIFE whose home language literacy levels are at 3rd grade and below (McNamara & Smith, 2015). The Bridges program provides a curriculum aligned to the Common Core, New York State language progressions and Next Generation Science Standards across five subjects: English Language Arts (ELA) Parts 1 & 2, Foundational Language and Literacy (FLL), Math, Social Studies, and Science. The two-course ELA curriculum focuses on helping students build conceptual knowledge through the use of stretch texts and essential questions to guide critical thinking. More information on the ELA curriculum and other components is available to educators via the [Bridges website](http://bridges-sifeproject.com) (<http://bridges-sifeproject.com>).

The Mutually Adaptive Learning Paradigm (MALP), is a culturally responsive instructional approach designed to help educators address the needs of students with limited or interrupted formal education (SLIFE). This approach provides teachers with a concrete, practical set of guidelines to follow in designing and delivering culturally responsive instruction to SLIFE and other struggling learners. This model is intended to transition these learners from their preferred and customary ways of learning to Western-style formal education by integrating key elements of formal education while balancing and acknowledging their needs, preferences, and priorities. For more information about workshops, institutes and materials, visit the [MALP Education website](http://www.malpeducation.com) (www.malpeducation.com).

Home language literacy development within sheltered programs. If a school has a significant number of students who share the same home language, it is preferable to provide a program that strengthens literacy in that language (Klein & Martohardjono, 2009). A large body of research indicates that the academic language and literacy skills students acquire in their home languages transfer to similar skills in their additional language (Cummins, 2000; Goldenberg, 2008). Teaching students to read in their home language also promotes higher levels of reading achievement in their additional language as well (August & Shanahan, 2006).

Collaboration across content areas in schools without sheltered programs. Many schools are not able to create and sustain a dedicated program for SIFE students. If a sheltered program is not feasible, an alternative is to create collaboration models across academic departments to support simultaneous linguistic and academic development. Middle and high school instruction tends to be a segmented practice, with each subject area relegated to a separate instructional period. This disconnected structure makes it difficult for students to develop high levels of proficiency in content knowledge, language for academic purposes, and literacy abilities. To minimize this, the district/school should encourage practices in which all content area teachers should collaborate and integrate language instruction into all subject areas to help students advance from basic language development to more advanced literacy (Custodio, O'Loughlin, 2017; De Capua, Smathers, & Tang, 2009).

Appropriate professional development for staff members. Working with students with interrupted education requires that educators base their practice on culturally sustaining pedagogy and curricula grounded in the historical, cultural, and linguistic backgrounds of

students. They also need to understand the communities' forms of communication and knowledge. Given the diversity of students' backgrounds, schools should provide staff members with opportunities to learn about the students' countries of origin so they can tap into cultural and linguistic practices and help students build from them. Educators should also be familiar with the students' previous educational system and schooling experiences to help them understand and navigate their new environment. In addition, it is important to provide all teachers with training in second language acquisition, as well as specialized strategies and instructional methods designed to accelerate the academic achievement of SIFE and knowledge of emergent literacy practices that are age-appropriate (Advocates for Children of New York, 2010; Mendenhall, Bartlett, & Ghaffar-Kucher, 2017; WIDA Consortium, 2015).

Guidance. Since many students who are considered SIFE experience trauma, or arrive in the U.S. under difficult circumstances, their socio-emotional needs are a priority and specific interventions are needed to support them (Custodio & O'Loughlin, 2017). It is important that the guidance counselors are aware of students' histories and living situations. In addition, they need to learn about students' experiential and cultural backgrounds, as well as their academic histories. In many cases, schools not only address the needs of the students individually, but also create support groups for students in similar situations, as well as support groups for families (Auslander, 2016, September).

Support services for students and families through partnerships. To provide a holistic approach to students' wellbeing and development, schools should partner with community organizations that provide services for both the students and their families. It is especially important to establish relationships with organizations that can continue to provide support even after the students age out of the program. Partnerships with social services and community organizations widen the net of support for newly arrived immigrants with limited or interrupted education (WIDA Consortium, 2015; Advocates for Children of New York, 2010).

Guidance Structures at a School with SIFE Newcomers

One school for newcomers in Brooklyn, NY, has addressed the needs of SIFE and other incoming students by setting up a few collaborative guidance structures in the school. The principal, a former social worker and AP of Guidance, spoke about the impact of trauma on some of her students: “Losses of relationships with their mom, grandma, or losing those people that they are attached to when they come here is hard. That’s why we are here for them. The way that we run our school is with the understanding that our students, most of them, have been separated from their parents in one way because of their immigration story, and they suffer losses”.

The school provides individual counseling as well as college and career counseling but also provides support group services. For example, one social work intern ran a support group for grieving students who have lost a family member. In addition, teachers and counselors collaborate in weekly meetings to discuss what specific behaviors are emerging in the classroom and who needs specific supports. This helps both teachers and counselors differentiate to address the needs on an ongoing basis. One graduating senior in 2015 summed it up this way: “One thing I learned, this school it’s more like family. You got support on every step.” (Auslander, 2016, September).

SIFE Program at a High School for Latino Students

At a high school in NYC in which the majority of the students are newcomers and other multilingual learners whose home language is Spanish, the school administration emphasizes the importance of students’ mastery of academic language in their home language while learning academic language in English. With this view, the high school has developed a SIFE program that incorporates strong home language literacy development with more traditional ENL classes.

The school has a SIFE program in which the students take a Spanish Language Arts class for two years during the school day. They also take Science and Spanish Language Arts classes on Saturdays, and participate in a book club in Spanish. When they complete their second year in the SIFE program, they rejoin other students in a transitional bilingual program with emphasis on home language maintenance, which allows them to continue learning all subjects in both English and Spanish. The students conclude with the Advanced Placement Spanish Language examination.

In addition, the school has a peer-tutoring program in which students who excel in particular academic areas tutor other students, including SIFE, with supervision from two teachers.

Classroom-Based Practices

It is important that all classroom practices for SIFE are driven by high expectations and based on a curriculum that challenges the students intellectually while being fluid and adaptable to address students' individual needs.

Activating prior knowledge/experience. It is vital for teachers to be aware of students' prior knowledge and experiences so they can guide them in making connections to new concepts or ideas. Drawing from familiar experiences and everyday language provides a bridge to new concepts and academic language, and building from what students already know helps to balance the cognitive load (Walqui, 2006).

Using oral language and experiential learning. For many students with interrupted or limited education, their prior learning experiences have been based on oral language, which flows directly from experience. SIFE students have experience (often outside of formal education) in learning by doing, following a model, operating within a context where knowledge has a concrete application, and obtaining feedback from the results themselves or from other people. In contrast to this model of learning, the U.S. educational system requires extensive analytical tasks that are decontextualized from real world applications. Another significant difficulty in transitioning to school in the U.S. is the transition to text-based learning (Marshall, DeCapua & Antolini, 2010). Multimodal realms of experience (linguistic, visual, auditory, gestural, and spatial) enrich language learning and literacy development (Martens, et al., 2012) and should be integrated into the learning experiences designed for these students. Extending learning beyond the classroom through field trips and bringing guest speakers can be beneficial in boosting students' confidence to participate in their new society.

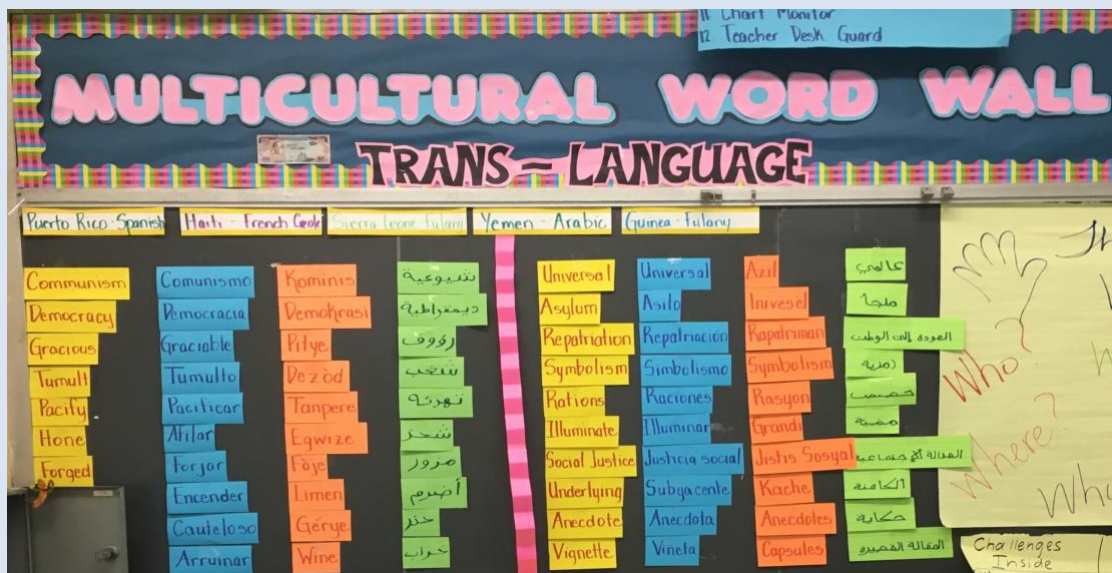
It is also important to leverage students' oral language, allowing students to talk about what they are learning, as well as expand their language in relationship with new content and skills. In the writing process, it is essential that students have opportunities to use their entire linguistic repertoires to speak about their ideas for writing, and to assess their writing (Kibler, 2010). Teachers have a crucial role in modeling conversation and dialogue around these contexts and others as well.

Fostering collaboration. It is important to set structures for collaboration that allow SIFE to use both the new and home languages in the context of learning activities, particularly within partnerships or small group settings. Language learning is a collaborative process; however, it is often challenging for adolescent students to express their ideas in a large classroom due to fears of being judged, or not being understood. Small-group work provides a platform for students to express their ideas in a lower risk environment (Marshall, DeCapua, & Antolini, 2010; Walqui, 2006). Since many students might not have experience with group work in an academic setting, it is important to explicitly teach the interpersonal skills they need to interact productively with one another. The teacher needs to establish structures and model skills such

as turn-taking, using encouraging language with each other, providing feedback, and building on each other's ideas.²

Using Art to Tap into Students' Prior Knowledge

An 8th grade NLA teacher at a middle school in Brooklyn, NY has a heterogeneous group of students that includes several newcomers and one student identified as SIFE from Sierra Leone. In her classroom, she regularly uses strategies that support home language development, such as a multilingual word wall and multilingual texts.



When students write in their journals, they use their home languages. She also emphasizes the use of oral language, using language partners to support students with low literacy skills. As a regular practice, her students share their work orally in their home language with the whole class. She describes using music and visual art to tap into her students' prior knowledge, such as introducing a "visual thinking strategy" before a writing activity. In this approach, she displays an image and asks the students to think about: *What is going on in this picture? What do you see that makes you say that? What more can you say about it?*

In making connections to a visual image or to music, students are encouraged to bring in previous experiences that help the teacher make connections to the content and skills that she is teaching.

² For more resources, visit the [Bridges Curriculum website](http://bridges-sifeproject.com/curriculum-overview/) (<http://bridges-sifeproject.com/curriculum-overview/>)

Using Oral Language to Develop Literacy

An 11th and 12th grade teacher from a high school in Manhattan works with a newcomer group of students including several students identified as SIFE who do not share a home language. As a common practice, the teacher begins with collaborative oral activities to process, question, comprehend, share, and discuss before moving to independent writing activities. In her class, she uses a cooperative vocabulary activity as a review before a major writing task or assessment, which helps with longer-term retention and use. The teacher asks her students to rate their vocabulary knowledge of a small set of unit terms, “think/pair/share” words they need help with, and then play a *Who Am I?* name game. In this completely oral game, students have vocabulary words taped to their backs, and must formulate yes/no questions and ask them to others in order to guess their vocabulary words.

The teacher also uses a “speed talking” activity during prewriting to encourage collaborative idea generation and during writing to foster idea cross-pollination. The students stand or sit in two rows (A and B) facing each other. She generally models target behaviors (eye contact, speak in neighborly voices, wait to ask questions, nod to agree). During the first round, she reads aloud and projects the first question onto a Smartboard, providing sentence frames for responses. Each student in row A has two minutes to think and then share with the opposite student in Row B, who listens and asks follow up questions. After a few minutes, they switch roles. When the round finishes, the rows rotate so that each student has a new partner, and they repeat with a new prompt.

Profiles of Students Identified as with Interrupted / Inconsistent Formal Education (SIFE) Who Attend School in New York State

Students identified as SIFE are not a homogenous set, but are incredibly diverse with regard to home language, amount of English language exposure, cultural experiences, social status, and psychological-emotional needs. These students come from a variety of backgrounds—some may have had limited schooling due to political or social circumstances in their home country; others may arrive from areas where formal education was absent or unavailable beyond the early years or where students attend school consistently, but have non-parallel schooling experiences to the United States. They, however, bring unique life experiences that students who live in urban areas might not have had.

Below you will find the profiles of three students who upon entering their first year of schooling in the U.S., and New York, were identified as SIFE. In addition to be identified as SIFE, these students are also labeled as Newcomers by NYSED because they have been receiving English as a New Language (ENL) supports and services for less than three continuous school years. These profiles were gathered from information provided by their teachers. In order to protect the students' confidentiality, they have given a pseudonym and no information on their schools or teachers are provided.

You will meet **Emmanuel** (9th grader from the Dominican Republic), **Daniel** (9th grader from Haiti), **Mahir** (10th grader from Yemen), and **Daniela** (4th grade from El Salvador). Each of their stories show how unique each of them are. They have different prior educational experiences, they receive different services in their school and by their teachers as well as they have different learning needs, preferences and personalities. These profiles serve as an example of the vast diversity of the students labeled as SIFE. It's very important that educators in New York learn about how each of their students are, regardless of the labels that they have received.

Emmanuel, 14, 9th Grade Student from Dominican Republic

Emmanuel is a 14-year old who arrived from Dominican Republic at that beginning of 9th grade. He was identified not only as a **Newcomer but also as SIFE because he lived in a rural area in the Dominican Republic, and although attended school, he was reading at a 2nd grade level in Spanish, his home language. He was at the entering level of English proficiency when he started his schooling in New York.**

Emmanuel is in 9th grade and attends a high school in a large city in New York where he is placed in the Spanish-English Transitional Bilingual Education program. Emmanuel is comfortable expressing his ideas orally in Spanish. His thinking is very complex and his ideas are very strong. He struggles with academic vocabulary and with communicating his ideas in writing. Since he often writes in fragments, his teachers are teaching him strategies to make full sentences.

At the beginning of the year, he struggled to make sense of common school skills. For example, the first time that he encountered multiple choice questions, he circled all the answers. His teacher needed to show him how this type of test worked and to only circle the correct answer. The teacher also worked with Emmanuel on test-taking strategies such as starting by finding and eliminating answers that were clearly wrong. Since then, the school has provided academic intervention support services where he is learning basic school skills, some as basic as organizing his folder.

As Emmanuel has started to make sense of what is expected of him in school, his literacy skills both in Spanish and English have become stronger. Emmanuel's Spanish and English teacher collaborate in their planning as they work with the same students. When they worked on a unit of study about immigration, Emmanuel was able to hear and understand stories about immigrant children coming from different countries in Spanish class and then again in English class where he was able to follow along with the topic.

His teachers highlighted Spanish/English cognates for the unit which helped Emmanuel develop academic vocabulary in both languages. Emmanuel could relate to the topic of the unit as his family had immigrated to New York. His teachers helped him make further connections when they got into the study of rural and urban communities during the unit. Since Emmanuel grew up in the countryside, he has knowledge that students in the city don't have and he loved sharing his experiences during class.

Emmanuel is a wonderful artist. When he first started 9th grade, he would doodle, drawing while trying to pay attention to the teacher. One of his teachers shared that, while other kids often hide their doodles, he would show them to the class because he was very proud of what he had drawn. He used his doodles sometimes to make sense of the class work. For example, if during class they talked about the descriptive language used to portray a boy, he would draw the boy.

When Emmanuel first started school, he was working at a supermarket every evening after school to help support his family. Since his work schedule made it hard for him to keep up with school, he eventually changed the schedule.

Daniel, 17, 9th Grade Student from Haiti

Daniel is a 17-year old who arrived from Haiti the summer before starting 9th grade. He was identified not only as a **Newcomer but also as SIFE because he received inconsistent schooling in Haiti and was reading at a 1st grade level in Haitian-Creole, his home language. He was at the entering level of English proficiency when started his schooling in New York.**

Daniel is in 9th grade and attends a high school in a large city in New York where he has been placed in the **stand-alone English as a New Language (ENL) program**. When Daniel first arrived, he was very quiet and observant. He quickly learned basic school routines but was very reluctant to engage in any kind of group work, preferring instead to work individually. He was paired with students from Haiti so they could provide him with peer support. The Haitian students in his class have had their schooling in French so they are able to make connections between academic language in French and English, but since Daniel doesn't speak French, it is sometimes a challenge for them to help him.

From the beginning, Daniel was always willing to takes directions. He is very eager to work hard even though it is difficult for him to complete some of the assignments. Since most analytical conceptual work is difficult for him, his ELA teacher scaffolds his work, so he is able to participate. For example, at the beginning of the year, she encouraged him to draw his responses to questions. As he learned more English, he was able to use simple words and sentences. In his first year in high school, he has been able to learn basic conversational English and he is very determined to continue to learn.

Mahir, 16, 10th Grade Student from Yemen

Mahir is a 16-year old who arrived from Yemen in the middle of 9th grade. He was identified not only as a **Newcomer but also a Student with Interrupted Formal Education because he lived in a rural area of Yemen and had inconsistent schooling. He was reading at a 2nd grade level in Arabic, his home language and was at the entering level of English proficiency when he started his schooling in New York.**

Mahir is in 10th grade and attends a high school in a large city in New York where he is placed in a stand-alone English as a New Language (ENL) program. When he first entered high school, he was unfamiliar with basic school routines, and he was overwhelmed by being in a new setting. He spent much of his class time writing his name on his folder. His school places 9th and 10th grade students together in classes, so the 10th graders can provide peer language support to the newcomers. Upon his entrance to the school he was paired with Arabic-speaking students so that they could help him understand how to navigate the classroom and school routines. He also received small group English literacy support.

Mahir is a very friendly and social student. Despite the fact that he started in 9th grade with almost no English, he has made friends with students who speak different languages and come from many cultures. He loves to play soccer and talk about it. This has been a common ground for him to socialize with kids from a variety of backgrounds. Because of his social skills, Mahir his English oral language has developed very quickly and he was able to communicate socially in oral in English in a very basic way early on. Since many of his friends are from Latin American countries, he has also learned some Spanish.

Mahir is now able to understand the routines of the class and to use them to his advantage. He thrives doing group work and takes a leadership role in organizing his group and getting everyone to work. Working in a group helps Mahir because it provides a venue for him to participate in the class and check his understanding with other students. The school's philosophy is to encourage students to use their home language for learning English and to work in small groups of students who share a home language. For example, in class they were learning Romeo and Juliet in English class. The teacher asked each student to choose a quote, translated it to their home language, and then shared the meaning of it in English. Mahir choose "When love is denied, you will find an ocean made of lover's tears" and completed the activity first in Arabic and then in English. While he is making progress in English he continues to struggles to conceptualize what he is supposed to do in his class work, particularly if an activity has more than one component.

Daniela, 9, 4th Grade Student from El Salvador

Daniela is nine years old and recently arrived in the United States with her father; previously, they lived in El Salvador. **Daniela was identified as a Newcomer when she entered school as a fourth grader. She was also identified as SIFE, because had inconsistent schooling in El Salvador, as she lived in a rural area without much access to schooling.** At most, she attended school three months out of the year. When she arrived at her elementary school in Queens, New York, she was unable to read or write in Spanish, and she could not understand or speak in English.

Daniela attends a dual language K-5 school with a side-by-side program. She attends classes in English one day, and then attends classes in Spanish the next day. However, every day, Daniela and the other Newcomers in her classroom receive 45 minutes of "in place" instruction; their Spanish teacher works with them on their speaking, listening, reading, and writing abilities.

Daniela was shy at first, embarrassed when she realized that her classmates were further along in their literacy development in both English and Spanish. She was intimidated by their capabilities. There was also a culture shock, as she was not used to attending school so frequently, and American culture in general was new to her.

However, Daniela's academic trajectory changed drastically when her teacher introduced her to a chapter book featuring a protagonist who came to the United States from the Dominican Republic. She loved hearing the story read aloud to her, and she took the book with her everywhere. From this book—which she read constantly, even during math lessons!—she began to learn to read in Spanish. Her skills continued to develop as she read other similar books. By the end of the school year, Daniela, who had not been able to read in her home language, was reading at a third-grade level.

In English she now reads at a kindergarten level and can say a few words and phrases. She is able to understand much of what her teachers and classmates say to her in English, and when she struggles, they are happy to translate for her and help her. She continues to speak primarily Spanish, even when she is addressed in English.

Research Studies on Supporting Students with Interrupted/Inconsistent Formal Education (SIFE) Annotated Bibliography

New York State Education Department identifies Students with Interrupted/Inconsistent Formal Education (SIFE) as Multilingual Learners /English Language Learners(MLLs/ELLs)³ who have attended school in the U.S. for fewer than 12 months, and are two or more years below grade level in home language literacy and/or math due to inconsistent or interrupted schooling prior to their arrival (NYSED 2014, CR Section 154-2.2). SIFE are a sub-group of MLLs/ELLs who have been identified as newcomers.

This annotated bibliography serves as comprehensive overview of current research on Students with Interrupted/Inconsistent Formal Education (SIFE) around two areas: what are the issues to consider in identifying SIFE, and what school- and/or classroom-based supports are best for working with SIFE. It is intended to be a resource for educators who serve this growing population of students; it is not an exhaustive list of resources, but, rather, serves to highlight representative research in the field around these areas.

Methodology for Selecting the Articles Featured

This annotated bibliography includes current research found through structured internet and database searches on the two areas of research presented above and from suggestions of scholars knowledgeable in the literature on SIFE. We used the following search terms: Students with interrupted formal education, students with inconsistent formal education, students with limited schooling, English language learners, newcomer students, immigrant students, SIFE, and SLIFE. The works included in this annotated bibliography were selected based on the following criteria:

- They come from a credible publication source, such as a peer-reviewed journal, educational institution, or agency (books are not included in this list);
- They are current, being published in past seven years (between 2010 and 2017);
- The methods of analysis were clearly identified in the publication in order to evaluate the rigor of the study; and
- The research focused primarily on SIFE in the U.S. educational system.

The authors of this annotated bibliography then selected 10 sources that they consider the most useful for educators working with SIFE.

We first present an overview of what current research says about the two analyses: a) what are the issues to consider in identifying SIFE, and b) what school- and/or classroom-based supports are the best for working with SIFE. We then present a summarizing table indicating the authors and year of the works included, the type of article they are (journal or report) and on which area(s) of analysis they have

³ MLLs/ELLs are defined as children who “by reason of foreign birth or ancestry, speak or understand a language other than English...and require support in order to become proficient in English” (NYSED, 2014, p. 17).

information on. Finally, we present each article, organized alphabetically, and a summary of their findings by analysis area.

What does the research say about about issues in identifying Students with Interrupted/Inconsistent Formal Education (SIFE) and school- and classroom-based supports?

In this annotated bibliography, we include 10 studies that provide insights from research issues in identifying who SIFE are, and classroom- and school-based practices that support these students in the U.S. Because of the unique educational backgrounds and profiles of SIFE, research has highlighted that current identification systems must be strengthened in order to clearly identify these students from within the larger population of MLLs/ELLs. SIFE typically need specialized support in several areas including language and literacy proficiency, academic content knowledge, and acclimation to cultural and institutional assumptions within the U.S. school system. Because of their unique and often challenging backgrounds, research has identified that SIFE may also need additional psychological support as they adapt to their new lives and new communities.

Research shows that it is beneficial to adopt an asset-based classroom approach that validates and leverages students' prior experiences and knowledge. Use of the home language and inclusion of familiar words and content in classwork helps to create an encouraging learning environment for SIFE. More concretely, using culturally-based curricular content, scaffolding supports for written and oral tasks, and special attention to academic thinking exercises help SIFE to participate meaningfully in the classroom as they develop new skills and knowledge.

In terms of schoolwide practices, the research recommends specially designed professional development to help educators better identify the diversity within MLLs/ELLs, and recognize the unique backgrounds and educational experiences of these students. In particular, institutional or district-level training opportunities can help transform the approach to SIFE from a deficit-based view to an asset-based one. In addition to classroom strategies that validate students' existing resources and home languages, schoolwide supports that also leverage those resources provide safe spaces for SIFE to thrive academically and culturally. Where feasible, specialized considerations such as extended learning time, bilingual/home-language programs, and appropriate transition strategies for students entering mainstream classrooms are ideal. Finally, communication and involvement with students' families and their larger communities promotes increased collaboration, helping to reduce cultural dissonance that impedes students' success.

Author and Year	Type of Article	Considerations in identifying SIFE	School- and/or classroom-based supports for SIFE
Advocates for Children of NY (2010)	Report	✓	✓
Dávila (2012)	Journal		✓
DeCapua & Marshall (2010)	Journal	✓	✓
Hos (2016a)	Journal		✓
Hos (2016b)	Journal		✓
Mendenhall, Bartlett, & Ghaffar-Kucher (2017)	Journal		✓
Menken (2013)	Journal	✓	✓
Montero, Newmaster, & Ledger (2014)	Journal		✓
Nykiel-Herbert (2010)	Journal		✓
Roy & Roxas (2011)	Journal		✓

Advocates for Children of New York. (2010). Students with Interrupted Formal Education: A challenge for New York City Public Schools. New York: Advocates for Children of New York.

Full text access: <http://www.advocatesforchildren.org/sife%20paper%20final.pdf?pt=1>

This report identifies SIFE within the larger population of MLLs/ELLs in the New York City public school system, emphasizing attention to SIFE needs as a critical component in improving overall MLLs/ELLs achievement. It presents recommendations for policy implementation and reform for the New York State Education Department and the New York City Department of Education.

Issues to consider in identifying SIFE:

- Improve collection and availability of data on the demographics, characteristics, and performance of SIFE.
- Strengthen systems to identify and assess SIFE in all schools and enrollment centers.

School- and/or classroom-based recommendations for supporting SIFE:

- Review current SIFE programming and articulate a more comprehensive plan for funding, programming, and professional development.
- Apply to use extended graduation timelines for SIFE.

Dávila, L.T. (2012) 'For them it's sink or swim': Refugee students and the dynamics of migration, and (dis)placement in school. *Power and Education*, 4(2), 139–149.

The research presented here describes the institutional processes in schools such as labeling, placement in remedial courses, and participation in state-mandated testing, which reinforce the struggles many refugee students face. While many SIFE work against these processes by creating their own spaces for learning and connection, they are often prevented from accessing the tools necessary for success in or beyond school.

Issues to consider in identifying SIFE:

- Increase awareness by including non-refugee students in discussions on school and classroom policies that present barriers to academic opportunity.

- Adapt curricular materials that engage students in both familiar and new kinds of knowledge.
- Provide extended learning time for SIFE and other newcomer students.
- Develop appropriate transition strategies for students entering mainstream classrooms, including modified activities and assessments.
- Provide opportunities for SIFE and English-speaking students for meaningful interaction that supports English-language development but at the same time create opportunities for appreciation of their native cultures, experiences, and language abilities.

DeCapua, A., and H.W. Marshall. (2010). Serving ELLs with limited or interrupted education: Intervention that works. *TESOL Journal*, 1(1), 49–70.

This article proposes a reconceptualization of SIFE/SLIFE education, and investigates how the Mutually Adaptive Learning paradigm (MALP) assist SIFE in the development of literacy and academic thinking as well as improve SIFE engagement and participation. Following implementation of MALP, students demonstrated improved ability in independent writing responses, become more comfortable with internet-based print research, and made strides in academic thinking strategies.

Issues to consider in identifying SIFE:

- SIFE often need specialized support in several areas including language and literacy proficiency, academic content knowledge, and adaptation to cultural and institutional assumptions in the U.S. school system.

School- and/or classroom-based recommendations for supporting SIFE:

- Make lessons immediately relevant to students.
- Help students develop and maintain interconnectedness.
- Incorporate both shared responsibility and individual accountability.
- Scaffold the written word through oral interaction.
- Focus on tasks requiring academic ways of thinking.
- Make tasks accessible to students with familiar language and content.

Hos, R. (2016a). Caring is not enough: Teachers’ enactment of ethical care for adolescent students with limited or interrupted formal education (SLIFE) in a newcomer classroom. *Education and Urban Society*, 48(5), 479–503.

This article explores the experiences of adolescent refugee SIFE in a secondary newcomer classroom, identifying several characteristics of ethical care in relation to academic achievement. In addition to the theme of ethical care in the classroom, the author emphasizes the importance of adequate support and advocacy within the larger context of the school system.

What does this article say about classroom strategies for SIFE:

- Increase patience, flexibility, and empathy for students in the classroom, e.g.; adapt teaching strategies based on students’ needs and proficiency, model social/academic expectations for students, clearly explain expectations, discuss sample conflict resolution scenarios, and share personal experiences to encourage understanding.
- Build students’ self-confidence by demonstrating trust, providing opportunities to take responsibility, and approaching their background and abilities with a non-judgmental perspective.

School- and/or classroom-based recommendations for supporting SIFE:

- Advocate for students in the larger school system context.

Hos, R. (2016b). The lives, aspirations, and needs of refugee and immigrant Students with Interrupted Formal Education (SIFE) in a secondary newcomer program. *Urban Education*, 1–24 (online publication).

This article examines the experiences of adolescent refugee SIFE in a secondary newcomer classroom, particularly as they prepare to transition into mainstream education. The author identifies three primary themes at work: 1) students' needs for socio-emotional support, 2) students' responsibilities and community obligations outside of school, 3) students' aspirations, and incomplete knowledge of the educational system. She emphasizes the importance of culturally-responsive teaching, in conjunction with administrative and district-level collaboration in developing comprehensive support for SIFE.

School- and/or classroom-based recommendations for supporting SIFE:

- Address covert or subtle discrimination in how the curriculum is delivered to students.
- Provide psychological support and encouragement within the classroom.
- Provide adequate access to psychological support through school counseling services.
- Implement academic bridge programs that facilitate SIFE in continuing their education and meeting their aspirations.

Mendenhall, M., Bartlett, L., and A. Ghaffar-Kucher. (2017). “If you need help, they are always there for us”: Education for refugees in an international high school in NYC. *Urban Review* 49, 1–25.

This study focuses on one school, Brooklyn International High School, that has successfully catered to the needs of refugee and asylee students (including SIFE), and documents key classroom and school-based factors that contribute to their academic inclusion.

School- and/or classroom-based recommendations for supporting SIFE:

- Encourage use of the home language in the classroom.
- Promote asset-based approaches that recognize, value, and leverage students' pre-existing knowledge and skills.
- Create team teaching opportunities to allow teachers more time to build a supportive learning community.
- Offer a variety of curricular approaches and assessment strategies.
- Offer professional development opportunities to help educators better understand students' prior educational and life experiences.
- Establish or build upon partnerships with students' families and local organizations.

Menken, K. (2013). Emergent bilingual students in secondary school: Along the academic language and literacy continuum. *Language Teaching*, 46(4), 438–476.

This review article summarizes the current state of research on MLLs/ELLs in secondary school, including SIFE. The author identifies several challenges in SIFE instruction, including appropriate curricula and pedagogy for the wide range of SIFE knowledge and abilities, and addressing the social and emotional needs for those who have experienced trauma. Strategies for teaching academic language and literacy are discussed, with a focus on translanguaging, or using the interconnectedness of each students' languages and language practices to enhance learning and literacy development.

Issues to consider in identifying SIFE:

- SIFE must be clearly identified within the larger MLLs/ELLs population in order to adequately address their unique profiles.

School- and/or classroom-based recommendations for supporting SIFE:

- Provide professional development and train teachers to identify the diversity within MLLs/ELLs, and teach academic language and literacy to students across the spectrum.
- Establish bilingual programs for schools with MLLs/ELLs of the same home language.
- Prepare teachers to incorporate translanguaging strategies in instruction.

Montero, K., Newmaster, S., & Ledger, S. (2014). Exploring early reading instructional strategies to advance the print literacy development of adolescent SLIFE. *Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy*, 58(1), 59–69.

This article presents guided reading and running records as a framework to enhance SIFE students' access to English print literacy. The findings indicate that overall, students demonstrated significant increases in receptive and expressive vocabulary, passage and listening comprehension, and word identification.

School- and/or classroom-based recommendations for supporting SIFE:

- Investigate early reading instructional approaches, focusing on the principles of guided reading: teach the reader, not the text, balance literacy instruction along both content and context.
- Create a literacy profile for each student, including information on home language and English language abilities, prior schooling, immigration history, and work samples.
- Introduce students to classroom 'learning centers' that focus on developing specific skills in areas such as listening, writing, and reading.
- Collect running record data on each student, noting their reading skills and strategies in decoding, miscues, phrasing, word stress, and intonation.

Roy, L., and K. Roxas. (2011). Whose deficit is this anyhow? Exploring counter-stories of Somali Bantu refugees' experiences. *Harvard Educational Review*, 81, 521–618.

This study considers how the discourse about refugees infiltrates the pedagogical and curricular decisions made in the school context. The authors contend that the deficit perspectives of some educators with regards to academic achievement, cultural values, and behavior create missed opportunities for learning, and prevent refugee families and students from successfully navigating the American school context.

School- and/or classroom-based recommendations for supporting SIFE:

- Address deficit discourse with educators, and examine its effect on academic success.
- Provide space for refugee parents to speak about their experiences and collaborate with teachers.
- Enhance teacher training with exercises in recognizing and responding to racial stereotypes, microaggressions, and deficit notions in the educational setting and beyond.

Nykiel-Herbert, B. (2010). Iraqi refugee students: From a collection of aliens to a community of learners--The role of cultural factors in the acquisition of literacy by Iraqi refugee students with interrupted formal education. *Multicultural Education*, 17(3), 2–14.

This article examines the effect of a culturally-relevant immersion environment on the academic and social development of non-literate refugee SIFE. Outcomes indicated that following the 10-month intervention, students demonstrated not only academic advancement, but also a stronger sense of cultural identity, in parallel with positive regard for the host culture. The author emphasizes the role of ‘hybridized cultural environments’, where the values and expectations of the education system provide space for the values and expectations of students from outside the majority culture.

School- and/or classroom-based recommendations for supporting SIFE:

- Create a safe cultural space within the classroom to recapture students’ group identity and allow them to manage their social behavior according to their familiar cultural prescriptions, rather than attempting to ‘act American.’
- Include curricular content that is relevant and congruent to students’ cultural knowledge and views. Where possible in the curriculum, allow flexibility for students to reflect cultural values and social norms in their choice of projects, discussion topics, and group work strategies.
- Maintain positive relationship between cultural patterns supported by the school and those adhered to by the students. Demonstrate respect for the home cultures of students; explicitly draw attention to implicit cultural knowledge of values, beliefs, social roles, linguistic interactions, and non-verbal behaviors, and discuss differences in cultural patterns.

Additional Resources Regarding Students Identified as SIFE

Bridging Refugee Youth and Children Services: Resources

<http://www.brycs.org/whatsNew/index.cfm#resources>

Colorin Colorado: Students with Interrupted Formal Education

<http://www.colorincolorado.org/ell-basics/special-populations/students-interrupted-formal-education>

Edublogs: Supporting English Language Learners: Giving Wings to Their Dreams: Identifying and Nurturing Students with Interrupted Formal Education

<http://supportingells.edublogs.org/2014/06/20/giving-wings-to-their-dreams-identifying-and-nurturing-students-with-interrupted-formal-education/>

New York State Education Department: SIFE Resources <http://www.nysed.gov/bilingual-ed/schools/students-interrupted-inconsistent-formal-education-sife>

Spring Institute for Intercultural Learning: ESL Resources <https://www.springinstitute.org/esl-resources/>

Teaching Refugees with Limited Formal Schooling: Instructional Resources

<http://teachingrefugees.com/instructional-programming/resources/>

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