


**Breaking New Ground for SLIFE:
The Mutually Adaptive Learning Paradigm, 2nd edition**

November 2023 – Volume 27, Number 3

<https://doi.org/10.55593/ej.27107r1>

Breaking New Ground for SLIFE: The Mutually Adaptive Learning Paradigm[®], 2nd edition		
Authors:	Andrea DeCapua & Helaine W. Marshall (2023)	
Publisher:	Ann Arbor: U. of Michigan Press	
Pages	ISBN-13	Price
Pp. xiii + 191	978-0-472-03933-3 (print) 978-0-472-22120-2 (e-book)	\$29.95 U.S. (print) \$24.95 U.S. (e-book)

**Breaking New Ground
for SLIFE**
The Mutually Adaptive Learning Paradigm[®]
Second Edition



Andrea DeCapua & Helaine W. Marshall
MICHIGAN

Immersion in a new culture and embracing a foreign language can be challenging when moving to a new country. Children, especially those who move to an entirely new school environment in an unfamiliar country, can experience significant academic tension. In 2021, there was a notable influx of almost one million new individuals to the United States (Office of Immigration Statistics, 2021). Among these newcomers, a significant portion comprises children who are English language learners, facing the challenge of not only acquiring proficiency in English but also comprehending educational content presented in a language that is foreign to their native tongue (DeCapua & Marshall, 2010). These ELLs often fall into the category of Students with Limited or Interrupted Formal Education (abbreviated to SLIFE). SLIFE, according to DeCapua and Marshall (2010), is a term used to describe students who have had their formal education significantly disrupted or limited, frequently because of factors like migration, conflict, or other circumstances that prevented them from attending a regular, continuous school in their home countries. As a result, students can have substantial gaps in their educational background when they come to the USA, making it harder for them to adapt to the American educational system.

Educators have needed help finding the right teaching approach for this group of students. *Breaking New Ground for SLIFE* (Second Edition), written by Andrea DeCapua and Helaine W. Marshall, aims to address these challenges by broadening its focus from the U.S. secondary school context in the first edition to learners of all ages in the second edition. The book incorporates research and collaborates with classroom teachers to highlight the importance of using a culturally responsive teaching method

called the Mutually Adaptive Learning Paradigm (MALP) for SLIFE. MALP, an innovative learning paradigm that empowers SLIFE to excel in the formal educational system, is recommended to incorporate into lessons to help these students transition to traditional classroom contexts.

This book's second edition is structured in two parts: the introduction and theory of MALP (Chapters 1-4) and the implementations and projects of the approach (Chapters 5-9). Part one starts by exploring three underlying cultural factors that impact how people understand teaching and learning: individualism vs. collectivism, pragmatic vs. academic ways of thinking, and oral transmission vs. literacy. The concept of MALP is introduced as an innovative learning paradigm aimed at empowering SLIFE to excel in the formal educational system, encompassing three crucial learning components: conditions for learning, processes for learning, and activities for learning. The authors present The MALP Teacher Planning Checklist to support teachers working with SLIFE, which aligns with these three components. The checklist provides teachers with specific elements to address while planning lessons and activities for SLIFE, ensuring a comprehensive and practical approach to their education. While progressing through the entire book, readers are encouraged to participate in a range of Discovery Activities designed to foster a more profound comprehension of their cultural perspectives and those of SLIFE.

Part two then turns to practice. The authors provide examples of projects from a MALP perspective. The Mystery Bag Project, one of the projects introduced, helps SLIFE learn the tasks of classifying, comparing, contrasting, and defining. Class Surveys are also presented as another type of MALP project in Chapter 6. These projects involved all three MALP components, which are the core of a mutually adaptive approach. Six MALP projects designed and delivered by trained instructors from different content areas are presented. The first three are designed for children who participate in formal education in their early years (Chapter 7). Another three aims to assist adolescent learners (Chapter 8). Although these projects are specifically designed for particular groups of students, educators are encouraged to adapt and adjust lessons to their own students, curriculum, contexts, and subject areas. This second edition concludes by reflecting on the journey made by one teacher both before and after she received training in MALP and observations from a former SLIFE who successfully transitioned to formal education.

DeCapua and Marshall have made significant contributions to the literature on SLIFE, providing practical theory and numerous examples that are highly valuable for teachers and educators. The book stands out for its practical illustrations of projects, offering tangible strategies and approaches to actively engage SLIFE and promote their academic development. While there are other resources available as support for teaching SLIFE to help with academic ways of thinking, language, and literacy development (e.g., Marrero Colón et al., 2022; Frydland et al., 2019), DeCapua and Marshall present practical illustrations of projects that teachers and educators can use as a framework to design class projects as a supplement to support the curriculum. Another strength of the book is the inclusion of a Discovery activity—a pause and reflect session in between each chapter. These sessions provide a valuable opportunity for educators to engage in thoughtful self-reflection. They are beneficial not only for those who directly work with SLIFE, but also for those involved in preparing educators. They serve as a helpful guide for facilitating discussions and guiding professional development sessions.

Throughout the book, the authors emphasize the importance of systematically incorporating translanguaging (see e.g., García & Li, 2014) into classroom lessons. However, it would be beneficial for the book to highlight further the relevance of this concept to the specific context of teachers. The need for a comprehensive, step-by-step guide that empowers educators with practical strategies for implementing translanguaging in their classrooms is evident. Such a resource would be invaluable for teachers directly engaging with SLIFE in real-life teaching scenarios. Undeniably, though, this book has provided valuable support for teachers. Moving forward, to better understand and help this specific group of children, the authors may go further by addressing the needs of stakeholders in larger school

ecosystems, such as parents, staff, and school administrators. This would have a more substantial and beneficial effect on SLIFE education as a whole.

The MALP teaching approach has great potential to reduce any difficulties that students could encounter in the classroom by bridging the gap between two different learning paradigms of SLIFE. Going through the pages of the book, readers are equipped with unique MALP classroom ideas and insights on how to effectively tailor lesson plans to meet the specific needs of SLIFE. Through the exploration of its pedagogical approach, readers are also prompted to reflect on their own experiences and consider how they relate to this group of students. Although this book predominantly focuses on the US context, the principles and strategies discussed can still be valuable and adaptable to other educational settings outside of the United States. The provided resources serve as a solid foundation for designing effective lessons and supporting SLIFE learners globally. Ultimately, the goal of the authors is to encourage educators to engage critically with the concepts presented and adapt them to their specific contexts. Overall, this book provides valuable information and is thought-provoking, making it an insightful resource for not only inexperienced educators but also for those more seasoned, as well as researchers, who are dealing with SLIFE one way or another.

References

- DeCapua, A., & Marshall, H. W. (2010). Students with limited or interrupted formal education in US classrooms. *The Urban Review*, 42, 159-173. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11256-009-0128-z>
- DeCapua, A., & Marshall, H. W. (2011). Reaching ELLs at risk: Instruction for students with limited or interrupted formal education. *Preventing school failure: Alternative education for children and youth*, 55(1), 35-41. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10459880903291680>
- Frydland, N. (2019). Transforming classrooms with the Mutually Adaptive Learning Paradigm®. *LESLLA Symposium Proceedings*, 11(1), 14-25. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.8035710>
- García, O., & Li, W. (2014). *Translanguaging: Language, bilingualism and education*. Palgrave Macmillan. <https://doi.org/10.1057/97811373>
- Marrero Colón, M. I., & Désir, C. (2022). Best practices in meeting the literacy and postsecondary needs of adolescent students with limited or interrupted formal education. In L. J. Pentón Herrera (Ed.), *English and students with limited or interrupted formal education* (1st ed., Vol. 54, pp. 161-189). Springer.
- Office of Immigration Statistics (2022, November). *2021 Yearbook of immigration statistics*. U.S. Department of Homeland Security. <https://www.dhs.gov/immigration-statistics/yearbook/2021>

About the reviewer

Praew Bupphachuen is currently a master's student in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (MATESOL) at Michigan State University. Her main research interests center around project-based teaching, differentiated instruction, and language teacher identity. bupphach@msu.edu, ORCID ID: 0009-0006-2208-6775

Copyright of articles rests with the authors. Please cite TESL-EJ appropriately.