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BUILDING TEACHER CAPACITY AS A PATHWAY TO EQUITY FOR FIRST-GRADE SPANISH-SPEAKING ENGLISH LEARNERS: AN APPLIED RESEARCH STUDY

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BUILDING TEACHER CAPACITY AS A PATHWAY TO EQUITY FOR FIRST-GRADE

SPANISH-SPEAKING ENGLISH LEARNERS: AN APPLIED RESEARCH STUDY

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ABSTRACT

The teaching of English Learners, one of the fastest growing subgroups in American Public schools, is a task American classroom teachers are ill-equipped to handle. As students from a variety of language backgrounds move from metropolitan areas of the country to more rural locales educational leaders must equip teachers to integrate language acquisition with content instruction. Failure to do so will result in compounding learning gaps among English Learners as the language barrier prevents them from gaining content knowledge. Based in a Mississippi school with a growing population of English Learners comprising over a quarter of the school's population, this action research study with program evaluation explored the training of classroom teachers in a variety of best practices for teaching English Learners. The results reveal specific strategies found to be successful in improving English Learners' access to content knowledge as they work toward English language proficiency. The added influence of the COVID-19 pandemic rendered this study of specific value as it addressed how change initiatives can be impacted by external influences while still being successfully implemented.

DEDICATION

Taking on the acquisition of a lifelong dream to earn a doctorate does not occur without the support of those around you. Those who have helped me achieve this dream are my family, co-workers, and the amazing colleagues of Cohort IV. Your support in pushing me to start the process and encouraging me when I did not think I would finish has allowed me to realize this dream. The sacrifices of my husband, Tim, to cook, clean, and check on me in the wee hours of the morning when I was awake and writing are a testament to the way he has supported me not only through this process, but throughout life, something for which I am forever grateful.

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There are those, who throughout our professional careers, see in us what we do not see in ourselves. In my life I have been blessed with an abundance of such people.

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The faculty of Principal Corps and K-12 Educational Leadership at The University of Mississippi have shaped me in ways they will never realize. Your wisdom, patience, and encouragement have shaped me into the leader I am today.

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Statement of the Problem

The student population in America's public schools is changing. One reason for this shift is the increase in English language learners (ELs) in our schools from 3.8 million in 2000 to 4.9 million ELs in 2016 (NCES, 2019). Spanish speaking ELs comprise the majority of these students with 3.8 million or 78% of the 4.9 million ELs having a home language of Spanish (NCES, 2019). In Mississippi alone, the EL population has grown from 1,236 in 2013 to 12,632 in 2017 (MDE, 2018). Of these ELs, 65% are native Spanish speakers (MDE, 2018).

One can imagine the challenges these students face with learning the subject matter of math, science, social studies, and English language arts without a mastery of the language in which the content is being presented. An experience from my high school years helps me, to a small degree, understand what challenges our ELs face with learning academic content in a language they do not fully understand.

The South Florida sun beamed brightly as I walked home from an afterschool activity. Having crossed the highway, I continued down the road towards my house on Sweetwater Circle. I moved close to the edge of the canal bordering the road as an approaching car slowed behind me. "Hola, chica!" was followed by a string of words I did not understand. I continued walking, if not a little quicker, as a turtle slipped into the canal. In this moment, and others throughout my high school years, it seemed I was no longer in America, but in a completely different country. My experience as a native English speaker who moved from Kentucky where blonde-haired,

blue-eyed, fair-skinned girls were the norm to south Florida where my classes were equally split between people who looked much like me and a mixture of Hispanic students led me to purposefully choose to take four years of Spanish in high school.

As a high school freshman, I knew basic words in Spanish, lapis…pencil, papel…paper, but what the boys in the car were saying, I had no idea. Fast forward to year two of high school and Spanish II where my teacher, Señora Aguilar, a native Spanish speaker spoke to us only in Spanish. As I listened to her speak, leading us through the conjugation of verbs and other conventions of grammar, I felt lost amid the thickly accented Spanish swirling through the classroom. Trying to understand the conversation in the room was a struggle for me, which was new to this straight A student. Consolation was taken in noticing that while most of my native Spanish speaking classmates were thriving in Señora Aguilar's classroom, there were a few who looked equally as lost as me.

Reflecting on these two experiences I am reminded of my Spanish speaking classmates with whom I took both English and Spanish. I can understand the struggle my classmates might have experienced and the barriers they faced in learning a new language. I can connect to the uncertainty and trepidation I saw in their eyes. More than 30 years later, I have not forgotten these experiences. As I walk through the schools in my district, especially those in the south portion of Nevara County, I see students in whose eyes there is the same uncertainty and trepidation. It is the idea of bringing hope to these students through English language proficiency which drives me to focus my study around providing better learning opportunities for ELs in my district through teacher development in teaching Spanish speaking ELs.

The National Education Association (NEA) has identified ELs as the fastest growing segment of school populations in America (NEA, 2011). From 1995 to 2005 the population of ELs doubled in 23 states nationally (Payan & Nettles, 2008).   Between 2000 and 2015, the EL

population in America's public schools grew from 3.8 million students to 4.8 million ELs (NCES, 2018). American public schools have the ultimate goal of preparing students for high school graduation and beyond to college and career readiness. Unfortunately, ELs are a subgroup of the school-aged population which tends to lag behind all American students, rendering them less likely to be college and career ready. Despite an overall increase nationally in student performance in reading and math on the National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP) assessment, data indicate a ten-year period of stagnancy for ELs (NCES, 2017). With other student groups showing growth and EL growth remaining stagnant, a gap in performance between ELs and all other students exists. This gap is further illuminated in an analysis of trends in the 2013 NAEP data where Murphey (2014) revealed a gap of 40 percentage points between the performance of ELs and the performance of non-EL students in fourth-grade reading. Focusing on ELs who were deemed proficient on the World Class Instructional Design and Assessment (WIDA) English Language Proficiency Test, Miley and Farmer (2017) discovered significant gaps ($p= .022$) in performance between ELs and native English speakers on English Language Arts end of course assessments.

What then are the factors which prohibit ELs from reaching the same levels of achievement as their native English-speaking classmates? One factor is the language barrier which compromises an ELs comprehension of the material and prohibits ELs from communicating their knowledge. According to NASEM (2017), ELs are hindered academically by their lack of English proficiency. Goldenberg (2013) discusses how ELs lack the complexity of academic language proficiency needed for success in American schools. Hakuta, Santos, and Fang (2013) expose the challenge all students face as a result of the increased content complexity and classroom conversations required to meet proficiency with the next generation standards. This higher linguistic interaction poses an even greater challenge to ELs who lack basic language

proficiency, much less the content specific vocabulary to excel academically. What we do as educators to foster English proficiency, especially academic language proficiency, is of utmost importance to the future aspirations of ELs.

English language proficiency among ELs, as measured by English Language Proficiency Tests such as WIDA and LAS Links, takes between three and five years to develop while academic English language proficiency is acquired within four to seven years (Cummins, 2000; Hakuta, Butler, & Witt, 2000). Compounding the difficulty of English language proficiency are the varying ranges of language proficiency ELs have in their native language (Gandara & Rumberger, 2008). Even among Hispanic ELs, the native language may vary in modes of language usage with some having both written and oral language and others having only oral language (Gandara & Rumberger, 2006). Considering the ranges of native language proficiency, the wide range of language gaps among ELs provides an exceptional challenge to America's public-school teachers who instruct primarily in English.

An EL's English proficiency level upon entry to an EL program is a strong predictor of their timeline to proficiency. Cook, Linquanti, Chinen, and Jung (2012), determined 86% of ELs whose initial English language proficiency was rated as a three on a scale of one to four (with four being the highest level) were able to achieve proficiency in four years as opposed to only 44% of students whose entry-level proficiency was a level one. In a study of a cohort of first grade Spanish speaking ELs in Texas, Slama et al. (2017) concluded ELs who entered first grade with a beginning level of English proficiency more often failed not only to attain English proficiency, but also failed to meet the standards of proficiency in language arts and math.

For ELs who have not attained English language proficiency by middle school, their proficiency in skills identified as necessary for success in courses leading to high school graduation may be lacking (Slama et al., 2017). Deussen, Hanson, and Bisht (2017) studied

graduation and dropout rates among ELs in Washington state and revealed native English speakers had a dropout rate of 5.2%, while ELs had a dropout rate of 7.7%. When compared to the national dropout rate for all students of 6.1% (NCES, 2018), it is clear ELs are at higher risk than native English speakers for dropping out of high school.

While national data concerning ELs are important to understand, it is equally important to understand why studying ELs in Mississippi is important. Are there really enough ELs in Mississippi and more specifically, in Nevara County to even warrant a study of this nature? The answer is overwhelmingly, yes. Horsford and Sampson (2013) identified Mississippi as one of 10 states with the highest percentage of EL growth in the nation qualified by an increase of 158% between the years 2001 and 2011. Of the ten states recognized in this study, six provide some sort of state funding earmarked specifically for instructing ELs. Mississippi is one of the four states which provides no state funding specifically for teaching ELs.

In a two-year period from 2016-2018, the Mississippi Department of Education (MDE) (2018) reported an increase statewide of 3000 more ELs enrolled in Mississippi public schools. Further, the MDE recognized a shift in the concentrations of ELs statewide from primarily the Mississippi Gulf Coast and Northeast sections of the state in the1990s to a more widespread EL population in other pockets across the state. Traditionally, EL families have concentrated in areas where fishing and farming jobs were readily available. As of 2018, 35 districts statewide served 10 or more EL students (MDE 2018). Spanish is identified as the primary language of the majority of ELs in Mississippi with over 20 other languages prevalent in the state (MDE 2018).

The increase in the EL population is not just an issue nationally and across Mississippi, but in Nevara County specifically. The Nevara Public School District (NPSD) is one of 14 districts in Mississippi serving more than 300 ELs (MDE, 2018). As of February 2020, the NPSD had an EL population of 813 students. With a total district enrollment of 13,415 students,

the EL population comprised 6.06% of the district's student population placing the NPSD in what the United States Department of Education (USDOE) would signify as a district with a medium (5% to < 20%) concentration of ELs (USDOE, 2020). This indicates a rapid increase from the population of 246 ELs or 1.9% of the district's population in 2014-2015 when NPSD was classified as a district with a low (0-5%) EL population (USDOE, 2020).

In light of a statewide accountability initiative regarding ELs, a study of school data was conducted and shared in conversations with district leadership and the Victory Elementary School (VES) leadership team. From these conversations a need to address how to best serve the unique instructional needs of ELs at VES surfaced. Specifically, teachers expressed a need for training in how to best meet the needs of their ELs as they attempt to teach content and the English language simultaneously.

Description of the Problem

As the Assistant Director of Research and Development for the NPSD, my role is two-fold. In relation to student assessment data, I work with building-level administrators, their faculty, and other district personnel to explore the impact of assessments on instructional practice. Through school-based professional development, principals and teachers are guided to analyze student learning by studying benchmark and state test results four times yearly. Input from our curriculum specialists in literacy and mathematics further illuminates the data, suggesting best practices in instruction and student learning from the research as a means of improving student outcomes. Specifically, these specialists focus on the research concerning student growth, teacher efficacy, formative assessment, and reaching special populations. Collaboratively, the aforementioned stakeholders plan how to help students grow and reach proficiency.

Recently, the state of Mississippi, in fulfilling a requirement of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) (2015), named ELs as the subgroup which would be included in the accountability model for Mississippi schools. My second work role, with school and district accountability, was impacted greatly by this decision. In October 2018, when the initial model was presented for how ELs would be counted in the accountability model the team with whom I work began communicating with district officials as well as principals and teachers concerning the impact on their school's accountability as well as the district's accountability. Calculations were showing a negative impact on school accountability ratings at all of our schools. Particularly impacted were schools with larger populations of ELs, among which are the four schools in the Bearcat zone. Of the four zones in the NPSD, the Bearcat zone's high EL population presents an especially unique set of challenges and potential for tremendous student growth.

One of four schools in the Bearcat zone, VES is located in the suburban town of Arcadia in central Mississippi. In the school year 2018-2019 VES enrolled 775 students in grades Pre-K through second grade with a racial breakdown of 61.29% African-American, 20% Hispanic, 14.32% Caucasian, and 4.39% Asian. Of the 155 Hispanic students, 87.74% were considered ELs as were 79.41% or 33 of the Asian students. The city of Arcadia's demographics reflected a different picture with the majority of the population, 54.9%, being Caucasian, 35.5% African-American, 5.1% Hispanic, and 5.1% Asian. With 54% of the population in Arcadia living in rental property and 5.7% of the students enrolled by special affidavit, VES was impacted by transience. Additionally, VES had the highest EL population in the district at 21.55% of the school's population. Of the 13,211 students in the NPSD in 2018-2019, 693 or 5.25% of the students were EL students. Further, 169 of the 693 EL students or 24.39% of the district's ELs attended VES.

By the 2019-2020 school year these numbers had shifted. In February 2020, the population at VES totaled 764, a decrease of 11 students from the previous school year. Although the total population declined, the EL subgroup did not. By February 2020 the EL subgroup at VES had increased by 30 students from the previous year to 199 ELs bringing the percentage of ELs to 26.05% of the school population. The USDOE (2020) classifies schools and districts as having a high percentage of ELs when the population is over 20%. Therefore, VES can be identified as a school with a high population of ELs.

Considering the relatively large EL population at VES, how we specifically met the needs of this unique student population was of utmost concern. At the onset of this study, the principal and assistant principal were in their second year of leadership at VES. Both were previously employed at the high school in the same zone prior to taking their current leadership positions. The school staff consisted of 53 certified teachers, three of whom were EL teachers with certification in English as a Second Language. All three EL teachers held multiple certifications or endorsements including K-12 English, K-12 Spanish, Elementary Education, Mild/Moderate Disabilities, Art, and Child Development (Pre-K and K). The EL teachers met with students on a pull-out basis. Classroom teachers had the main responsibility for teaching content and fostering language acquisition.

The administration was intentional in assigning EL students to the class rosters of general education teachers who agreed to teaching ELs. To allow the teachers to truly focus on the special needs of ELs, students with other types of exceptionalities were filtered into the class rosters of other teachers in a similar manner. In this way, the potential for teachers to become overwhelmed with multiple special considerations was minimized and they could better meet the unique needs of their EL students.

In recent years, VES had been labeled a C or D school in the state accountability model which is a system based on an A, B, C, D, F grading system. In 2018, VES had a rating of a 333 C and in 2019 VES rose to a 440 B, their highest rating in the past five years (MDE, 2019). The Mississippi accountability model is built upon student proficiency, the growth of all students, and the growth of the lowest 25% of students. As a pre-k through second-grade school, VES' rating is based on the proficiency of students in third grade and the growth of students in fourth grade. In 2019 a new component was added to the accountability model related to ELs. Any school with 10 or more ELs had five points taken from each of the proficiency and growth areas to create an EL category. Since VES meets the 10 or more qualifier, this rating was built on a 600 point model with 95 points each for proficiency in ELA and math, 95 points each for growth of all students in ELA and math, 95 points for growth of the lowest 25% of students in ELA and math, as well as a 30 point category for the performance of EL students on the LAS Links English Language Proficiency Test. With the exception of the EL component, teachers at VES felt a lack of control concerning their school's rating as the grade comes from one to two years after students leave VES. This has led to some negative feelings and a decline in morale at VES.

Teacher development concerning the teaching of ELs is a key component in meeting the learning needs of ELs. For ELs to be successful in their pursuit of academic content knowledge, they must be proficient in the English language. Further contributing to their success is the acquisition of academic language. The research collected concerning ELs, teacher development, and language acquisition, as well as information gained through stakeholder collaboration, was utilized to generate and implement a plan to increase teacher efficacy in instructing ELs. Collaborating with the principal and assistant principal at VES, as well as with the math and literacy specialists, the three EL teachers, and the general education faculty, we developed instructional tools to help our EL students reach English language proficiency by equipping our

teachers with those tools, observing their implementation, and offering continued support to teachers through feedback and further training based on their needs.

Significance of the Problem

The failure of ELs to reach English proficiency is an economic and social justice issue. In a report to the Secretary of Education, the Equity and Excellence Commission (USDOE, 2013) identified education as the key factor in the economic success of a country. Further, the commission asserted a disconnect between the education of affluent American young people and the education of students in high-poverty communities. The commission went so far as to equate the education received by children in high-poverty schools as being on par with the lowest-performing countries worldwide. Noguera (2011) in his work on education and poverty notes the negative effects of poverty on the educational prospects of students. Failing to adequately educate ELs will lead to an increase in the segment of the Hispanic population who is poorly educated and lack the means to improve their station beyond manual and service-related labor.

While all ELs at Victory Elementary School are not considered to be from low socio-economic backgrounds, many are. One of the primary means of rising from poverty is to complete high school with the essential skills to be college and career ready. The foundation for successful high school completion is laid by third grade, especially in the area of reading proficiency. Hernandez (2012) highlights the importance of reading proficiency by third grade stating one in six children who fail to read at a proficient level by third grade will not graduate from high school on time and are four times more likely not to graduate than proficient third graders. In comparing the third-grade non-proficient status of high school seniors, Hernandez (2012) found Hispanic students lagged behind White students in graduation rate. This disparity is exacerbated when the Hispanic student is also poor.

A student's ability to read English is one of the four components, along with writing, speaking, and listening, measured by the LAS Links assessment given to Mississippi ELs. The measure to which a student is language proficient, especially in oral language, is an indicator of reading comprehension (Lindsey, Manis, & Bailey, 2003). The LAS Links assessment measures EL English language proficiency and growth by incorporating both the English language arts standards of the Mississippi College and Career Readiness Standards and English Language Development Standards (MDE, 2018). LAS Links performance data from Spring 2018 for VES showed only 9.88% of ELs reached proficiency (DRC, 2018). With 90% of the VES ELs not meeting acceptable levels of proficiency, there was clearly a need to increase the opportunities of ELs to speak, read, and write in English.

With pre-kindergarten through second graders as the student population at Victory Elementary School, the teachers at VES are building the reading foundation in the lives of all their students. Intentionally focusing on the language acquisition of ELs is something VES must capitalize on for the future success of their EL students. In a longitudinal study of Kindergarten through second graders comparing ELs and native English speakers, Lesaux and Siegal (2003) found early identification of reading deficiencies and interventions as critical components in bringing ELs up to the same level of proficiency as native English speakers by second grade. Lesaux and Siegal (2003) found with these supports some ELs surpassed their native English-speaking classmates in proficiency. Leading our ELs to proficiency, which can be defined as the basic set of skills and understandings necessary for success in the next grade level, must be the goal of every teacher for every student. As Cunningham and Cunningham (2013) indicated, every school has a teacher or teachers who excel in teaching to the level of proficiency, although it is rare to find an entire teaching faculty who teaches excellently.

In recent years, VES has struggled to demonstrate efficacy in building a solid language foundation for ELs at a proficient level. In Mississippi, the English language proficiency of ELs is measured with the LAS Links assessment. ELs are assessed in four areas: speaking, listening, reading, and writing. The LAS Links assessment reports proficiency in five levels: PL1 Beginning, PL2 Early Intermediate, PL3 Intermediate, PL4 Proficient, and PL5 Above Proficient. In the 2017-2018 school year, 162 ELs took the LAS Links assessment at VES, scoring in the following ranges: PL1-52 students, 32.1%; PL2-46 students, 28.4%; PL3-48 students, 29.63%; PL4-16 students 9.88%; and PL5-no students.

While VES is a pre-k through second-grade school and the entry point of instruction in English for most ELs, the LAS Links data listed includes kindergarten, first, and second-grade students. For 90% of these 162 ELs, we still have work to do in leading them to English language proficiency. Keeping in mind the timeline of three to five years for English language acquisition, and four to seven years for academic language proficiency, VES is in line with trends nationwide. However, knowing the widening in knowledge gaps which will occur when ELs fail to gain English language proficiency and the critical achievement of academic language proficiency, it is vital we are intentional in our approach to avoid further widening the gaps. There is no better time to be intentional in closing gaps than when the gaps are the smallest and most easily closed. VES has such an opportunity.

My experience in working with the faculty and administration at VES as the Assistant Director of Research and Development has provided me the unique opportunity of exploring the instructional culture of the school. In the past three years, I have observed teachers taking more ownership of their students' data and becoming more reflective about their teaching practice. EL teachers are open communicators who seek to provide enriching learning opportunities for their students but often seem to be on the fringe of data conversations. The administration, while new,

requests to meet with me and for me to meet with the faculty to review data trends after each benchmark assessment. Going forward, the groundwork is in place to build upon the collaboration evident within grade levels and to begin connecting it across the grade levels and out to support teachers (EL teachers, Literacy Specialists, etc.) in a more intentional way. It is my intent to forge these relationships through professional development for teachers of ELs, both general education and the EL specialists, as well as the literacy specialists and administrators in research-based methods for encouraging language acquisition among ELs.

Significance for the Audience

Research related to ELs presents much information about the time it takes to acquire conversational or academic language proficiency, the impact of the similarity of the student's native language to English, and to an extent explores the issues of increasing academic deficiencies and gaps in the performance of ELs and their native English-speaking peers. What seems to be lacking is voluminous research surrounding the professional development of the practitioners who teach ELs. Centered in a pre-k through second-grade school, with a specific focus on first grade Spanish speaking ELs, this study sought to add to the research about how building teacher capacity to teach ELs assists them in supporting the language acquisition needs of their ELs while minimizing the performance gaps between ELs and their native English-speaking peers, which increase yearly as they progress through the elementary grades and beyond.

The stakeholders who may benefit from this applied research study are the teachers, principals, and students at VES and other schools around the state and country. Teachers may find the information valuable as they seek to improve their own practice. Understanding the value of their time, teachers may gain insight about how to streamline their current practice resulting in a more effective and intentional use of their time. Administrators might benefit from

discovering teaching practices the teachers found valuable and proved to bolster student learning as a means of economic frugality in developing the school's strategic human resources plan. Students may benefit from having teachers who are better equipped and feel more confident in meeting their unique learning needs.

Those involved in drafting policy may find value in the results of the study as they, like school administrators, seek to allocate resources or implement programs, some of which may be aimed at assisting ELs. In our country a great debate rages about the entrance of illegal immigrants into our country, especially from our southern border. Lawmakers who supported the building of a wall at our southern border may be reluctant to fund educational initiatives aimed at assisting ELs. Whether or not the student entered the country legally, as a matter of equity, we must do our best to provide a quality education for our ELs. At a statewide level, policymakers may gain greater insight into the unique needs of ELs. Information from this research may help them understand the need for legislation and/or funding to equitably educate our ELs. Of particular interest to my district would be any findings related to what methods are viewed as successful as those might become potential district-wide initiatives for schools with EL students.

Research Method

To address the need for building teacher capacity to teach ELs as a means of increasing English language proficiency and academic content understanding among ELs, an action plan was developed. This plan was collaboratively created with the stakeholders at VES. It included both qualitative and quantitative data in an applied mixed-methods program evaluation design. Data related to the success of the plan was collected intermittently as a formative means of monitoring the progress of the implementation. Formative data was used to make changes as needed to ensure the program was meeting the needs of the stakeholders. Data was collected at

the end of the program's implementation to determine the overall success of the program in meeting the goal of building teacher capacity to teach ELs as a matter of program evaluation.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this mixed methods study was to address the language acquisition of ELs at VES as impacted through teacher development in teaching methods aimed at assisting ELs in language acquisition. At VES, the problem of insufficient teacher training and coaching in teaching ELs was addressed through the professional development of teachers in the best-practices for teaching ELs. This study employed a program evaluation with qualitative and quantitative data collection and analysis to determine the effectiveness of the study.

As a means of evaluating current VES teacher capacity for teaching ELs a survey, in partial fulfilment of doctoral work by a VES teacher, was developed and administered to determine a baseline of initial exposure to information and methods for teaching ELs. Post-implementation interviews and document analysis of classroom observations of the implementation of the strategies for teaching ELs provided a check point to determine, among other insights, which strategies were incorporated into teaching practice, found effective, or were deemed not helpful in improving the language acquisition of ELs while minimizing the gaps in their content understanding. Teacher implementation of the strategies for increasing EL opportunities to speak, read, and write were observed in the classroom. Student performance on the CASE benchmark assessments provided evidence of student growth and proficiency levels before and after the implementation.

Research Questions

Approaching this problem of practice through program evaluation led to a number of qualitative and quantitative research questions guiding the study. The central phenomenon of building teacher capacity for teaching ELs included the aims of improving the English language

acquisition of ELs, increasing the content knowledge of ELs through improved English language proficiency, and lessening of the gaps between ELs and native English speakers. The following five research questions were explored during the year-long program implementation.

1. Did English Learners show a suggested mark score increase of two or more points from baseline testing to summative testing in English Language Arts as measured by the CASE 21 Benchmark assessment?

2. Did the gap between English Learner performance and the performance of native English speakers in English Language Arts decrease by at least 10% as measured by the CASE 21 Benchmark assessment?

3. What aspects of the training program for teaching English Learners did teachers say improved their capacity to teach English Learners and which aspects did they feel need improvement?

4. What perspectives did administrators have concerning the effective and/or ineffective implementation of language acquisition methods in the classroom?

5. Did teachers provide English Learners 20% more opportunities to speak, read, and write English in the classroom when measured from the baseline prior to program implementation to the final observations at the end of the action plan implementation?

The five research questions served as the basis for evaluating the action plan outlined in Chapter Three. The purpose of the program evaluation was to determine the degree to which organizational improvement, specifically increasing teacher capacity, occured. A variety of data was collected through a survey, interviews, assessment data, document analysis, and observations providing evidence of the improvements incurred as a result of the action plan implementation. The resulting data collected through these methods was analyzed and discussed thoroughly in Chapter Four of this dissertation. Not only does the data answer the research

questions, but it also provides information as to the effectiveness of the program implementation and will be used to guide future organizational improvement efforts.

Conclusion

Meeting the educational needs of the growing EL population at VES is a social justice issue of increasing magnitude. From an organizational improvement perspective, increasing the capacity of teachers and equipping them to serve this unique subgroup of students was vital. In Chapter Two, the research related to teaching ELs was explored as a means of informing the development of an action plan to build the collective capacity of the faculty at VES.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

Walking through the campus of Victory Elementary School (VES), the melding of cultures in this learning institution is representative of the diversity seen in a growing number of schools in the United States of America. Naturally, this diversity means a variety of languages, over 20, are represented in the student population. The majority (80.65%) of the first grade English Learners (ELs) at VES have a home language of Spanish. Compared to state data which indicates 84.4% of ELs are Spanish speakers, VES' EL population aligns closely to the state majority language of ELs (USDOE, 2020). The language barrier faced by ELs complicates their understanding of the content needed to reach proficiency and move to the next grade level. Teachers arguably have a significant impact not only on their student's understanding of content (Hattie, 2009), but also on an EL's acquisition of English.

Framing a case for the importance of teacher development in the area of language acquisition as a means for unlocking content understanding for ELs, this literature review explores four topics: (a) time to English Proficiency, (b) gaps in EL achievement, (c) effective practice in teaching ELs, and (d) teacher preparation and support. Reviewing the research regarding language acquisition for ELs helped to create and implement a plan of action to develop teachers' capacity to assist ELs in reaching academic English language proficiency, while gaining as much content knowledge as possible.

Time to English Proficiency

When learning a second language we must be mindful "that linguistic competence is complex" (Hakuta, Butler, and Witt, 2000, p.7). A need to acquire two distinct types of English proficiency, oral and academic, contribute to this complexity. Oral language can be described as "conversational language that is cognitively undemanding and embedded in context" (Hakuta et al., 2000, p. 7). This oral language is also called social or conversational language proficiency (Brown, 2004). Because ELs are often able to communicate in common oral language, teachers may have a false sense of confidence in their ELs' ability to comprehend English in an academic setting. Academic language is described as "the ability to use language in academic contexts, which is particularly important for long-term success in school" (Hakuta et al., 2000, p. 4).

With every moment of the school day being critical to the success of native English-speaking students, adding the challenge of speaking a language other than English makes instructional time even more valuable. Hakuta et al. (2000) analyzed EL proficiency data as measured by the IDEA Proficiency Test, Language Assessment Scales, the Bilingual Syntax Measure, and others, from four school districts to determine an average length of time it would take to become proficient in English, both orally and academically.

The amount of time necessary for ELs to reach conversational English language proficiency has been estimated to be between three to five years (Collier, 1989; Cummins, 2001). Academic proficiency in English is not acquired for four to seven years (Hakuta et al., 2000). During the three to five years it takes to achieve oral proficiency ELs are missing out on key pieces of content instruction as they lack the academic vocabulary to fully attain the content knowledge. These gaps in content understanding, to be addressed later, lead to a decrease in EL proficiency in academic content areas.

Impacting the time for student language acquisition are a number of internal and external factors (Soltero, 2011). Internal factors include age, self-esteem, level of proficiency in a student's native language, and the student's unique learning style. External factors contributing to an ELs acquisition of English include instructional quality, access to English-speaking peers, as well as school and community expectations. Providing students with a welcoming classroom environment, with peers who speak in English and with teachers who are equipped in language acquisition strategies, can help minimize the negative impact of these internal and external factors for students.

Despite the language barrier, ELs, like native English speakers, can have true learning disabilities or be intellectually gifted. In researching ELs, Garcia (2000) points to the variability in the characteristics of the students as a factor in their English acquisition. For those who are intellectually gifted, it would be reasonable to assume in their own language, the content would not be an issue to acquire. However, when considering the road to academic English proficiency, which relates to a student's ability to truly understand the academic vocabulary and content information, it would be reasonable to consider the degree to which ELs, even intellectually gifted students, could be behind in the subject area content when compared to their English speaking peers.

Arellano, Liu, Stoker, and Slama (2018) employed descriptive analysis of student assessment data to determine the rate at which students became proficient in English. The analysis showed the majority of students who entered kindergarten with high levels of Spanish fluency were able to exit an EL program as English fluent by fifth grade, yet still scored lower on state assessments than their native English-speaking classmates. The research suggests students with high native language literacy have greater success in acquiring a second language. Further,

Cardenas-Hagan (2018) links the commonalities between the syntax of a student's native language and the syntax of English to the student's success in becoming proficient in English.

The more proficient a student is in their home language, the more likely they are to reach proficiency in English. Slama et al. (2017) conducted a longitudinal study to determine the average time the students in a cohort took to become English proficient, determining students gained English language proficiency by third grade but did not show satisfactory achievement on state tests in math and reading until eighth grade. This study highlights the disparity between conversational English language proficiency and academic language proficiency.

Garcia (2000) sees the variability in time to English proficiency as a much wider span of one to 10 years, depending on a number of factors such as student ability, motivation, and readiness, all of which can promote or hinder the language acquisition. Focusing on the types of ELs Freeman, Freeman, Soto, and Ebe (2016) identify four common types of ELs as newly arrived with adequate schooling, newly arrived with limited or interrupted schooling, long-term ELs, and students at risk of becoming long-term ELs.

Pondering the average time it takes to reach English proficiency, even if a student enters an English speaking school as a kindergartener, is identified as an EL, and receives instructional services for English language acquisition, the student would likely not be English proficient until third grade and academically proficient until fourth grade at the earliest. During the time ELs are learning the English language, academic content is missed leading to gaps in their understanding of the content they should have learned (NEA, 2008). Adding variability to this time frame are the factors of closeness of fit between the home language and English, as well as the student's proficiency in their home language (Ringbom, 2007).

Further, Hakuta et al. (2000) caution against fully embracing the average time to oral and academic proficiency stating the research may "underestimate the rate at which students acquire

English, i.e., the actual rate may be slower than what is estimated in the analyses presented" (Hakuta et al. 2000, p.11). The disparity between time to language acquisition and the time to academic language proficiency highly impacts an EL's level of proficiency in the content they must know in each grade level. An unfortunate consequence for ELs, especially those who would have been successful students in a school where their native language was the mode of instructional delivery, is they have the potential to become low-performing students because the language barrier prevents them from fully understanding the content. As a result, gaps in understanding may develop which amplify their difficulty in reaching proficiency in later years.

Gaps in English Learner Achievement

English Learners often lag behind their native English-speaking classmates. This achievement gap is especially noticeable when comparing American ELs to Caucasian middle-class and upper-class students (Rothenberg, 2020). According to Hakuta et al. (2000), performance gaps widen as students progress through school. The older a student is and the longer it takes them to achieve English language proficiency, the further behind they become in the basic content knowledge they should have attained. In one of four case studies, Hakuta et al. (2000) imposed parameters to ensure the data collected would reflect the impact of instruction within the particular district being studied and not an amalgamation of student experiences from other schools. Proficiency data from a variety of assessments, including the Woodcock Language Battery and the MacMillan Informal Reading Inventory, was examined from a sample group of 1,872 EL first through sixth-grade students who had been in the district since kindergarten and were identified as ELs in kindergarten. Thus, the English proficiency and content knowledge gained by the students was a more accurate reflection of the instruction given by the school and district. The data showed EL students are outpaced by their native English-speaking peers. Specifically, ELs "gain from 1.5 standard deviation units below native English

speakers after 1 year to about 1 standard deviation unit below after 2 to 4 years, and .5 standard deviation unit behind after 5 years" (Hakuta et al. 2000, p.12). To better meet the needs of ELs, the researchers support a policy which focuses on a "balanced curriculum that pays attention not just to English, but to the full array of needs of the students" (Hakuta et al. 2000, p.18).

When ELs fail to achieve English proficiency after four to five years, they are classified as long-term English learners (LTEL) (Freeman et al., 2016). Menken and Kleyn (2009) describe LTELs as ELs who have been in American schools for seven years or longer without achieving English proficiency and who have noticeable gaps in their schooling. Students at risk of becoming LTELs include non-English speaking students in the primary grades. Freeman et al. (2016) support identifying such students early and intervening with principles for teaching ELs such as teaching academic language with academic content. Six other principles for teaching ELs are outlined by Freeman et al. (2016), including learner-centered teaching, teaching from whole to part, making learning meaningful, providing interactions to develop oral and written language, including students' language and culture, and teaching which reflects the faith of the learner. Incorporating these principles early and effectively can help ELs become English proficient and avoid the gaps often associated with LTELs.

Achievement gaps among ELs are exacerbated as classes are taught in English with an increasingly complex academic language. Bialystok (2017) notes in learning two languages, ELs may have better metalinguistic awareness, but they often have a smaller vocabulary. Spanish speaking students may speak general conversational English but struggle with oral construction and writing in the academic language required in a school setting. Further data concerning the gaps in achievement between ELs and native English speakers is found in a study by Ruffalo (2018) in which student performance on the California Assessment of Student Performance and Progress (CAASPP) was reviewed. Comparing the CAASPP data over three years, from 2015 to

2017, 12% of ELs met or exceeded proficiency while 43% of English only or English fluent students were able to successfully meet or exceed the proficiency. The results raise cause for concern as the study indicates "gaps between English learners and non-English learners actually widening from 2015-2017" (Ruffalo, 2018, p. 6).

Samson and Collins (2012) explored National Assessment of Education Progress data from five states (California, Florida, Massachusetts, New York, and Texas) with the highest EL percentages nationally. Reading achievement of ELs and Native English speakers was measured in fourth and eighth-grade. In these five states, Florida had the smallest gap (22%) among fourth-grade students, with the greatest gap being in New York (44%). By eighth-grade, the gaps had widened to an average of 52%, with Florida still maintaining the least gap (36%) and Massachusetts having the greatest gap at 59%.

To be certain, these studies illuminate the gaps between the performance of Native English speakers and ELs. It would appear teaching strategies are relatively effective in teaching Native English speakers, but there is a need for exploring strategies to help ELs gain the same content at an equitable rate. Additionally, this data highlights the increase in the gaps in later grades. An argument could be made for the need to effectively address language acquisition, specifically integrating academic language, in earlier years as a means of decreasing these gaps.

Effective Practice

When leading professional development sessions with the teachers in the Nevara Public School District, one of my focuses has been on quality Tier One instruction. Tier One instruction is defined as effective classroom instruction available to all students (Gregory, Kaufeldt, & Mattos, 2016). No single program, piece of software, or textbook series can more positively impact student performance than quality teaching. With the special needs of combining language acquisition with content acquisition, effective teaching is even more critical

for ELs. Exploring the research on effective teaching practices for EL instruction, August (2018) cites a report by NASEM (2017) which identified seven effective practices: providing access to grade-level course content, using research-based effective practices for EL students, imposing supports to help master core content, developing academic language, encouraging peer-to-peer learning opportunities, capitalizing on EL's culture and home language, and screening for learning disabilities so proper supports can be provided. These and a host of other methods exist for helping ELs gain English language proficiency and more specifically, academic language proficiency.

Because students have to hear the instruction given by the teacher the idea of listening for comprehension as an effective method is not surprising. Seo, Taherbhai, and Frantz (2016) evaluated the importance of listening as ELs progress towards proficiency of the English language. The study examined 1,233 Asian and European high school EL students. The research included an examination of the literature surrounding comprehension strategies, analyses of student assessment data, as well as the review of student journal entries to determine effective listening for comprehension strategies. A challenge they noted for ELs is the speed at which ELs are able to process language, comprehend, and remember what they were taught. When asked a question, ELs often hear the English, translate it into their native language to answer it, then translate it back into English to give the answer. In classrooms where thoughtful, targeted listening was used students were more likely to comprehend and retain the information. During lessons in which targeted listening is the focus, ELs may require the use of graphic organizers or notes pages with part of the information included to assist them in collecting the relevant information in a logical and organized manner. Teachers must be cognizant of this issue and reinforce their ELs learning through repetition, questioning for clarification of understanding, and delivering material in smaller chunks to allow students to process what they

heard. Doing so, ELs will be able to clarify the information they are collecting on their graphic organizers is accurate.

All students benefit from a language rich instructional environment and ELs are no different. To increase the academic language of ELs and consequently, their content understanding, a precise, multi-faceted program of instruction is necessary. Using data from the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study from the National Center for Education Statistics, Redford (2018) developed a profile of EL student participation in English language programs from a sample set of 18,170 kindergarten students from 1,310 schools in the United States. Teachers were surveyed to determine what instructional approaches were used in English language acquisition programs. Student factors such as race/ethnicity, poverty status, parent education, home language, as well as school factors including type of school, percent of minorities, and the type of community were considered. The research from this study shows the primary focus for English language instruction to be immersion in the English language where students are not allowed to use their native language with 60% of students in English as a Second Language programs, 27% in bilingual education, 8% in dual-language education and 5% of the students in other types of language acquisition programs.

Although Redford (2018) found immersion, an English only strategy, to be the most commonly implemented form of instruction for ELs, the practice of allowing a student to use their home language as a means of unlocking English is a valuable tool which can aid a student in their English acquisition. ELs often engage their native language as they learn a new language through code switching, a process in which they listen in the new language, think in their native language, then respond in the new language (Garcia, Flores, & Chu, 2011).

Oral language combined with intentional opportunities to use written language in a learning-rich, rigorous instructional setting is beneficial for all students and especially for ELs

(NCEE, 2001). Long (1996) contends ELs must have opportunities to receive language through listening and reading as well as to express language through speaking and writing. Further championing the need for language-rich classrooms, Cunningham and Cunningham (2013) highlight the unique vocabulary in each academic area and the importance of teachers ensuring students understand the content specific vocabulary in their discipline. Building academic vocabulary is especially important in terms of developing speaking and writing. For ELs, speaking and writing are two of the four components measured in the English Language Proficiency Test (ELPT) which in Mississippi is measured via the LAS Links Assessment. Focusing teacher development on ways to incorporate academic vocabulary could be seen as a valuable tool in increasing the academic language proficiency of ELs.

In a mixed-methods study, Ruffalo (2018) examined the impact of English understanding in math instruction, concluding the importance of tying instruction and language to the culture and background of the EL student. Connecting the English language to the culture, prior knowledge, and understanding of the student while immersing them in the English language should be a successful means of making gains in their language acquisition. Although teachers may not speak the EL's language, "it is necessary to explore, understand, and integrate commonalities between the native language and English during instruction" (Cardenas-Hagan, 2018, p.7). Learning occurs best when new knowledge is tied to prior knowledge (Bransford, Brown, Cocking, & National Research Council, 2000). When teachers understand the cultural background of their students, they are able to plan instruction to meet students in their own contextual understanding, thus tying new knowledge to what students already know (Fillmore, 1991; Nieto, 2004; Perez & Torres-Guzman, 1998). Language experiences must be full of meaning in order for students to make sense of what they are hearing (Krashen, 1981).

The more we practice something, the better we get at it. In keeping with this idea, the practice of speaking English or oral language has gained support. Wilson, Fang, Rollins, and Valadez (2016) explored the implementation of a program where ELs spoke with partners, in small groups, and in classroom settings. Using a modified version of the EL Student Shadowing Observation Tool, 30-40 minute observations were conducted in 23 classrooms at eight elementary schools. English learners were more likely to speak with a partner as they equally shared airtime with their native English-speaking partners while only speaking once for every five times a native English speaker spoke when in a whole group setting.

As a matter of specifics in effective oral language instruction, Cardenas-Hagan (2018) identified a focus on phonology, morphology, semantics, syntax, and pragmatics as critical to the development of oral language. Richards-Tutor, Baker, Gersten, Baker, and Smith (2016) in a compilation of research studies identified interventions such as focusing on phonemic awareness and phonics to be effective in encouraging language acquisition, especially among ELs with learning disabilities. This research proposes focusing on phonemic awareness as an important component of good reading instruction. Cunningham and Cunningham (2013) encourage early development of oral language through exposure to nursery rhymes and books with alliteration and rhyme. While Native English speakers may have the advantage of having been exposed to these phonemic rich types of literature, ELs, even if they have been exposed to nursery rhymes and other literature with strong rhyming structures in their home language, lack the understanding of phonemic awareness built through the exposure to this type of literature in English.

Classroom structure which encourages the use of language is critical for all students, especially ELs (Santos, Darling-Hammond, & Cheuck, 2011). One way to do this is through the careful organization of classroom time. Scheduling the day with clear times for when certain

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activities are done helps ELs make sense of their environment, providing a means for ELs to organize what happens next. Providing purposeful opportunities for speaking, reading, and writing will assist ELs in unlocking the English language and the academic content (Goldenberg, 2013). Too often classrooms do not provide students with such opportunities (Zwiers, 2014).

Gifford and Valdes (2006) laud the benefit of ELs interacting with native English speakers. The modeling of the English language helps ELs build contextual understanding of the syntax of the language. Intentional grouping of students for paired or triad learning opportunities allows ELs to speak one on one with a native English speaker in pairs or with a native English speaker and a proficient EL in triads. Grosjean (2010) discovered ELs relied on three strategies for learning a new language: assimilate into a group and act like you know what's going on, chose words and opportunities to interact wisely so you appear to know the language, and use your friends to help you. Clearly, students need meaningful opportunities to use the language in small groups with familiar peers from whom they can get assistance when needed.

Echevarria (2012) also supports the integration of content with language acquisition especially through the Sheltered Instruction Observation Process (SIOP) which identifies eight components of successful EL instruction. The eight components include lesson preparation, building background, comprehensible input, strategies, interaction, practice and application, lesson delivery, and review and assessment. Ultimately, Echevarria (2012) determined the importance of fidelity in teaching the SIOP method as critical to student success and achievement. Other models which infuse academic content with academic language include the Cognitive Academic Language Learning Approach (CALLA), Guided Language Acquisition Design (GLAD), and Quality Teaching for English Learners (QTEL), although SIOP is the most commonly used. As with the implementation of any methodology, the efficacy of those doing the implementation as well as the fidelity with which it is implemented are critical to successful

implementation. Not without its critics, SIOP is described as being used incorrectly when used as the sole means of instructing ELs of all ages, rather than as a late exit model as Krashen intended (Crawford & Reyes, 2015).

Thomas and Collier (2003) explored the benefits of dual-language instruction over English-only models of instruction through immersion. As ELs were allowed to use their native language in conjunction with English they were better able to unlock the content as they conversed with their native English-speaking classmates. After five years of dual-language instruction, ELs scored in the 51st percentile on the Stanford 9 assessment while other ELs receiving English-only instruction in the same district scored only in the 34th percentile (Thomas & Collier 2002). Thomas and Collier (2004) conclude the gaps in learning for ELs can be decreased when ELs are in dual language enrichment classes.

The National Institute for School Leadership (NISL) identifies five essential practices from the research on teaching ELs which can be used as a framework for teaching ELs (NISL, 2015). The five essential practices are: 1) develop oral language through meaningful conversation and context, 2) teach targeted skills through contextualized and explicit instruction, 3) build vocabulary through authentic and meaningful experiences with words, 4) build and activate background knowledge, and 5) teach and use meaning-making strategies. According to NISL (2015), teachers should use these essential practices to guide their instructional planning and practice. School leaders are encouraged to look for these five practices when observing teachers of ELs to ensure a high level of appropriate instruction is occurring through which ELs can maximize their understanding of content while learning the English language.

Teacher Preparation and Support

Related to the methods we use is the ability of teachers to effectively implement them. Hattie (2009) analyzed over 250 influences on student achievement and determined teacher

efficacy to have the single largest effect size (1.57). With teachers having the largest impact on student learning, they should be the resource into which we invest more heavily than any other. In the research, we see this investment in multiple forms.

Reviewing the literature surrounding what EL educators should know, including a review of professional and state level standards, Samson and Collins (2012) conclude the lack of focus on teaching ELs in teacher preparation programs, varying criteria for state certification in EL instruction, and better program alignment nationwide as needs in preparing teachers for teaching ELs. Orosco and Abdulrahim (2018) echo the need for revamping teacher preparation programs at the collegiate level stating, "Preparing school personnel to teach ELs how to use comprehension strategies improves their comprehension" (2018, p.2).

Since many teachers currently in the classroom came through teacher preparation programs with little focus on English Learner instruction, they need support through professional development (Ballantyne, Sanderman, & Levy, 2008). Teachers need specific training in language instruction, especially in language scaffolds and supports (Santos et al., 2011). Munguia (2017) points to the responsibility of the principal in providing the professional development and support needed by teachers to effectively teacher ELs. After professional development in teaching ELs, principals can provide common planning time and Professional Learning Communities in which teachers can collaborate and plan to implement what they have learned about research-based best-practices for meeting the needs of all learners in their classrooms, including their ELs.

Conclusion

The average time needed to become English proficient is between three and five years, with academic language proficiency in four to seven years. English Learners who develop language proficiency slowly will show lower academic achievement than their native English-

speaking peers. The gaps between ELs and native speakers widen as students matriculate through school. The NAEP data from the study by Samson and Collins (2018) highlights this issue as the average gap in performance between ELs and native English speakers increased from 36.6% in fourth-grade to 52% in eighth-grade. When ELs fail to reach English proficiency within six years they are considered Long-Term English Learners (LTEL) and have gaps which are difficult to overcome, often leading to ELs who become dropouts (Menken & Kleyn, 2009).

As far as effective teaching practice is concerned, a language rich classroom is key to immersing ELs in the language. Classrooms and school environments should be alive with print language in both English and the home language of the students. ELs need opportunities to employ linguistic input through listening and reading as well as linguistic output through speaking and writing. Krashen (2020) lauds the importance of acquiring language through opportunities to build understanding through comprehensible input. When these opportunities occur in whole groups, small groups, and in pairs or triads they are able to use context and peers to engage their home language in unlocking the English language. Providing access to rigorous content and academic language through graphic organizers and learning models like SIOP also helps increase language acquisition and achievement for ELs. Using a framework for building instruction, such as the five essential practices recognized by NISL, helps teachers to construct a robust classroom environment where not just ELs but all students will thrive.

Further, a need to reevaluate teacher preparation programs and professional development offerings at the school level are needed to adequately equip teachers and support them in teaching ELs. Samson and Collins (2018) reflect on the preparedness of teachers to equitably teach ELs stating, "…it is essential for all teachers to be prepared to meet the unique needs of these students" (2012, p.19). This research review supports the need to develop a clear action plan to address teacher development in the area of teaching the ELs in the Nevara Public

Schools. Moving into Chapter Three, an action plan to implement strategies to develop teacher

capacity in teaching ELs is explored and developed.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODS

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to present an overview of how a problem of practice was identified, addressed, and evaluated through an applied mixed-method program evaluation design. Specifically, the problem identified is low English language proficiency among English Learners (EL) and as a result of the language barrier, a lack of proficiency in English Language Arts (ELA) content. The action plan sought to improve EL English language proficiency and ELA content proficiency by improving teacher capacity to teach ELs. Five research questions provide evidence of the implementation of the action plan as it relates to improving practice, processes, and outcomes of this program evaluation.

1. Did English Learners show a suggested mark score increase of two or more points from baseline testing to summative testing in English Language Arts as measured by the CASE 21 Benchmark assessment?

2. Did the gap between English Learner performance and the performance of native English speakers in English Language Arts decrease by at least 10% as measured by the CASE 21 Benchmark assessment?

3. What aspects of the training program for teaching ELs did teachers say improved their capacity to teach ELs, and which aspects did they feel need improvement?

4. What perspectives did administrators have concerning the effective and/or ineffective implementation of language acquisition methods in the classroom?

5. Did teachers provide English Learners 20% more opportunities to speak, read, and write English in the classroom when measured from the baseline prior to program implementation to the final observations at the end of the action plan implementation?

The site of this study was a pre-kindergarten through second-grade school in a suburban area of central Mississippi. In the 2019-2020 school year Victory Elementary School (VES) had a population of 764 students of which 26.05% are ELs. Over 80% of the ELs at VES were native Spanish speakers. While a leadership team selected from the entire faculty had input in the development and implementation of the action plan to improve organizational effectiveness, the study was centered in seven first-grade classrooms which served Spanish-speaking ELs.

The three sections in this chapter discuss the development of the action plan to address teacher capacity in teaching ELs, provide a detailed description of the action plan, and conclude by outlining the program evaluation. The program evaluation component was used to determine the effectiveness of the implementation, explore suggestions for continuous improvement of teacher practice, and determine possibilities for further implementation as a means of ensuring organizational improvement. In the development section, I outline the role of the stakeholders, review the data used in the decision-making process, discuss district-level and school-level decisions leading to the plan, and relate the research which was used to develop the action plan.

The second section of this chapter focuses on describing the action plan and includes the research questions of the study. The single element of improving teacher capacity to teach ELs is described along with the goals of the plan. A timeline regarding the implementation provided direction for the program. Those responsible for each task were delineated and the resources needed to successfully complete the action plan was discussed.

A description of the program evaluation of the action plan comprises the third section of chapter three. In this program evaluation, both qualitative and quantitative data were used to

provide evidence of the processes and outcomes of the action plan, highlight the improvement of teacher practice, and point toward areas which may need further improvement. This information collected through the program evaluation will prove useful in developing subsequent professional learning opportunities for the faculty at VES.

Development of the Action Plan

Since joining the Research and Development Team in the Nevara Public School District (NPSD) in July of 2016, it has been my responsibility to work with principals and teachers within our district. Dissecting our team name into its two components, research and development, our role is two-fold. On the research end, we study the trends and research in achievement, accountability, and assessment. We use this information to fulfill our second role of developing our principals and teachers. Specifically, we equip school leaders and teachers to unpack achievement, accountability, and assessment data to make informed instructional decisions aligned with research-based best-practices.

In fulfilling the role of our team, we came across some alarming data in the 2017-2018 school year related to Victory Elementary School (VES) which led to an intensive look into the situation and ultimately the development of an action plan for changing a downward trend at VES. In 2017, VES was labeled for the second year in a row as a "D" rated school. Despite teacher efforts to promote student growth, the school only managed to make a 13-point gain from a school rating of 281 in 2016 to 294 in 2017. Based on a 600-point scale, these scores are quite low. Armed with this information, the principal, school leaders, and district personnel sought a solution to the poor achievement at VES.

When VES received the initial "D" rating in 2016, the principal reached out to our team for guidance. Our first step was to work with the leadership team and faculty to review the CASE benchmark data. CASE benchmark assessments are administered three times yearly at

VES at the beginning of the second, third, and fourth nine-weeks. Administrators, specialists, and teachers looked collaboratively at the benchmark data under my facilitation to determine in which standards the students were struggling to demonstrate proficiency. As we reviewed the items, these conversations revolved around analyzing what portion of the standard was addressed with each item, to what Depth of Knowledge (DOK) level we had taught the standard, how we could shift our instructional practices to lead students to answer the types of questions being asked, and how to ask better questions in our classroom instruction and assessments. During the 2016-2017 school year the teachers at VES were further disheartened by receiving a second "D" rating despite having observed gains in student proficiency and growth. A sense of dismay filtered into the faculty and a decline in teacher morale occurred.

The principal was concerned about how the school's rating could have failed to improve when the data was showing students were growing. She also wondered how she could justify the rating with her teachers, parents, and community. Our team sat down with the principal and dissected the accountability model for pre-kindergarten through second-grade schools. This 600-point model was based on the proficiency of third-grade students in English Language Arts (ELA) and mathematics as determined by the state Mississippi Academic Assessment Program (MAAP) testing as well as the growth of fourth-grade students on the same assessment. This understanding of the accountability model led to an "ah-ha" moment concerning the school's progress. The proficiency and growth seen at VES and the resulting accountability rating were out of sync because of the method used for calculating K-2 school ratings.

The student scores used to determine VES's accountability rating were one to two years removed from direct instruction by the teachers at VES and completely dependent on the instruction of teachers and learning of students at the third through fifth grade school where they had no influence. Armed with this information the faculty chose to continue analyzing the data

and adjusting instruction as we were seeing gains in growth and proficiency in the students at VES. Perhaps in continuing to do so we would eventually see the gains in the accountability ratings as better prepared students matriculated to third and fourth grade.

VES continued the review of benchmark data into the 2017-2018 school year, using the observations to guide instructional practice. Again, the faculty was seeing continued growth in student proficiency and by the end of the year anticipated the release of the 2017-2018 accountability data. VES received a "C" rating of 333 for the 2018 accountability ratings, a gain of 39 points over their previous year's rating. Preparing students well in the primary grades and sending them to the next school with a better grasp of the standards seemed to be making a difference in student learning and performance. The teachers were encouraged and continued to collaboratively discuss the data and adjust instruction.

At the beginning of the 2018-2019 school year, a new principal and assistant principal began to lead VES. Over the summer the principal met with my team and with the principal of the third through fifth grade school her school feeds to discuss what the status of the school was from an achievement data perspective. Additionally, these two principals began to discuss the need to better vertically align the instruction between the two schools. The data was disaggregated by teacher and by standards to understand the capacity of the faculty. This data was shared with the faculty to determine what standards were taught to mastery in the previous year and to discuss how instruction needed to shift to increase student proficiency.

As I prepared to visit VES to share the results of the first CASE Benchmark data for the 2018-2019 school year, a bombshell was dropped by the Mississippi Department of Education (MDE). A new component had been identified and added to the accountability model per the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA, 2015). According to ESSA, each state had to identify a subgroup to be included in the state accountability model. Mississippi had chosen ELs. To

incorporate the EL component into the existing accountability model (see figure one), five points

from the existing six categories (ELA and math Proficiency in 3rd grade, as well as growth of all

students and growth of the lowest 25% in both ELA and math in 4th grade) in the 600-point

model were taken to create a new 30 point category for EL proficiency. Taking five points to

create a new category decreased the impact of the six existing categories. The category of EL

proficiency would not be based on EL performance on the MAAP test, but rather on a unique

piece of data, the proficiency of ELs on the English Language Proficiency Test taken by all ELs

in Mississippi, namely the LAS Links Assessment. LAS Links measures an EL's ability to

speak, listen, read, and write in English.

600-point Accountability Model for Mississippi Schools		
READING	MATH	
Proficiency: 95 points	Proficiency: 95 points	
Growth of All Students: 95 points	Growth of All Students: 95 points Growth of	EL Progress to Proficiency: 30 points
Growth of Lowest 25% of Students: 95 points	Growth of Lowest 25% of Students: 95 points	

Figure One

The initial calculations we received from the MDE regarding the new model with the EL

component included had an adverse impact on every school's accountability rating in our district.

At VES, the 333 "C" rating would have dropped to a 329 "C" rating. Initially, schools were

going to be given this new rating in the fall of 2018. This would have resulted in schools being

held accountable for results after instruction and testing had occurred in the Spring of 2018 and

without having been warned ahead of time. Fortunately, MDE was able to institute a "hold

harmless" year in which the EL component was excluded from the ratings in 2018. However,

2019 was coming when the EL component would certainly count.

Sensing the urgency regarding this new component and its potential ramifications our district took several steps. First, we compiled presentations for each school who met the qualifications of an n-count of 10 or more ELs, those for whom the EL component would be in play, and scheduled accountability talks with school and district leadership teams, each school faculty, and additionally presented the information to the school board in the November board meeting. In late October of 2018, the Research and Development team met with the English as a Second Language (ESL) certified teachers in the district, including the three teachers from VES, to discuss the ramifications of the new EL component and the importance of implementing research-based practices across the district to assist our ELs in becoming English language proficient. Meanwhile, we collaborated with districts around the state, found there to be similar negative impacts in the initial iteration of the EL component in the accountability model, and worked together to come up with suggestions to more equitably calculate the new component.

The district leadership began planning an EL summit to be held in January 2019 with a select group of administrators and teachers from schools with large EL populations in our district. A presenter with expertise in EL instruction was brought in from out of state to train this select group in a research-based method for teaching ELs called Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol (SIOP). As a research-based method of teaching ELs, SIOP integrates content understanding with instruction in the new language (Echevarria, Vogt, & Short, 2017). Although SIOP can be used by English as a Second Language certified teachers explicitly teaching language acquisition to ELs, it is intended for use by general education teachers.

One final district initiative in the 2018-2019 school year was to hire an English Learner Director to oversee the instructional program for ELs within the district. While many applied, finding candidates with the qualifications of both English as a Second Language certification and administrator's licensure proved challenging. After convening a diverse interview panel and

conducting interviews with potential candidates, no candidates were found to have the desired qualifications for the position. The position was never filled and the listing for the position was removed from the list of employment opportunities within the district.

At VES, the 2018-2019 school year saw the teachers and administrators continuing to dive into the data as a means of guiding instruction. The ESL teachers were brought into the data conversations more intentionally so they would know the ELA and math content proficiency levels of their students and to communicate with the classroom teachers in making appropriate instructional decisions for increasing the language acquisition of their EL students. In my conversations with the school administrative team which included the principal, assistant principal, and the literacy and math specialists, we discussed how we would continue to make strides with our ELs to ensure they were prepared with the prerequisite knowledge to be successful at the third-fifth grade school. These conversations carried over to the data talks with the whole faculty and a need for specific training for classroom teachers in teaching ELs emerged.

As the school year concluded, the principal and I met to discuss the data from the LAS Links English Language Proficiency Test and the CASE benchmark assessments. This data would be used as a means of shaping the professional development needs at her school. Looking at two years of data from the LAS Links assessment we found that most ELs were not reaching English language proficiency. In 2018 only 9.88% reached Level Four Proficient and no students reached Level Five Above Proficient. This meant 90% of the ELs at VES had not achieved basic English language proficiency. For 2019, the numbers were better with 13.29% of students reaching Level Four and 1.27% of students reaching Level Five. However, 85% of the ELs at VES were not reaching language proficiency. While the average EL takes 3.8 years to develop English language proficiency (Motamedi, 2015), it was not overly surprising to see so

few students reaching Levels Four and Five. In contrast though, over half of the ELs were still in Level One and Level Two with a third, 32.28% of ELs in Level Three Intermediate. We pondered how we could move the students in the lowest three levels up one level. Developing classroom teachers to better teach ELs was an area where we felt we could impact the language proficiency of the ELs as well as their content proficiency in ELA and math.

As the 2019-2020 school year began, meetings continued with the leadership team at VES and within the district regarding EL instruction. Teachers around the district and at VES voiced their concern for a lack of training in how to meet the needs of our ELs. Desiring to do the best they could for their students, the teachers simply felt ill-equipped. Teacher feelings of inadequacy to teach ELs are common with those around the state and nation. Ballantyne, Sanderman, and Levy (2008) in their research surrounding classroom teacher capacity relate only 29% of teachers with ELs in their classes feel they have adequate training in how to teach ELs. Further, they analyzed teacher perceptions about their preparedness and found the majority of teachers desired more training so they could adequately meet the needs of their ELs. With an increase in its district EL population from 693 at the end of 2018-2019 school year to 792 in September of 2019, teachers in NPSD and specifically VES are sensing the urgency to better support this subgroup of students. This 15% increase in the EL population coupled with teacher desire to be better equipped for meeting the needs of ELs has fueled the need to intentionally address the issue of EL instruction not only at VES but district-wide.

In response to the increased need for training in teaching ELs, the Federal Programs Director had been exploring ways to provide professional development specifically for the Title schools with large EL populations, of which VES is one. The National Institute of School Leadership (NISL) provides training for school leaders. One such training is in the area of instructing ELs. As a district initiative, the NISL English Learner training was scheduled. One

administrator and one teacher from VES and other schools with concentrations of ELs

participated in a two-day training at the beginning of October 2019 on methods for teaching ELs.

This training involved leaders and teachers from three other districts. The collaboration amongst

the districts was valuable as each participant explored how they could better serve the ELs in

their schools. A follow up training with the administrator collaborative occurred in December.

The NISL EL training included one day of training for classroom teachers of ELs in

research-based best practices summarized in a NISL publication titled "*12 Key Points*." Of the

12 points, only eight were addressed in this training. The participants included 24 kindergarten

through eighth-grade classroom teachers, including teachers from VES and the elementary and

middle school within its feeder pattern. The meeting began with teachers sharing their concerns

related to teaching ELs.

Four main categories of responses evolved: student motivation, content, parent

involvement, teacher capacity. Teachers saw their own capacity as the greatest issue accounting

for 37.5% of the responses. A secondary issue of motivating students garnered 33% of the

responses. Related to their capacity, teachers cited concerns with how to fill in the learning gaps

of students, understanding language acquisition, understanding cultural differences, increasing

student writing and speaking opportunities, and moving students toward content proficiency in

the absence of English proficiency. Considering student motivation, teachers noted students are

often embarrassed by the assistance they receive, lack confidence, prefer working with other

ELs, may need emotional support due to traumatic experiences, and need encouragement to

speak out even when they struggle to understand. Many of the concerns with student motivation

can be addressed through training and are essentially issues of teacher capacity. These informal

responses (See Table 1) provide evidence of the need for training of classroom teachers of ELs

and were shared with the leadership team at VES to help shape the specific components of

training conducted. The attendees from VES were also asked for further feedback regarding the

NISL EL training to fine tune the professional development modules in this action plan.

Table 1

Areas of Concern Among Teachers of English Learners

School	Student Motivation	Content	Parent Involvement	Teacher Capacity
VES	2	0	2	4
3rd-5th	4	0	1	4
6th-8th	2	3	1	1
Total	8 (33%)	3 (12.5%)	4 (16.67%)	9 (37.5%)

Based on the review of student assessment data, conversations with school leadership,

and on the self-identified need for training by teachers, this action plan addressed building

teacher capacity. Specifically, we sought to increase teacher capacity through training modules

covering language acquisition, intentionally designing opportunities for students to talk, read,

and write in English, and providing safe opportunities in which ELs could practice speaking in

whole group, small group, and paired or triad settings. These areas of focus aligned with

research-based best practices for teaching ELs.

Teacher capacity has the single greatest effect size (1.57) in impacting student

achievement (Hattie, 2009). Arming teachers with information will help them increase their

instructional impact. Teachers need to understand the relationship between speaking, reading,

and writing and their impact on language and literacy (Fillmore & Snow, 2000).   Understanding

the interconnectedness of language development and content understanding will prepare teachers

to infuse their lessons with content-rich language learning opportunities (Bunch, Kibler, &

Pimentel, 2012). As students have increased opportunities to speak, the dialogue will force them

to think about what they are learning and build their understanding of language and content

through metacognition (Vygotsky, 1978). Designing opportunities to use language in context develops communicative competence, an essential component for ELs to become competent speakers of English (Gumperz & Hymes, 1986).

The element chosen for this action plan was done so intentionally with the participants of this study in mind. These participants included seven classroom teachers who teach ELs, the three English as a Second Language certified teachers, the Community Relations Liaison, two literacy specialists, the assistant principal, and the principal. Since the focus was on improving teacher capacity to teach ELs, the teachers in seven first grade classrooms in which ELs were taught were those for whom the training modules were developed, presented, observed, and revisited for further training opportunities. However, the entire faculty participated in the training to build the collective capacity of the school. Each of the participants listed had a role in developing the training, reviewing the progress of the plan, and monitoring the implementation of the training as a means of organizational improvement.

Development of the training modules to be implemented at VES occurred through a collaborative effort. Involving all stakeholders was an important key to ensuring fidelity in the implementation as people are more apt to welcome change when they contribute to developing the change (Novak, 2012).

Feedback from the VES teacher attendees of a NISL EL training on November 7, 2019 was gathered to shape the training modules. The teachers reflected on the training they received and identified specific strategies in which they felt they most needed further training and could feasibly implement to see growth for their students. Input from the VES Leadership Team including ESL certified teachers, the literacy specialists, assistant principal, and principal, solidified the structure of the training modules, those responsible for delivering the trainings, and

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a timeline for the delivery, monitoring of implementation, and feedback with the teachers regarding the degree and perceived success of the implementation.

Description of the Action Plan

The purpose of this study was to improve English language acquisition for Spanish-speaking first grade ELs at VES through building the capacity of teachers to teach ELs. With that purpose in mind, this action plan had one main element, the professional development of teachers in research-based best practices for teaching ELs. The overarching goal was for teacher capacity to teach ELs to increase. As a result, organizational capacity would also increase.

Element: Professional Development.

Professional development is perceived as the most effective tool in improving schools (Dufour & Marzano, 2011). To assist in the school improvement efforts at VES, a total of three modules were developed to cover best-practices related to: 1) language-rich classrooms (both oral and visual), 2) intentional integration of opportunities to speak, read, and write in English, and 3) sentence frames, thinking maps, and other means of scaffolding. Other strategies incorporated across all three modules include the intentional infusion of vocabulary, both conversational and academic, and the introduction of affixes and roots. The strategies taught in each module were framed within the five essential practices for teaching ELs: 1) develop oral language through meaningful conversation and context, 2) teach targeted skills through contextualized and explicit instruction, 3) build vocabulary through meaningful experiences with words, 4) build and activate background knowledge, and 5) teach and use meaning-making strategies (NISL, 2015).

The training modules were originally planned to be presented monthly for three months through Professional Learning Communities. Teachers were to be given opportunities for lesson planning and preparation based on the modules during the following week. Observations were

set to occur in week three with an observation protocol used to collect data on the implementation of each module. The plan was for the principal, assistant principal, and I to conduct the observations with inter-rater reliability ensured by training each observer on the purpose and use of the observation protocol. A series of practice observations were planned through which the raters could compare notes and unify the observations. After the observations occurred, the data was to be analyzed and shared with the teachers and leadership team during the PLC in week four. Reflective, feedback conversations were to occur after the observations to discuss next steps including retraining, continued or adapted implementation, or further exploration into the strategy to result in a deeper level of implementation. Teacher feedback from these sessions was to be a valuable tool for guiding future implementation. However, as the following timeline shows, the COVID-19 pandemic resulted in a shifting of the original plan.

Timeline of implementation.

August-September 2019. Multiple conversations occurred between the principal of VES and me to consider the possibilities and needs for training the classroom teachers of EL students. After considering the data, manageability, and potential for sustained implementation, it was decided to narrow the focus to only first-grade teachers of ELs. This decision was based on having baseline data from LAS Links in the Kindergarten year, the introduction of CASE 21 data in first grade as a consistent measure of student progress on ELA content, and the potential to continue the work into the second-grade year in the 2020-2021 school year.

The entire faculty met on August 1, 2019 to look at the accountability data from the previous school year. One of my team members and I led the meeting. We explained the accountability model and how VES' rating was determined. At the time they were projected to be an "A" school based on preliminary data from the Mississippi Department of Education (MDE). The faculty was jubilatory.

Further, data reports from the third CASE21 benchmark assessment in the 2018-2019 school year were generated and shared with the faculty. The data showed the proficiency level of each student as well as an analysis of the standards which were covered on the assessments. This standard level data was representative of the impact of the instruction on student learning in the previous year. With little teacher turnover, the faculty was able to discuss what had been taught well and to explore areas where instructional practice might need to be revisited. One area of note was the lower performance of ELs when compared with native English speakers. We ended the meeting by sharing the vision for collaboratively developing an action plan to improve EL language acquisition and content understanding by better equipping them.

Originally, I planned to survey the classroom EL teachers to determine their levels and topics of training, coursework, and certification for teaching ELs in the Fall of 2019, but during one of the planning conversations with the principal it was discovered one of her teachers was also working on a dissertation. Her topic focused on the correlation between formal teacher preparation in teaching ELs and the performance of ELs. It was discovered she was collecting, through a survey, information about teacher coursework and training prior to the 2019 school year as the key piece of data in her dissertation. Since this was the sole piece of research around which her dissertation was based, and only supplemental baseline data for mine, a decision was made to not survey the teachers twice. Instead I would use the data gained from her survey as a citation within my research.

October 2019. In preparation to lead the action plan, the principal, the kindergarten teacher/doctoral candidate from VES, and I attended a two-day NISL EL Leadership Training Summit which was held at the NPSD central office. The training involved teachers and leaders from four school districts in the central Mississippi area. During this training we analyzed our own school and district level data concerning ELs, explored how to support our teachers of ELs,

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and delved into the research-based best-practices for teaching ELs. By attending to our own professional development in the area of teaching ELs, we were following the concept of modeling the way which is one of five attributes of successful leaders (Kouzes & Posner, 2002). Armed with a better understanding of what works in teaching ELs, we were prepared to begin the training of our teachers. The principal chose eight teachers from VES to attend the teacher version of the NISL EL training aimed at equipping teachers with the research-based strategies for teaching ELs. It was decided the input from teachers after this training would be valuable in shaping the training modules.

During October, baseline data was being collected as students took the first CASE 21 Benchmark assessment. The window for testing opened on October 21 and closed on November 1. The CASE 21 data was analyzed, shared, and discussed with teachers in November.

November-December 2019. Eight teachers from VES including kindergarten, first-grade, and second-grade teachers, attended the NISL EL training on November 7 at the NPSD central office. Teachers were exposed to eight of the 12 Key Points (NISL, 2015) which related directly to classroom instruction. Key point eight addresses the five essential practices for teaching ELs. I was allowed the opportunity to audit this session with the teachers from VES so I would know specifically what training they had received. Following the training, their feedback was gleaned to determine the strategies in which they needed further training.

On November 21, I led data conversations concerning the results of the first CASE21 Benchmark assessment. This conversation occurred in grade level groups with kindergarten, first-grade, and second-grade teachers. The EL teachers, literacy and math specialists, as well as the assistant principal and lead principal attended the meetings. We explored the levels of proficiency of all students and contrasted those with the proficiency levels of just ELs. Additionally, we looked at the standards which were assessed as a means of considering how

well students learned what was taught, reflected on what we might do differently, identified areas of reteaching, as well as areas where we needed to dig deeper. Teachers analyzed the performance of the children in their classes to determine opportunities for differentiating instruction.

January 2020. Prior to beginning the modules, I met with the principal in January to review the action plan, discuss the material for each module, and solidify dates for the PLCs, observations, and feedback loops. Afterward, we walked through the classrooms to get a baseline for the use of visual language in each classroom. While the typical posters with colors, the alphabet, and shapes adorned the walls, very little labelling of items had been done in the classroom in English, much less Spanish. I knew the focus on making language visible in the classroom environment was needed.

In the hallway, the principal directed me to a bulletin board upon which statements were posted in English and Spanish. She explained the school had a phrase of the week they learned in both English and Spanish which was displayed in the main hallway where every student would pass at some point in the school day. This was one step toward including English and Spanish language in the school environment.

Between January 23 and February 5 students took the second CASE 21 Benchmark assessment. I organized the data, analyzed it, and sent it to the school to be shared with the faculty. A data talk, to proceed in much the same manner as the November data talk was scheduled for February 14. Due to a training scheduled for me by the state department of education, I had to postpone the data talk until the first week of March. The principal then had to reschedule the data talk. This middle of the year data provides evidence of the growth of all students compared with the growth of ELs in the area of ELA.

February 2020. The intention was to present the three training modules, one module monthly, at the beginning of each month. ESL certified teachers and I were to be the presenters for these modules. In week two of each month classroom teachers of ELs in collaboration with the school leadership team members acting as facilitators were to meet in PLCs to plan for the implementation of the strategies in their lessons. During week three observations were to occur to monitor the implementation of the strategies. An observation protocol was to be used to collect evidence of implementation. Prior to the observations, training was to occur with the principal, assistant principal, and ESL certified teachers who would be conducting the observations to train them in using the observation protocol. A feedback loop would occur in the fourth week of each month with the entire EL leadership team to discuss how the implementation went. Decisions concerning further training or adjustments to the implementation would be made during these feedback loops. This was our plan, prior to the COVID pandemic.

Originally, the training modules were scheduled to be presented monthly for three months through Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) in the months of February, March, and April of 2020. During the month of February, I was able to begin the initial module. On February 6, 2020 I met with the faculty during PLCs in separate grade level meetings. In attendance were the grade-level teachers, the literacy specialists, the EL teachers, the assistant principal, and the principal. We explored the five essential practices for teaching ELs considering how they were already being implemented in our classrooms and how we could further implement them. Specifically, we focused on what triads were and how we could make language, both English and Spanish, visible in the classrooms. We connected triads to Essential Practice One, developing oral language through meaningful conversation. The use of visible language was connected to Essential Practice Three, building vocabulary through authentic and meaningful experiences with words.

At the conclusion of the meeting, teachers had two tasks: begin incorporating English and Spanish throughout their classrooms by labelling anything which could be labelled and begin thinking about how triads could be organized in their classrooms. The EL teachers offered to provide free printable resources for labelling common classroom items to assist in the effort. During week two teachers were to plan for implementation in anticipation of a walkthrough during week three.

The principal sent pictures at the beginning of week three where teachers had begun grouping students in the triads of one native English-speaking student, one English proficient EL, and one EL who was not yet proficient. The EL students both spoke the same home language, usually Spanish. The teachers commented to her how the students seemed to be talking more and participating better in the triads.

To check how implementation of the visible language component was progressing, I did an informal walk-through of the classrooms as we had in January.   I observed no change in the labelling of the classroom environment in any of the seven classrooms which served ELs. However, both the progress of triads and English and Spanish labelling would be part of the feedback loop during PLCs in week four. Conflicts with outside speakers who were scheduled concurrently with PLCs prevented us from meeting for the feedback loops during week four. We rescheduled the feedback meeting to run concurrently with the training for Module Two on the Thursday after Spring Break.

March-April 2020. At the beginning of Spring Break the action plan hit a major hurdle. The COVID-19 pandemic outbreak occurred just as March began. With school closed from March 9th through at least April 20, 2020 the decision was made to rework the schedule for the training modules. Since all school district employees were working and teaching remotely though online platforms with which they were unfamiliar, I consulted with the principal and

determined a new schedule for delivery of the training modules would be created to delay implementation until the fall of 2020 as outlined later in this timeline.

The third CASE Benchmark Assessment, was scheduled to be given between March 25 and April 2 to determine the proficiency of all students, including ELs, in ELA and Math. With the COVID-19 outbreak, we were not in school during this window. Partnering with TE21, the parent company of the CASE assessments, it was arranged for these assessments to be postponed and used as baseline data when we returned to school in August.

May 2020-June 2020. During these months, conversations with the principal and leadership team at VES continued to prepare for the implementation of the training modules when we returned to school.

July 2020-September 2020. Continuing with the modules but understanding some time has passed since we originally participated in the training for Module One, a review of Module One, which focused on speaking, as well as feedback teachers had concerning what had been implemented was planned for the July professional development meeting prior to the beginning of school. The leadership felt there would be great benefit to reviewing triads and strategies for making the language visible right before school started. Teachers would be able to implement triads as part of the learning environment from the beginning of the year. As they decorated their rooms prior to the start of school they could easily incorporate the English and Spanish labelling around their classrooms and the school building.

Returning to school from a rather unusual end to the previous school year with the COVID-19 pandemic, we lacked end of year, standards-based data about what students knew concerning the standards from the previous year. As agreed with TE21, we planned to administer the CASE benchmark from the Spring of 2020 in August to determine a baseline of what students know as they began the 2020-2021 school year. The data was to be organized,

analyzed, and shared with the faculty to guide instruction through a data talk scheduled for September to discuss the results.

Module Two was scheduled for August to cover graphic organizers as a means of organizing thinking when reading. The use of graphic organizers is aligned to Essential Practice Five, teaching and using meaning-making strategies. Teachers were also to be introduced to the Time on Task Observation Tool for Speaking, Reading, and Writing (Appendix C). During week three, the principal, assistant principal, and I planned to conduct practice observations with the Time on Task Observation Tool for Speaking, Reading, and Writing to ensure we were comfortable with using it and to ensure interrater reliability. Week four was to culminate with a feedback loop where teachers could share their thoughts on the implementation of graphic organizers, give an update on how triad implementation is progressing, and share about how students were interacting with the English and Spanish word labels in the classroom and school.

In September, we planned for Module Three to progress with a focus on writing during which we would discuss using the sentence patterns appropriate for kindergarten through second-grade classrooms to help ELs build their writing skills. The sentence patterns planned to be covered are S + V (Subject + Verb) and S + V+ DO (Subject + Verb + Direct Object). The use of sentence patterns aligns with Essential Practices Two and Four, teaching targeted skills through contextualized and explicit instruction and building and activating background knowledge. During week two of Module Three teachers would plan for using sentence patterns with implementation to begin in week three. During observation rounds, the principal, assistant principal and I would conduct Time on Task Observations for a baseline.

October 2020. As with the previous assessments, we planned to organize, analyze, and share the data with the faculty with a data talk scheduled for the end of October to discuss the results. Comparing the proficiency of ELs with the proficiency levels of Native English speakers

in ELA from the beginning of year until now was important for providing valuable instructional information. A second round of Time on Task Observations were scheduled to occur in October to determine any gains in the opportunities ELs had to speak, read, and write in English.

November 2020. The action plan implementation was scheduled to culminate with exit interviews to be conducted with the seven first-grade classroom teachers of ELs, the ESL certified teachers, and the principal and assistant principal. Two separate interview protocols were developed to garner the participants' impressions of the action plan's implementation. The interview protocol for classroom teachers of ELs (see Appendix A) focused on their impressions of the training they received as well as the process of preparation, implementation, observation, reflection, and revision as it relates to building their capacity to teach ELs. The interview protocol for administrators (see Appendix B) focused on the implementation process itself and their perceived benefits and/or detriments to the organization, teachers, students, etc.

December 2020. In order to share the information with the stakeholders at VES, the data from the interviews was analyzed and organized. All data was compiled and shared with the EL Leadership Team as a matter of transparency in reporting as outlined in the Accuracy Standard of Communicating and Reporting (Yarbrough, Shulha, Hopson, & Caruthers, 2011).

Resources for Implementation.

Since VES and the NPSD have a variety of professionals with expertise in the areas focused on in the training modules and since they will be fulfilling duties related to their normal roles within the school and district, no additional expense occurred other than the normal salaries of these personnel. In thinking of human resources as an economic factor, there was a cost in the personal time spent by the personnel to develop the training modules, deliver the training, observe in the classroom, conduct the feedback meetings, and revisit the plan for further training. Time spent assessing students, compiling and analyzing the data, and in collaborative data

meetings were all costs to the school and district which have a direct impact on teacher capacity and instructional practice and therefore are resources worth spending.

With the action plan developed, the timeline laid out, and the necessary resources planned for, the plan was implemented. Keeping in mind the nature of this study, simply implementing the action plan would have failed to take into account a key component of this process, the program evaluation. Monitoring the level to which organizational improvement occurs is what sets the Dissertation-in-Practice (DiP) apart from other types of research. As a practitioner, understanding how organizational improvement is occurring and to what degree is valuable for guiding current and future change initiatives in my school setting. Specifically, for VES, understanding the degree to which teacher capacity was improved helped inform what steps to take to ensure the continued growth of our faculty to teach ELs.

Program Evaluation

Program evaluation is used to formatively and summatively assess the implementation and quality of a program in order to make informed decisions regarding the improvement initiatives in an organization (Yarbrough et al., 2011). At VES I led the collaborative development of research-based training modules to increase teacher capacity of classroom teachers in teaching Spanish speaking first grade ELs. The program evaluation in this DiP assessed the degree of organizational improvement which occurred during the implementation of a stakeholder-developed action plan. The action plan was focused on the improvement of teacher capacity to teach Spanish speaking, first-grade ELs.

This program evaluation data was collected in line with the 30 program evaluation standards as developed by the Joint Committee on Standards for Educational Evaluation (Yarbrough et al., 2011). Attention to the five key elements of utility, feasibility, propriety,

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accuracy, and accountability ensured appropriate data collection, ethical treatment, transparency in communication and reporting, and the validity of collection and results, to name a few.

Below is an outline of the qualitative and quantitative data collected and analyzed to accurately evaluate the implementation of the program and explore the degree of organizational improvement at VES. This information is being used to consider future actions and initiatives aimed at continuing to improve the organizational capacity of the faculty. Attention was given to the collection methods to protect the validity of the data. Finally, the protocols used are included in the appendix. The program evaluation includes data related to five research questions.

Research Question One. Did English Learners show a suggested mark score increase of two or more points from baseline testing to summative testing in English Language Arts as measured by the CASE 21 Benchmark assessment? The CASE 21 Benchmark assessments are given three times annually in October, February, and April. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, a third benchmark was not given in April of 2020 so it was planned to be given in August 2020 to collect baseline data as the school year begins. This date had to change to September as the NPSD delayed starting school by one month to September 3, 2020.

The CASE 21 assessments are developed by TE21, a third-party provider and delivered through an online platform, Mastery Connect, in a specific two-week window. About a month prior to the administration of each benchmark assessment, normally a team of teachers from NPSD representing each grade level and subject area at each school participate in an Expert Review of the benchmark items. The purpose of this review is to ensure alignment to the standard, safeguard against bias, and ensure grade level appropriateness. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, all expert reviews of benchmark assessments were conducted by the district's instructional specialists as a mitigating measure to minimize the spread of COVID-19 across the district.

Upon the closing of the benchmark window, the data are compiled by CASE 21 into reports. These results were further organized, sorted, and color-coded in Excel workbooks with multiple pages, one per grade level and subject area. Student proficiency levels, standards, and items were sorted into performance quintiles from least to greatest in a red, orange, yellow, green, and blue coding system with red being the lowest quintile and blue being the highest quintile. For each student, longitudinal performance on the CASE 21 benchmark assessments was included to track individual student growth. Teachers used this data to identify when students may be falling behind. The organization of this data reporting by standard allowed teachers to identify areas of strength and weakness in individual student understanding of the content standards. Looking at individual items with which students struggle allowed teachers to further identify specific pieces of the content where students need remediation.

CASE 21 data are reported in various ways including performance levels and scaled scores. The performance levels are a five-level system with categories one, two, and three having an "a" and "b" level representing "low" and "high" performance within the level. Thus, the scores range from low to high as 1a, 1b, 2a, 2b, 3a, 3b, 4, and 5. Levels four and five do not have sub-categories as they are considered to be indicators of proficiency. These reporting categories equate to the state test categories which students will take beginning in the third grade. Concurrent with the state assessment, CASE 21 assigns scaled scores based on a 98-point scale. These scaled scores are grouped by ranges into the performance levels. The performance levels can account for point ranges of over 30 points which can lead to difficulties in demonstrating growth over a shorter time period. Demonstrating up to a 30-point gain seemed unreachable for our time frame, so using the performance levels was not a workable plan. To acquire further guidance, I reached out to the statistician with CASE 21 to determine the best score point to use.

First and second grade CASE 21 assessments are measured with a performance level and a different scaled score called a suggested mark score, a scaled score between 1 and 100 points. To arrive at a manageable point increase for the suggested mark scaled score, I took scores of students at my site from the 2018-2019 school year and did a comparison from an End of Year benchmark as a baseline to a first benchmark, as this is the type of data I will be using to answer this research question. In the sample data, the average point gain was 1.73 points. Knowing this question was looking for student improvement, I arrived at a two-point gain as being indicative of an increase in student performance and a shift in instructional practice while accounting for the impact of COVID-19.

Following each benchmark, the data reports were shared with teachers and administrators as a means of monitoring organizational improvement. These reports also included an analysis of the number and percent of ELs who grew by two or more points as a means of answering question two. Due to COVID-19, data was shared, but meetings did not occur for the fall administrations. Data meetings are planned for February, and April after the second and third benchmarks are given. Regardless of whether face to face data talks occur, teachers and administrators are in the practice of looking at student performance on individual standards as a means of informing instructional practices and future professional development needs.

Research Question Two. Did the gap between English Learner performance and the performance of native English speakers in English Language Arts decrease by at least 10% as measured by the CASE 21 Benchmark assessment? To answer research question two, EL proficiency on the CASE 21 assessment in ELA was contrasted with the proficiency of native English speakers. The differential between EL proficiency on the first benchmark was compared with EL proficiency on the second benchmark. A similar analysis was conducted of native English speakers. The proficiency percentages of ELs and native English speakers were

compared and calculated as to the percent of the gap between the proficiency of ELs and the proficiency of native English speakers. This data is being used to inform the degree of improvement in teacher capacity to teach Spanish speaking first grade ELs.

Research Question Three. What aspects of the training program for teaching ELs did teachers say improved their capacity to teach ELs and which aspects did they feel need improvement? Research Question Three focused on the teachers' impressions of the training program in which they participated. This qualitative data was valuable for illuminating teachers' perceptions of improvement in their capacity to teach ELs. Because this data was collected after the after the delivery of training and the implementation of the strategies learned in the training, it is considered outcome data informing the value of the training for teachers.

Teacher feedback was collected through an interview protocol administered to the seven classroom teachers of ELs. To ensure consistency of delivery and collection of the data, I served as the interviewer. Teachers were read a statement of consent to which they agreed prior to participating in the interview. They were aware their responses were recorded to ensure their responses are accurately captured. Teacher responses from the interviews were collected in a spreadsheet and stored on my password protected device. To ensure the anonymity of the interviewees, each was assigned a number. A list of the participants and their numbers was created to ensure accuracy in reporting but was kept in a secure location to protect anonymity. As a further measure of confidence in the process and in a spirit of transparency in reporting, teachers were allowed to member check their responses to ensure accuracy (Yarbrough et al., 2011). Feedback from the member checking was taken under advisement and used as appropriate to bring clarity to the reporting.

Analysis of the interview transcripts was used to evaluate teacher's perceptions of their teaching capacity after participating in the training modules and implementing what they learned.

Patton (2015) suggests several ideas regarding the review of qualitative evaluations including a variety of matrices to organize the data. During the analysis of the transcripts, themes were identified from which findings were developed. Based on the themes which emerged, the data was organized graphically to visualize the themes and the teachers' perceptions. Conclusions regarding teachers' perceptions were made and the findings reported to the stakeholders. Collaboratively, the stakeholders will be meeting in the Spring of 2021 to consider next steps for future training, offer any suggestions for modifying the existing training, and celebrate areas of organizational improvement.

Research Question Four. What perspectives did administrators have concerning the effectiveness and/or ineffective implementation of language acquisition methods in the classroom? Research question four is similar to question three as it sought to gain qualitative, outcome data. The difference here is the focus on the administrators who participated in the trainings and monitored the implementation. An interview protocol was used to capture the administrators' impressions of the program. Like with question three, the data was collected through an interview for which the participants gave consent to participate. The interviews were conducted, recorded, transcribed, and analyzed. Interviewees had the opportunity to member check the responses to ensure their views were accurately captured. All materials related to the interviews were collected and stored in a manner similar to the teacher interviews.

As with the teacher interviews, the administrator interviews were used to determine organizational improvement. The transcripts were analyzed, documented, and organized based on the themes which emerged. The results were developed into findings which were shared with all stakeholders at the end of the program evaluation to determine if organizational improvement occurred, in what ways, and to determine next steps. It was interesting to compare the views of

the administrators with those of the teachers who were the participants and implementers at the classroom level.

Research Question Five. Did teachers provide English Learners 20% more opportunities to speak, read, and write English in the classroom? Research question five is a formative piece of quantitative data collected through a time-on-task observation protocol (Appendix C). The implementation of teaching strategies to provide ELs with opportunities to speak, read, and write in English as introduced in the training modules was recorded using the time-on-task protocol during classroom observations. The time-on-task protocol for observations was utilized to measure the level to which teachers are giving ELs opportunities to speak, read, and write in the classroom.

Although the initial plan was for the principal, assistant principal, and I to conduct the observations, the impact of COVID-19 altered the implementation. Instead of a team of reviewers, only I conducted the observations. Since I led the collaborative development of the tool, I understood how to record the instances of speaking, reading, and writing observed in a 20-minute block of time. One protocol was completed on three different occasions in each of the seven first grade classrooms with EL students. The first observation was conducted as a practice session with the second and third observations actually counting in the data collection. The numbering system used to code teacher responses to the interview questions was used for coding the observation tools. The data from each observation recorded the instances in which ELs were involved in speaking, reading, and writing in English during the 20-minute observation.

Upon completion of each round of observations, I compiled the instances of speaking reading, and writing for each teacher and for the seven teachers collectively. Data from the third round of observations was compared to the second round to track the instances of speaking, reading, and writing in English. Analysis of the percent of change from one observation round to

the next was employed then compared to the goal of providing 20% more opportunities to speak, read, and write individually and collectively.

The teachers were given feedback after each observation to discuss how the implementation of time-on-task activities for ELs to speak, read, and write is going. During these feedback loops, the observation data was reviewed to determine if organizational improvement is occurring. Teachers and leaders reflected on the data from the observation protocol by identifying next steps including changing the time at which the observations occurred, opportunities for further training, and for fine tuning the intentional use of time provided for ELs to participate in activities of speaking, reading, and writing in the classroom.

With a focus on one element, the building of teacher capacity to teach ELs, this program evaluation explored both qualitative and quantitative data from a variety of sources including CASE 21 Benchmark data, a time-on-task observation protocol, and two interview protocols focusing on teacher perspectives and administrator perspectives. The data was collected at multiple points throughout the program's implementation. This data informed the level of organizational improvement and will guide future improvement initiatives.

Conclusion

Collaboratively, a team of teachers together with school and district administrators met to decide the best course of action for addressing the deficiency in language acquisition and content understanding for ELs at VES. During these discussions it became clear the teachers not only had a desire to receive further training in how to best meet the needs of their ELs, but also had the greatest potential to impact their ELs' language acquisition and subsequent academic achievement. Through attending district provided training for teaching ELs, eight VES classroom teachers of ELs were able to identify some areas which could be of particular use and which aligned with the best practices discovered through my research. Namely, we chose to

focus on the opportunities of ELs to speak, read, and write in the classroom as a means of unlocking the English language and academic content. It was decided collectively these opportunities would be aligned to the Five Essential Practices for teaching ELs.

To capitalize on needs for further training as identified by teachers, three modules were designed to be implemented in four-week cycles of trainings, lesson planning for implementation, observations of implementation, and feedback loops. This four-week cycle focused on how to intentionally build in time for speaking, reading, and writing in the classroom with the appropriate supports and scaffolding to assist ELs in unlocking the language. The first week of the cycle was the training week. In week two, teachers collaboratively planned for implementing these strategies. A time-on-task observation protocol to measure ELs' opportunities to speak, read, and write in English in the classroom was implemented during week three. A feedback loop meeting was scheduled to occur during week four of each module.

CASE 21 Benchmark Assessments were given at the beginning of school as a pre-assessment and at the start of each nine-week quarter as a means of measuring student progress. Data collected from these assessments provided summative quantitative evidence concerning the implementation of the action plan. Summative qualitative data was collected through interviews with teachers and administrators to capture their perspectives on the implementation of the training modules.

With implementation of the plan for building teacher capacity to teach ELs and a clear method of evaluation of the implementation of the plan complete, the next step is to explore the results collected. As a means of improving educational practice, the stakeholders and I seek to know if training teachers in how ELs learn to speak, read, and write and intentionally planning for and providing ELs with opportunities to speak, read, and write is successful or not and to what degree. This information is presented in Chapter Four to include the results of the time-on-

task observations, analysis of the CASE 21 data, and the themes illuminated from the interviews

with teachers and administrators.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS

Introduction

The intent of this mixed-methods applied research study with program evaluation is to improve the academic performance of English Learners (ELs) through building teacher capacity to infuse research-based best practices for building language proficiency as an interwoven component of content instruction in English Language Arts (ELA). As a means of seeking to build organizational capacity and student performance, the faculty at Victory Elementary School (VES) collaboratively reviewed historical student performance data to determine areas of needed improvement. With a growing population of ELs exceeding 26% of the school's total population, the incorporation of ELs into their own category of the accountability model, and teachers' self-professed lack of training to teach ELs, VES staff identified ELs as an area of focus. For this study, we chose to focus on first-grade Spanish-speaking ELs since over 80% of the ELs at VES have Spanish as their home language. As a primary school with students in pre-kindergarten through second-grade, first-grade ELs were the focus grade level because we had baseline data on this group of students allowing for implementation, evaluation, reflection, and adapted implementation in the second-grade year to best meet the needs of our ELs.

Focused on a single element of improving teacher capacity, three modules covering research-based best-practices for teaching ELs through speaking, reading, and writing were provided as professional development for the teachers at VES. The modules, based on the five essential practices for teaching ELs (NISL, 2015), focused on improving ELs' language

acquisition and the unlocking of academic content through the use of triads, making the language visible through dual language labeling, and incorporating meaning-making tools such as thinking maps and sentence frames. Five research questions were formulated to provide evidence of the implementation of the action plan outlined in Chapter Three and to demonstrate the degree of organizational improvement at VES.

1. Did English Learners show a suggested mark score increase of two or more points from baseline testing to summative testing in English Language Arts as measured by the CASE 21 Benchmark assessment?

2. Did the gap between English Learner performance and the performance of native English speakers in English Language Arts decrease by at least 10% as measured by the CASE 21 Benchmark assessment?

3. What aspects of the training program for teaching English Learners did teachers say improved their capacity to teach English Learners and which aspects did they feel need improvement?

4. What perspectives did administrators have concerning the effective and/or ineffective implementation of language acquisition methods in the classroom?

5. Did teachers provide English Learners 20% more opportunities to speak, read, and write English in the classroom when measured from the baseline prior to program implementation to the final observations at the end of the action plan implementation?

Statistical Methodology

Analysis of student achievement data was used to determine the level of EL academic performance in ELA as well as to evaluate the degree to which the performance gap between ELs and native English-speaking students changed. This analysis included the use of descriptive statistics. Interview questions asked of the teachers and administrators involved in the training

and implementation of the research-based best-practices provided qualitative evidence of the plan's implementation and improvements in teacher capacity. Teacher and administrator responses to these interview questions were analyzed to determine their perspectives about the training and implementation. Participants were given a copy of their responses to review as a means of member checking to ensure the validity of reporting (Creswell & Clark, 2018). Observation data collected through a time-on-task tool were analyzed to determine changes in the opportunities of ELs to speak, to read, and to write in the classroom. The interviews and observation protocols used by the researcher can be found in the appendix section of this dissertation.

Failing to acknowledge the challenges wrought on this study by the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic would be negligent. Initially, this action plan was to be implemented in the spring of 2020 with data collection completed by the summer of 2020. However, with COVID-19 causing the early closing of face-to-face learning and a shift to distance learning, the action plan had to be suspended and the timeline for implementation revisited.

As the 2020-2021 school year began, professional development centered around preparations for teaching remotely and for implementing precautions to mitigate the impact of COVID-19. This shift in school and district training led to a delay in the presentation of the training modules and the collection of observation data. The timeline of implementation as described in Chapter Three had to shift further as the decision was made in late July to start the school year a month later than initially planned.

With a September start to school, adjustments to the delivery of the modules, the method for gaining monthly teacher feedback, as well as the timeline for conducting the classroom observations were made. Timeline adjustments included combining the module one review with module two at the end of August and moving module three to late September. To minimize face-

to-face interactions while recognizing the importance of face-to-face conversations, the feedback loops from the previous training module and the subsequent training module were combined.

The teacher feedback gained through these sessions was valuable in building the collective capacity of the faculty as teachers shared what was and was not working in their classrooms while also brainstorming about what else they might try. Keeping transparency central, data collected from each round of observations were shared with the administration and teachers whose classrooms were observed.

Another impact of COVID-19 was the need for social distancing in face-to-face classrooms and the addition of virtual learning. For face-to-face students, this resulted in smaller class sizes which are often viewed as beneficial to student achievement (Baker, Farrie, & Sciarra, 2016; National Council of Teachers of English, 2014). The number of ELs who chose virtual learning was 24.84% schoolwide. With this study focusing on first grade ELs, the "n" count of ELs included in the study was impacted to a greater degree as 29.42% of first grade ELs choosing virtual learning for the 2020-2021 school year.

Research Question One

Did English Learners show a suggested mark score increase of two or more points from baseline testing to summative testing in English Language Arts as measured by the CASE 21 Benchmark assessment? Yes, on average ELs showed a suggested mark score increase of two or more points on the summative CASE 21 Benchmark assessment. To determine whether or not ELs had an increase of two or more points in English Language Arts, the scaled score from the baseline assessment was subtracted from the scaled score on the summative assessment to calculate the change.

There were 34 first grade ELs attending school face-to-face at VES who had both a baseline and summative score and could be included in the results. This n-count of 34 students

excludes ELs who chose to attend school as virtual learners. The 34 ELs gained a total of 151 points from baseline to summative testing with an average increase of 4.44 points each. This average increase is more than double the point increase goal. The majority (62%) of ELs had an increase in score while 38% of ELs' scores decreased. Of the 34 ELs, 13 students' scores decreased for a total of 70 points and an average decrease of 5.38 points. There were 21 students whose scores increased for an average increase of 10.71 points.

A critical consideration when analyzing the change in scores is the level of English proficiency of the ELs. Kim and Suarez-Orozco (2014) suggest students with higher English language proficiency are more successful academically. Because the level of English proficiency is tied to the academic success of ELs, an EL's level of English proficiency may influence the outcome of their assessment data. With this consideration in mind, it would be valuable to know what the English proficiency level is for the students who decreased as compared with those who increased.

Applying the same analysis to the native English speakers or English Proficient (EPs), a comparison of EL to EP performance can be made. Excluding EPs who were virtual learners, 77 first-grade EPs had baseline and summative scores. The 77 EPs gained a total of 314 points for an average gain of 4.08 points per student. Comparing the performance of ELs to the performance of EPs, the ELs had a slightly greater average point gain (.36 points) than the EPs. Regardless, both ELs and EPs showed improvement on average. Because EL improvement was more than double the original goal of two points, an argument could be made suggesting teacher capacity also improved. Table Two displays the comparison of the gains of ELs to EPs from baseline to summative testing.

Table 2

Baseline to Summative Point Gains for ELs and EPs.

Students	Baseline Total Points	Summative Total Points	Difference	Average Gain
English Learners	2541	2692	151	4.44
English Proficient	6318	6632	314	4.08
All Students	8859	9324	465	4.19

Research Question Two

Did the gap between English Learner performance and the performance of native English speakers in English Language Arts decrease by at least 10% as measured by the CASE 21 Benchmark assessment? No, the gap between the performance of ELs and EPs did not decrease by 10%. In fact, the gap between EL and EP proficiency widened instead.

When the baseline assessment was administered, 55.84% of EPs scored proficient or higher while only 38.24% of ELs scored proficient or higher. The difference or gap in proficiency between ELs and EPs was 17.61 percentage points. Research Question Two establishes a decrease of at least 10%. Given the baseline difference of 17.61 percentage points, 10% of 17.61 is 1.761; thus, the critical threshold to indicate meeting the goal of Research Question Two was a decrease of 1.761 percentage points in the gap between the proficiency levels of ELs and EPs.

Both ELs and EPs showed increases in proficiency percentages between the baseline and summative assessments. On the summative assessment, ELs reached a proficiency rate of 47.06%, an increase of 8.82 percentage points over the 38.24% proficiency of ELs on the baseline assessment. For EPs, there was also an increase in the percent of students at proficiency from 55.84% to 70.13%, a difference of 14.29 percentage points. To calculate the gap between

the proficiency of ELs and EPs on the summative assessment, the percentage of proficient ELs was subtracted from the percentage of proficient EPs (70.13 – 47.06) resulting in a gap of 23.07 percentage points. With a baseline proficiency gap of 17.61 percentage points and a summative proficiency gap of 23.07 percentage points, the gap increased by 5.46 percentage points. Table Three illustrates the difference in proficiency between ELs and EPs.

Table 3

Gap Between Proficiency of ELs and EPs.

Students	Baseline Percent Proficient	Summative Percent Proficient	Gain in Proficiency
English Learners	38.24%	47.06%	8.82%
English Proficient	55.84%	70.13%	14.29%
Gap Difference	17.61%	23.07%	5.47%

Research Question Three

What aspects of the training program for teaching ELs did teachers say improved their capacity to teach ELs, and which aspects did they feel need improvement? Teachers' responses to the interview questions found in the Teacher Interview Protocol were used to provide evidence for Research Question Three. Teachers described a variety of benefits from the training program modules. Their responses are organized into three categories: 1) English Learners, 2) Language Acquisition, and 3) Teacher Development.

English Learners.

After choosing between two icebreaker questions, responses to questions three through seven provided evidence of teachers' perspectives about their teaching of ELs. Teachers were asked what methods from the training modules they incorporated into their teaching. The top three responses included a greater focus on academic vocabulary (71.43%), the incorporation of

triads (57.14%), and the use of graphic organizers (28.57%). Each of these methods was part of the training modules and are research-based best-practices for improving the speaking, reading, and writing of ELs.

When asked about sharing success stories from their teaching of ELs, one teacher said, "The engagement is phenomenal." This engagement is evident in teachers' incorporation of best practices, such as focusing on a vocabulary-rich learning environment. One teacher attributed her focus on vocabulary to students using "new terms in everyday conversational language."

During the training modules, teachers were encouraged to provide more opportunities for ELs to speak, to read, and to write in the classroom. The use of triads focused especially on using an EL's home language in partnership with English to unlock content understanding while increasing English language proficiency. By placing students who spoke little to no English in triads, teachers saw students participate more in class. One teacher reflected on how a specific student's experience in triads "helped him verbalize more." Working in triads allowed an EL in another classroom to blossom to the point the teacher "can't get her to stop talking."

Teachers pointed to the incorporation of triads as having a positive influence on the reading of ELs. Working in triads has allowed ELs to better understand the vocabulary and content of the books and passages they are reading in class. Specifically, the vocabulary of all students in the triad has been increased through the sharing of unique vocabulary words as the triad students discussed the reading through the lens of their experience. This is evident in the collective growth of the triad when one student shared "her experiences while visiting (her grandfather's) farm" and related the experience to a book they were reading about the farm in class.

Teachers also mentioned changes in the academic achievement of ELs. One student who could not read at all at the beginning of the year is now "reading on a BAS level C and

volunteering to share answers and give comments." Another teacher states having the student utilize his home language to unlock new content has resulted in the EL now being "the top EL student" in her classroom.

Teachers identified several challenges as they have taught their ELs this year including the impact of COVID-19. With the move to distance learning for the final nine-weeks of the 2019-2020 school year as well as the month-long delay to the start of school, teachers believe students entered the school year with a degree of learning loss. One teacher felt she has been "playing catch-up because we missed so much school and many of them (ELs) have lost the skills that they learned in kindergarten."

Teachers stated EL achievement is also impacted when ELs miss instruction. Whether ELs miss class due to absences or by being pulled out of the classroom for support services, there are instructional pieces they miss. The COVID-19 related issue most identified by teachers was the struggle with parental communication and involvement (42.86%), which teachers also identified as a challenge before COVID-19. Communicating with parents early and often is important in ensuring students attend school to prevent missed learning opportunities.

Teachers also mentioned the limited background experiences of ELs as a challenge resulting in the ELs lagging behind their native English-speaking peers in the area of vocabulary development. As a result, what educators do to infuse vocabulary building into everything the school does is of great importance. One way to infuse vocabulary into the daily routine is through the dual-language labeling of the classroom and school environment as covered in the training modules.

Language Acquisition. Questions eight through 13 allowed teachers to reflect on the language acquisition of ELs. Teacher perceptions of language acquisition was first measured by asking them what language acquisition means in relation to ELs. Responses such as

understanding "how people comprehend or learn a language," ensuring they "have access to…thinking maps, labels, and pictures," and having an understanding of the language which allows them to "form words and sentences…transition(ing) to fully communicating." Teachers had a variety of ideas about the time it takes ELs to become English proficient with 42.86% correctly identifying four to seven years, 42.86% saying two to three years, and 14.29% saying there are "many variations to how quickly they grasp things."

The impact of a student's home language on their English language acquisition was a concern of teachers. Teacher responses about the language spoken at home revealed 71.43% of the teachers had ELs whose parent(s) spoke only Spanish, Arabic, or another language other than English. When students from homes where no English is spoken returned to school in September after being at home for six months, they had experienced little opportunity to utilize the English they had been learning while in school.

Teacher understanding of the time needed for both social and academic language acquisition is highlighted by one teacher who stated, "Students learn to speak conversational language much faster than academic language." When asked about the difference between social language and academic language, 85.71% of the teachers were able to verbalize the difference with one teacher stating, "Social language will develop before the academic language."

In contrast, a common misconception discussed in Chapter Two is teachers' perceptions of a lack of need for assistance when ELs speak well in class. One teacher reinforced this misconception, stating she didn't have any ELs who needed help as "they all speak English well." This statement led to a review of the English Language Proficiency scores for the four ELs in this teacher's class. All four ELs were found to be labeled as "non-proficient," based on their most recent assessment. Likely, this teacher was observing what Cummins (1977) relates as basic interpersonal communication skills (BICS), as opposed to cognitive academic language

proficiency (CALP). Despite the majority of teachers being able to describe the difference between social and academic language, this misconception highlights a need to revisit the progression of social language and academic language acquisition in addition to the difference between spoken language and print language.

Teachers showed an understanding of why language acquisition is an important factor they must consider when teaching ELs. Lack of exposure to both oral and print language was something teachers identified as a barrier to acquiring English. Statements such as, "If the EL doesn't understand what you are saying, how can you teach them?" convey the concern teachers have about the language barrier between them and their ELs. Teachers mentioned comprehension, vocabulary, and confidence as concerns regarding language acquisition, with vocabulary being of utmost importance. As one teacher stated, "Vocabulary development is very important for students learning the English language."

Teacher Development. Questions 14 through 26 focused on teacher development and the content of the training modules related to best practices for speaking, reading, and writing. Attending conferences and workshops is something all teachers in the Nevara County School District are encouraged to do each year. However, with the impact of COVID-19, all travel to off-campus training was suspended in March of 2020. This included the Spring TESOL conference many VES teachers were registered to attend. The questions related to offsite professional development were all nullified as a result of the hiatus on out of district travel. One teacher mentioned having attended a conference on ELs in a prior year, but no teachers have attended any conference, on ELs or any other subject, since the COVID-19 shut down. The only professional development teachers have received since February of 2020 has been district- and school-provided, including the three modules on teaching ELs, provided as part of this study.

The three training modules focused on increasing ELs' speaking, reading, and writing opportunities through the incorporation of triads, graphic organizers, and sentence frames with an intentional infusion of vocabulary through dual language labeling of the classroom and school environment as well as instructional materials. When asked about the incorporation of these learning tools with ELs, all teachers could describe how they have been used in their classrooms.

Triads. All of the teachers (100%) had positive feedback about the incorporation of triads in their classroom. Triads are a specialized small group of three students composed of a native English-speaking student, a native Spanish-speaking student who is English proficient, and an EL who has not yet reached English proficiency. The benefits of triads noted by teachers include the strengthening of weaker students, the benefit to all in the triad regardless of the variability in the groups' levels, the development of peer tutors, and increased collaboration among students. One teacher commented, "They (the students) love triads. If they need help, they have someone they can ask and also someone who can explain it to them in English so they can remember the vocabulary." Another felt the use of triads could be of most benefit to "students who were beginners." A third teacher stated she used triads "to the max" because "students are most comfortable with conversing and responding to their classmates in their pod (triad)."

Graphic organizers. Nearly all teachers (85.71%) stated they used graphic organizers in their classrooms with circle maps, Venn diagrams, and KWL charts mentioned. As to specific implementation, teachers found graphic organizers useful as they modeled and explained concepts during instruction. Teachers mentioned using graphic organizers along with pictures to help students connect vocabulary and to highlight specific reading concepts such as cause and effect. The use of graphic organizers also provided students with "visuals they can refer back to." A response from one teacher related how the use of graphic organizers impacted her writing

instruction: "In years past, I mainly let them (ELs) use them (graphic organizers) for informational writing. Now I will incorporate them with each writing standard. It has really helped them to get their thoughts on paper and figure out how their sentences should sound."

Sentence frames. The incorporation of sentence frames was intended to be especially useful in the development of writing. Sentence frames were identified by teachers as beneficial with 71.43% of teachers using them to help ELs understand what needs to be included in a sentence. The use of sentence frames was stated to be valuable for encouraging vocabulary development. One teacher even mentioned using a form of sentence frames in her math instruction to construct number sentences. Teacher comments related to the incorporation of graphic organizers and sentence frames include the benefit of a "boost in confidence" for students when using them and the importance of students being able to "see what I am asking them to do…making things more concrete."

Awareness of the needs of ELs and intentionally teaching to meet those needs was something all (100%) of the teachers said changed about their teaching after participating in the training modules. Teachers were conscious of how they explained things and focused on giving explicit, step-by-step directions so all learners understood the expectations. One need of ELs covered during our training was the need for a culturally sensitive, more EL-friendly environment. This type of welcoming environment was mentioned by two of the teachers as an important component they infused into their teaching. One teacher communicated this awareness of the needs of ELs as evidenced in one of her comments, "I created a more comfortable environment where their culture is embraced and integrated their language in a fun way where they feel that they are teaching us as well as us teaching them."

The research-based best practices selected for incorporation in this action plan were strategies teachers were already familiar with using. The purpose of the training was to show

them how these strategies could be utilized in intentional ways to meet the needs of their ELs. Appreciation for this type of approach was echoed in the response of one teacher who said, "These workshops were helpful because these are resources I already have access to."

The second part of Research Question Three has to do with potential changes needed to make the training more effective. When asked what could be done to better support teachers in their teaching of ELs, two teachers (28.57%) stated the support they have received has been sufficient, four (57.14%) gave specific suggestions for further support, and one (14.29%) indicated no additional need for support. Those who stated specific areas for future professional development support suggested resources for the ELs to use, more strategies, and more resources to help the families of ELs as needs. One teacher requested "more classes so that teachers can better understand how to communicate the needs of students." Another suggestion was to "provide more visuals of other teachers that are successful in teaching English Learners." This feedback will be used to inform future learning opportunities for the teachers at VES as well as inform revisions to the three training modules for implementation at other district schools.

Research Question Four

What perspectives do administrators have concerning the effective and/or ineffective implementation of language acquisition methods in the classroom? Research Question Four is complementary to Research Question Three but seeks out the perspective of the administrators at VES. As such, the Administrator Interview Questions, which can be found in Appendix B, differ slightly from the questions asked of the teachers yet cover the same main categories. The data collected through these interview questions highlight administrators' perception of the organizational improvement experienced at VES. Administrator feedback is organized into three categories: 1) English Learners, 2) Language Acquisition, and 3) Teacher Development.

English Learners.

Administrators were asked to describe the ELs at VES. They described the ELs as students from working-class families seeking a "better life for their children." Multiple languages, including Spanish, Arabic, and Hindi, comprise the home language of the ELs at VES with Spanish being the primary home language. Administrators described the Spanish-speaking families as coming primarily from Central America. Communication was identified as a challenge VES must overcome as illustrated by one comment from an administrator who said, "About 50% of our parents do not speak or understand English and rely on a translator or their student to communicate for them." Administrators thought highly of the work ethic of their ELs stating, "Our EL students work very hard and are eager to learn."

As to challenges the school faces in teaching ELs, administrators highlighted the language barrier and connection with the EL families. Not speaking a common language is seen as a barrier in communicating with the parents of ELs, as well as an issue for teachers as they seek to teach students who do not understand them and whom they cannot understand. As parents and the school struggle to communicate, this language barrier can lead to a lack of parental involvement. Further, administrators perceived the language barrier left parents feeling frustrated with their inability to help their child with homework. Administrators felt these communication issues could also lead to difficulties in addressing the social and emotional learning of ELs and their families. Related to the social and emotional learning of ELs was the impact of past trauma on ELs as many of the VES families migrated from Central America to seek a better life for their children.

Reflecting on the learning opportunities of ELs, administrators highlighted a variety of strategies implemented at VES. These strategies include unique grouping through triads, vocabulary development, labeling of items in the classroom, guided reading, and small group

instruction with English as a Second Language teachers. With the implementation of the strategies, both successes and challenges were noted. A success attributable to the intentional implementation of best practices with ELs is in the participation of ELs in classrooms. One administrator stated, "ELs are becoming more engaged in conversation and participating during whole group time." A challenge identified by administrators was the importance of "practice at home." Administrators note the support an EL receives outside of the school setting is valuable to their educational success. As stated previously, the language barrier can prohibit parents from actively engaging in their child's scholarly endeavors.

Language Acquisition. One administrator described language acquisition as "an English Learner's ability to understand and comprehend the English language as well as use it to communicate in simple words, phrases, or sentences." Administrators were able to distinguish between social language and academic language with one administrator stating, "Social language acquisition is being able to communicate in a casual conversation, whereas academic language is understanding academic vocabulary and comprehending it for the understanding of a concept." Another administrator stated concisely, "Social language is everyday language. Academic language is specific to the content being taught."

Administrators believed proficiency for ELs takes at least three years to acquire. A student's home language was identified as having a "big impact on their acquisition of English." This impact was exacerbated when the family of the EL speaks "little or no English, taking longer for them to understand and comprehend." In observing their ELs' interactions, administrators found it easy to determine which ELs come from homes where English is spoken. Administrators felt teachers must be aware of the difference in social language proficiency and academic language proficiency to "successfully impact the growth of the student."

Teacher Development. The responses to questions 15 through 28 provided evidence of the administrators' perceptions of the teacher development conducted at VES. These questions focused on both general professional development opportunities provided by the school and district as well as the training modules related to this study. Normally teachers are provided a robust array of professional development opportunities. However, administrator responses highlight the limitations to professional development resulting from COVID-19 this year.

At VES, administrators scheduled weekly professional learning communities (PLCs) in which teachers met by grade level to discuss a variety of instructional topics. Once a month, the PLCs focused specifically on strategies for the teaching and learning of ELs. The three training modules of this study were infused into the monthly EL focus in PLCs at VES. Outside of the PLCs, administrators said no other professional development opportunities specifically addressing the teaching and learning of ELs have occurred since March of 2020.

The three training modules incorporated during the EL focused monthly PLCs addressed increasing ELs' speaking, reading, and writing opportunities through the incorporation of triads, graphic organizers, and sentence frames with an intentional infusion of vocabulary through dual language labeling of the classroom and school environment as well as materials used in instruction. While administrators provided evidence of the implementation of triads and dual-language labeling, no evidence of the implementation of graphic organizers was mentioned.

Triads. Administrators felt the implementation of triads was successful. Comments regarding the implementation of triads included "Teachers did a great job with implementing triads in their classrooms," and "It works!" Perceiving triads as the "most successful" component implemented, administrators felt triads gave ELs more opportunities to speak in the classroom setting. While triads were valuable for non-proficient ELs, the English proficient ELs in the triads were also observed to have gained particular benefits in this grouping. Evidence of

this success is found in the reflection of one administrator who said, "The students seem to love the diversity in their unique grouping, especially students that are bilingual. They really enjoy and feel confident when they can explain something in their native language." No specific evidence was given about the impact of triads on the native English-speaking students by either the administrators or the teachers. This may be related more to the framing of the questions which specifically asked about the impact of triads on the ELs.

Administrators noted triads were particularly effective in the area of student writing. Proficient writing requires the deepest level of English language understanding. Due to the complex nature of writing, providing writing opportunities for ELs is especially important. One administrator stated, "I have noticed more emphasis on writing and using triads to assist students with developing their writing skills." This feedback is valuable for informing the implementation of writing as the observation data which will be discussed in the answering of Research Question Five showed writing to have had the lowest percentage of instances observed.

Dual-language labeling. The incorporation of dual-language labeling was important to increasing the reading of ELs by providing ELs with more visible print language. Essential Practice Three focuses on the building of vocabulary through authentic and meaningful experiences with words. The labeling of everyday items in both English and Spanish was aimed at providing ELs with meaningful print language interactions with common, everyday words. Extending this practice to instructional tools such as worksheets and classroom presentations would further help ELs make meaning of the print language and vocabulary with which they were interacting. Administrators noted efforts to include both English and Spanish labeling in the classrooms. However, the level of implementation was not as great as administrators had hoped. One administrator suggested, "I would like to see more labeling of commonly used vocabulary in both English and Spanish."

Administrators found the training to be appropriate in length and method of delivery, as well as implementable by the teachers. A high level of teacher engagement during the training and feedback sessions was also noted. Reflecting on the feedback sessions, administrators stated, "Some teachers were just reluctant to share." However, administrators thought teachers found value in hearing "how other teachers were using the strategies." A specific comment made by one administrator highlighted the perceived value of the Observation Time-on-Task Protocol and how teachers structured their instruction, "It was very useful for teachers to see the percentages of time they were spending allowing students time to speak and listen compared to how much time the teacher was spending doing the speaking." This comment illuminates the intentional faculty reflection about instructional design and participation opportunities for ELs.

Research Question Five

Do teachers provide English Learners 20% more opportunities to speak, read, and write English in the classroom when measured from the baseline prior to program implementation to the final observations at the end of the action plan implementation? Overall, yes, ELs were provided with 20% more opportunities to speak, read, and write. The results become more informative when disaggregated into three categories: speaking, reading, and writing.

Table 4

Observed Instances of Speaking, Reading, and Writing.

Group	All Instances	Speaking	Reading	Writing
English Learners	23.94%	9.04%	8.24%	6.65%
Teachers	5.85%	5.05%	0.80%	0.00%
Triads	21.54%	10.64%	4.79%	6.38%
Whole Group	48.67%	24.20%	16.49%	7.71%
Total Observations	100.00%	48.94%	30.32%	20.74%

Three rounds of observations were conducted to record the instances of speaking, reading, and writing of ELs as displayed in Table Four. The largest category of instances observed across all three observations was when ELs were participating in whole group learning (48.67%), followed by ELs working individually (23.94%), and ELs working in triads (21.54%). The most frequent mode of English use by ELs was speaking (48.94%), followed by reading (30.32%), and then writing (20.74%).

The observation sheets and summary charts for the school as a whole and individually by teacher were provided as feedback to participants with the total instances of speaking, reading, and writing observed at the conclusion of each round of observations. A variety of groupings including individual "English Learners," in "Triads," and with the "Whole Group," were observed in the classroom. An "All Groupings" category was also used to reflect the totality of recorded opportunities of ELs to speak, to read, and to write. While the "All Groupings" category was used to answer research question five, below is a detailed view of the results.

Table 5

Goal to Actual Observed Instances of ELs Speaking, Reading, and Writing.

Group	English Learners	Triads	Whole Group	All Groupings
Speaking Goal	3.60	0.20	3.00	6.80
Speaking Actual	-6.00	7.00	29.00	30.00
Reading Goal	4.00	0.20	1.00	5.20
Reading Actual	-11.00	6.00	24.00	19.00
Writing Goal	2.20	0.80	0.00	3.00
Writing Actual	0.00	-4.00	18.00	14.00
All Opportunities Goal	9.80	1.20	4.00	15.00
All Opportunities Actual	-17.00	8.00	72.00	63.00

Table Five summarizes the difference in the number of observed instances of ELs' speaking, reading, and writing opportunities in the classroom from the baseline observation to the summative observation. The numbers for each goal represent the numerical value of a 20% increase in EL opportunities to speak, to read, and to write. The difference between baseline observations and summative observations is also included. As long as the actual is higher than the goal, then the goal is met. Of the 16 combinations of categories, 11 or 68.75% of the categories saw an increase in opportunities for ELs to use English. Four of the five categories in which the goal was not met were when ELs worked alone and the other was when ELs worked in triads to write.

The results speak to ELs' opportunities when working individually. Examples of individual speaking opportunities include answering individually or working one on one with a teacher. Initially, a total of 18 EL speaking opportunities were observed. In the final round, 12 speaking instances were observed indicating a decrease of six opportunities. Reading also saw a decrease in the opportunities of ELs to use English from the initial to ending observations with reading opportunities decreasing by 11. Writing opportunities for ELs remained unchanged with 11 instances observed during both the initial and ending observations. The decreases in individual opportunities for ELs may seem concerning. However, with one focus of the training modules on implementing triads, a decrease in ELs working alone may be less of a negative and more of an indication of a shift to more participation in triads.

The opportunities of ELs to participate in triads increased for speaking and reading, but not for writing. With only six observations of triads during the initial round and 14 in the final round resulting in an increase of eight instances, the goal of a 20% increase (1.2 observations) in triad participation was exceeded. The speaking instances of ELs in triads increased from one to eight while reading instances in triads increased from one to seven. Writing instances in triads

had the strongest showing at four in the first round of observations but accounted for zero instances in the final round. In reflecting on the data from the observations, teachers noted the time at which the observations were conducted, in the morning, as having an impact on the number of writing instances. The schedule for first-grade classrooms has writing instruction scheduled after lunch. The context of when writing occurred during the daily schedule was an important detail to inform what the data was communicating. The low numbers of writing observations may be more a result of the time when the observations were conducted than a lack of emphasis on writing opportunities in the classroom.

Of the 11 categories where the 20% goal is met, all speaking and reading goals for ELs when participating in triads and whole group instruction are included as is the goal of writing in whole group learning opportunities. Not only were these goals met, but they exceeded the set goal of 20%. The percent of change in the opportunities to speak, to read, and to write, individually, in triads, and in a whole group setting shown in Table Six informs which areas saw improvement in implementation and which did not.

Table 6

Percent of Change in ELs' Speaking, Reading, and Writing Opportunities.

	English Learners	Triads	Whole Group	All Groupings
Speaking	-50.00%	87.50%	65.91%	46.88%
Reading	-122.22%	85.71%	82.76%	42.22%
Writing	0.00%	-100.00%	100.00%	49.28%
All Opportunities	-53.13%	57.14%	78.26%	45.65%

The opportunities for ELs to participate in a whole group setting had the highest increase at 100%. While this is certainly a positive gain, it is likely more attributable to there being no instances during the baseline round, rendering any gain positive. There were large gains in

opportunities for ELs including speaking in triads increasing by 87.5%, followed by reading in triads (85.71%), reading as a whole group (82.76%), and writing as a whole group (78.26%). When considering all participation opportunities, whole group implementation was the highest at 78.26%, with triad usage increasing by 57.14% and ELs working alone decreasing by 53.13%. Again, ELs working alone is not necessarily a concern as the decrease may be attributable to intentionally having them work in triads or in whole group settings. Because teachers were encouraged to implement triads and be more inclusive of ELs, this decrease in individual work on the part of ELs may indicate greater intent to involve ELs in the classroom community.

Conclusion

The findings of this applied research, mixed-methods study with program evaluation are outlined in the answers to the five research questions. Overall, it can be surmised teachers' capacity to teach ELs at VES has increased. The data from this study indicates an increase in EL performance in ELA. However, while ELs demonstrate an increase in proficiency in ELA, they are still outpaced by their native English speaking/English proficient peers. The increase in opportunities for ELs to speak and read in triads and whole group instruction is reflective of an improvement in teacher capacity to incorporate best practices for developing oral language through meaningful context as outlined in Essential Practice One (NISL, 2015). The self-professed integration of graphic organizers and sentence frames was integral to incorporating the meaning-making strategies as evidence of the implementation of Essential Practice Five (NISL, 2015). Essential Practices Two, Three, and Four are woven throughout the teachers' comments and observation notes as targeted skills were taught, vocabulary was built through meaningful experiences with words, and background knowledge was built and activated (NISL, 2015).

The purpose of a program evaluation is to determine the degree to which organizational improvement occurs. In the case of the implementation of an action plan to address teacher

capacity to teach ELs at VES, the qualitative and quantitative data indicate organizational

improvement. Despite the positive evidence of improvement, there are areas to address for

future professional development and continued organizational improvement at VES. These

future possibilities are outlined in Chapter Five.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION

Introduction

The purpose of this applied research study with program evaluation was to build teacher capacity to teach English Learners (ELs) by infusing research-based best practices for building language proficiency as a component of content instruction in English Language Arts (ELA). Improving the language proficiency and academic performance of (ELs) was an expected outcome. With the EL population at Victory Elementary School (VES) exceeding 26%, the faculty of this pre-kindergarten through second-grade school began paying particular attention to this subgroup of students as they analyzed benchmark and classroom performance data. The faculty noticed the academic achievement of ELs lagging behind their native English-speaking peers and determined to address the issue.

In Chapter One, contextual information about VES was shared and the purpose of the study to better equip classroom teachers for teaching ELs was explored. Chapter Two delved into the research surrounding the teaching of ELs including the time it takes ELs to reach English language proficiency, the achievement gaps between ELs and their native English-speaking peers, the effective practices surrounding the teaching of ELs, and the need for better teacher preparation in our educator preparation programs as well as continued professional training and support throughout their teaching careers. Outlining the action plan and program evaluation of this mixed-methods study, Chapter Three focused on a single element of building teacher capacity through the incorporation of triads, visible language through dual-language labeling,

and meaning-making tools such as graphic organizers and sentence frames. Five research questions were constructed to guide the evidence collection concerning the effectiveness of the prescribed action plan as a means of measuring organizational improvement. The evidence collected to answer these five research questions was explored in Chapter Four.

In Chapter Five, a discussion of the results of the action plan includes the degree to which triads, visible language through dual-language labeling, and the use of meaning-making tools such as graphic organizers and sentence frames were implemented. As a matter of reflection, the successes and limitations of the action plan's implementation will be explored. The incorporation of the program evaluation standards as part of the program evaluation will be outlined to support the reliability of perceived organizational improvement. Recommendations and implications for further research as well as next steps the school may want to consider will be explored. Finally, the chapter will summarize the conclusions drawn about the success of the action plan and program evaluation.

Discussion

Prior to the implementation of the action plan, the LAS Links English Language Proficiency Test showed 90% of ELs at VES were not English proficient. Of greater concern was 60.5% of ELs scored in the minimal and basic categories, the lowest of the five-category scoring system. Teachers at VES communicated concern over how to effectively reach students who did not speak English, the language through which instruction was being given. Further, a need to ensure ELs learned the content while they were learning English was deemed as critical to the ELs' future success in school. To address these needs, teachers were trained through three modules on the incorporation of triads, dual-language labeling, and the incorporation of graphic organizers.

Triads. If only one area could be celebrated as a success in the implementation of this action plan, it would be the incorporation of triads. Although teachers already grouped the students in their classrooms for collaborative work, the intentional grouping of their ELs in triads with a native English-speaking student and a bilingual EL provided ELs with a bridge to using their native language to unlock the content they were expected to learn. Providing ELs with a partner who spoke both English and Spanish assisted ELs with learning the content through the process of code-switching as described by Garcia, Flores, & Chu (2011). In code-switching students hear the content in the new language, translate it to their native language, process the answer in their native language, then produce the answer in the new language.

An issue experienced by ELs when going through the process of code-switching is the amount of time it takes to process the information and communicate their answer. Often ELs find themselves behind because the class has moved on to the next question before they have fully formulated an answer. The use of triads helps ELs navigate this code-switching process while arriving at a more accurate conclusion expediently.

Responses from the teacher interviews (see Appendix A) highlighted time and again the value teachers saw for their ELs as a result of working in triads. From increased confidence to improvement in reading levels, teachers described a multitude of benefits for their ELs. The analysis of ELs' opportunities to speak, read, and write in English using the observation time-on-task tool (see Appendix C) indicated the incorporation of triads had two of the largest gains in instances observed at 87.5% when speaking and 85.71% when reading. Participating in class helped ELs to not only gain academic understanding but also helped them to feel more connected to the school community. By being intentional in the grouping of their ELs, teachers had an easily implementable solution for providing their ELs with a means for gaining the knowledge previously inaccessible to them due to the language barrier.

This simple incorporation of triads provided ELs with more equitable access to content knowledge while increasing their content understanding. Based on the analysis of the CASE benchmark assessment baseline to summative data, ELs not only exceeded the intended goal of increasing their score by at least two points but also had a higher average gain than their English proficient peers (4.44 points for ELs and 4.08 for English proficient students). Certainly, the implementation of triads was only one of three components implemented as a result of the training modules in which the teachers participated. However, since triads had two of the largest gains in implementation according to the time-on-task observations, it could be inferred triads had a greater influence on the gains in achievement seen on the CASE assessment.

As a component of the action plan implementation, teachers were provided with a time for reflection through feedback loops. Having been presented with the data from the observation time-on-task tool, teachers collaborated during professional learning communities (PLCs) about their experiences. The stories shared during this reflective practice allowed teachers to illuminate successes, ask their peers for suggestions to handle situations with which they struggled, and re-evaluate how they were implementing triads. Those who experienced success in implementing triads early on provided the needed fodder to encourage their reluctant or slow to implement peers to create triads in their classrooms.

Dual-language Labeling. Being a pre-kindergarten through second-grade school, the teachers at VES already labelled items in their classrooms. As the school's EL population has grown, the native languages of the ELs have been incorporated on a limited basis. Prior to the implementation of the action plan, one bulletin board on the main hallway had a sentence of the week in Spanish, the language spoken by a majority (80%) of the ELs at VES. When walking through classrooms, the labeling of classroom items and posters of colors, letters, and numbers allowed students to see English in its print form as a visible language. Even after the

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implementation of the training modules, little evidence of dual-language labeling in both English and Spanish was observed.

One reason for this lack of implementation of dual-language labeling could be connected to the native language proficiency of the ELs. It is during the primary years when print language is developing for native English-speaking students. The same is true of the development of print language of the ELs in their native language. The ELs in this study are first-grade students. For these younger ELs, print language may be lacking. Bransford, Brown, Cocking, and the National Research Council (2000) assert the importance of linking new knowledge to prior knowledge. If the ELs at VES lack print language in their native language, then dual-language labeling is of little benefit. For this reason, it can be understood why little evidence of dual-language labeling was observed. Conversely, the research of August and Shanahan (2006) and Goldenberg (2008) suggests ELs' reading skills in English are increased when they are taught to read in their native language.

Additional reasons for this lack of observable dual-language labeling was provided during the interviews when considering the family background of the ELs. Both administrators and teachers shared the ELs at VES came from primarily low socio-economic households. The parents were described as working-class families who spoke little to no English. Many of the families lacked formal education and as such may have little print language themselves. Not surprisingly, the ELs also lacked print language in their native language. Absent of a schoolwide focus in encouraging bilingual proficiency, the need to utilize the print form of the students' native language was quickly realized to be a less helpful support, and other supports perceived as having a greater chance of success became the focus.

Graphic Organizers. Seo, Taherbhai, and Frantz (2016) described a need for students to have tools such as graphic organizers to focus their listening as they seek to make meaning out of

what they hear in the classroom. At VES, teachers had previously been provided with a type of graphic organizers called Thinking Maps. During the training module on using graphic organizers as a meaning-making tool, teacher feedback highlighted the relatively low implementation of the Thinking Maps prior to the training. The Thinking Maps materials previously provided to the teachers included laminated posters upon which dry erase markers could be used as a teaching tool. Some teachers commented they had these posters somewhere in their classroom but would need to find them. They were excited however to be using a resource they had already learned about and had at their disposal.

During the observations for the time-on-task tool, notes were made in the comments section about seeing the graphic organizer used in one class in particular. The teacher demonstrated how to use the graphic organizer, a circle map, then students in triads went to centers to use the circle maps to brainstorm about words with specific word endings. Students rotated from one circle map to the next to add to the work of the previous groups. This type of incorporation of a graphic organizer along with triads is a model for how these two supports can be implemented in the classroom to the benefit of ELs.

Limitations. As with the implementation of any action plan, circumstances caused limitations to the success of the plan. One limitation concerning the observation time-on-task tool was the time of day at which the observations occurred. When discussing the results of the observation data, teachers justified the low percentages of observed writing opportunities as a result of the time of day during which the observations occurred. All of the observations occurred during the morning before lunchtime. Teachers shared the majority of the focused writing instruction occurred after lunch. Armed with this information, any evidence of the incorporation of writing during the morning observations could be perceived as intentional because the writing was occurring outside of dedicated writing time. As a side note, the

incorporation of clearly scheduled time at VES is something suggested by Santos, Darling-Hammond, & Cheuck (2011) as one strategy found to be effective for helping ELs adjust to a classroom and school environment wrought with customs, social norms, and a language in which they are not proficient.

A second limitation, also tied to time, was the shift to using only one observer for the time-on-task tool rather than the intended three observers. This decision was made to protect the time of the principal and assistant principal due to their increased responsibilities as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. The administrators at VES were running the normal operations of on-campus learning and virtual learning as about a third of the school population was learning from home, all while mitigating the concerns wrought due to COVID-19. The level of training and meetings in which the administrators had to participate on top of the added processes and procedures they had to implement because of COVID-19 rendered their time for additional tasks, such as completing the observation time-on-task tool to be limited.

Another limitation was the ELs' lack of knowledge of print language in their native language. As discussed previously concerning the incorporation of dual-language labeling, students lacked enough print language in their native language to make the labeling worthwhile at this point. This lack of print language may not be a concern in a school whose EL population comes from families who are college-educated or who hold graduate degrees. However, should the school choose to move towards a bilingual approach to educating its students in the future, the work of Thomas and Collier (2004) may be of value in supporting the push to incorporating dual language learning as a means of decreasing learning gaps for ELs.

The COVID-19 pandemic limited the scope of the program evaluation. Because ELs were divided between on-campus and virtual learning for the 2020-2021 school year, the number of students used for the data analysis was limited to only those students who attended face-to-

face classes on-campus. Had all VES students been included in the analysis, the data would have had the additional considerations of on-campus learning versus virtual, computer-based instruction imposed upon its interpretation. To protect the clarity and accuracy of what the results illuminated, only the data of students enrolled in on-campus learning was analyzed to inform the outcomes of the action plan and the degree of organizational improvement.

Having to focus only on students enrolled in face-to-face on-campus learning and only on first-grade ELs leads to other limitations. Can organizational improvement as a whole be purported when only the first-grade, face-to-face students and teachers were studied? The evidence supports the organizational improvement of first-grade, face-to-face teachers, but what of the teachers in other grades or those who taught virtually? These questions open opportunities for further research to be discussed later in the chapter.

Program Evaluation Standards. As a means of determining the overall organizational improvement, researchers employ program evaluation. Yarbrough, Shulha, Hopson, and Caruthers (2011), divide the 30 program evaluation standards into five key attributes: utility, feasibility, propriety, accuracy, and accountability. To ensure the implementation of the action plan at VES was evaluated appropriately, standards from these five key attributes were employed as described in the following paragraphs.

Utility. The utility standards address the usefulness of a program in meeting the needs of the organization (Yarbrough, et al., 2011). One of these standards, Evaluator Credibility (U1) speaks to the qualifications of those conducting the evaluation. As the chief evaluator of the implementation of an action plan at VES, this researcher could be seen as one with an admirable amount of credibility. In my normal role with both VES and the district, I analyze data to determine the effectiveness of our instructional programs as evidenced in student learning outcomes. Applying these skills of analysis and evaluation to the standards-aligned benchmark

assessments, the feedback of teachers through interviews, and the time-on-task observations

provided VES with not only Relevant Information (U5) but also Meaningful Processes and

Products (U6).

 Feasibility. The key concept of feasibility was addressed particularly as it relates to

Practical Procedures (F2) and Resource Use (F4). By using the CASE Benchmark assessment

data, an assessment already used three times yearly at VES, teachers did not have to learn how to

administer and interpret a new assessment. Teachers already employed practices such as

grouping students, labeling items in their classrooms in English and using a type of graphic

organizers called Thinking Maps. By intentionally tying practices and resources already

available to teachers, these practices addressed the learning needs of ELs while meeting the F2

and F4 feasibility standards.

 Addressing Project Management (F1), my role as project manager was to ensure the

project followed the timeline while meeting the needs of the stakeholders. Yarbrough et al.,

(2011) understood the impact changes can have on a study by addressing the need for a project

manager to navigate adjustments to the plan's implementation. The COVID-19 pandemic

wrought a litany of changes upon the timeline, the day-to-day function of the school, and the

evaluation measures employed. One example was in the suspension of state testing for Spring

2020. Originally, the action plan included a sixth research question to explore the ELs'

performance on the LAS Links English Language Proficiency Test. When this test was canceled

in late March 2020, this valuable measure had to be eliminated. The second consideration of

feasibility related to COVID-19 regarded the functioning of the school building itself. The

schedule for delivering the training modules had to be adjusted due to the stay-at-home orders in

place during Spring 2020 and the late start to school in the Fall of 2020. As the program

manager, I worked with the school to navigate these adjustments while maintaining the intent of the99tanform evaluation.

Propriety. The propriety standards can be viewed as those which safeguard the properness of the program evaluation through ethical practice and by adhering to clear policies and regulations (Yarbrough et al., 2011). A cross-section of stakeholders including teachers, administrators, support staff, and district personnel were involved in the development and implementation of the plan, addressing the propriety standard of Responsive and Inclusive Orientation (P1).

As the researcher and program manager, I participated in Colloborative IRB Training Initiative (CITI) training as well as sought Institutional Review Board approval from the university. Further, the Nevara Public School District (NPSD) has a research approval team to screen applications to conduct research within the district. These measures are examples of ensuring the protection of Human Rights and Respect (P3).

In collecting the data for this program evaluation, efforts were made to ensure the information was received by the stakeholders in a timely manner. The action plan was shared with the leadership team and their input was sought throughout the implementation. The tools used to evaluate the success of the action plan were given to the stakeholders ahead of time to offer suggestions for improvement and to prepare for what would be evaluated. As soon as data from the various tools was collected and analyzed, the results were shared with the stakeholders. Doing so not only met the propriety standard Transparency and Disclosure (P5) but also allowed the stakeholders actionable data upon which to make further instructional decisions.

Accuracy. Ensuring the validity of the results of a program evaluation is the central focus of the accuracy standards. Focusing specifically on Reliable Information (A3) one may expect to see triangulation of data as a means of accuracy. The impact of COVID-19 changed

how the time-on-task observation tool was administered. As a means of protecting the already

stretched resources of the principal and assistant principal, they did not assist with administering

the observation protocol. In the future, it would provide an even greater sense of accuracy to

have three trained members to administer the tool as a means of triangulation of results.

As far as Communication and Reporting (A8) is concerned, stakeholders were given their

data as soon as it was calculated. The data was communicated in a purely objective manner

allowing teachers and administrators to draw their own conclusions about it. Feedback loops

provided the stakeholders with opportunities to discuss the results and reflect on what should be

done next. These built-in checkpoints were effective in gauging the organizational

understanding of what the data represented.

Accountability. The degree of clarity in the Evaluation Documentation (E1) impacts the

stakeholders' ability to determine the effectiveness of the program. Because a variety of

qualitative and quantitative data were collected, analyzed, and disseminated, the organization of

the documentation data was of primary concern. The data had to be organized clearly and

succinctly for all stakeholders to interpret. The use of tables and color-coding of the

performance quintiles when organizing the CASE benchmark data provided clarity and aligned

with how the stakeholders were used to having data presented. Feedback loops offered the

stakeholders opportunities to seek clarification about the data when needed while encouraging

collaboration and continued organizational growth.

Implications

Personal Professional Practice. The future implications of this study can be organized

into three categories: personal professional practice, suggested school initiatives, and future

research. As to personal professional practice, much was learned about conducting action

research and the value of program evaluation to determine the level of organizational

improvement. Future research endeavors could focus on the writing of the research questions as they are the lifeblood of both the action plan and the program evaluation.

Because the research questions of this study asked basic questions, the level of statistical analysis employed was also basic. The assessment data collected for this study has more of a story to tell. Had the questions been crafted differently, they would have required a deeper level of statistical analysis. For example, using the data from the observation time-on-task tool in combination with the CASE benchmark data could result in a question about the relationship between the number of opportunities an EL has to speak, read, or write in English and the number of points they gain per added opportunity. If a relationship could be determined between the number of opportunities a student has to do something and a quantifiable point gain per opportunity, then lessons could be customized to provide students with the number of opportunities need to meet a growth goal. This deeper level of analysis supports intentional improvement in practice as a means of improving student outcomes.

Another implication for future professional practice would be to adapt the training modules of this action plan to meet the professional development needs of other schools across the district and even the state who have ELs. While dual-language labeling was not as well implemented at VES, this component may be highly successful in a different school setting where students come from families with higher language proficiency in both oral and print language. The information collected through this study could be used to determine which components may be more successful in specific contexts. Applying this type of analysis would allow the modules to be customized to meet the needs and context of the specific school.

In order to continue developing professionally, adding the English as a Second Language endorsement may be prudent. The combination of this certification with administrator licensure is a combination the NPSD had difficulty finding when looking for an EL Coordinator. Securing

this certification would not only increase professional knowledge of teaching ELs but could open doors for future opportunities to positively impact our teachers and ELs.

Future School Initiatives. When considering future school initiatives for VES, an immediate application would be to capitalize on the successes noted in the program evaluation. Teachers should continue to collaborate concerning the implementation of triads, dual-language, and graphic organizers. Areas where teachers have had specific success could be used to guide future lesson development, such as the example given about the one teacher who used circle maps in her centers. Peer observations are another way teachers could model for each other how they are incorporating graphic organizers, sentence frames, and other components of the training. Further, the faculty at VES could consider incorporating instructional rounds as described by City, Elmore, Fiarman, and Teitel (2009) as a means of continuing to build their individual and organizational capacity to teach ELs.

There may be opportunities to look at the incorporation of bilingual classrooms. Thomas and Collier (2002) found ELs enrolled in bilingual classes to outperform ELs enrolled in English only classes. Conversations with the administrators at VES have indicated this bilingual teaching as an area of interest, especially if the population of ELs continues to grow. Prior to incorporating any new initiative of this nature, further stakeholder input, as well as research, will need to occur to inform the development of an action plan.

Further Research. Reflecting on the implementation of this action plan with program evaluation, there are a variety of implications for further research. In this action research, the data collected about the implementation of triads informed the impact on ELs. It may be of value to consider the impact of triads on native English speakers or bilingual students. The interview questions (see Appendix A and B) could be adapted to address the impact of triads on the learning of bilingual students and native English-speaking students. The time-on-task

observation tool could also be adapted to measure the interactions of each of these student groups within the triad.

Another aspect of this study for future improvement would be including a tool for measuring the incorporation of dual-language labeling and graphic organizers. Although the observer notes on the time-on-task tool allowed for the recording of anecdotal information about what was observed, there were no tools designed to measure the use of dual-language labeling and graphic organizers. This was a missed opportunity to provide data about the implementation of these two components.

The initial iteration of this action plan and program evaluation included an additional research question to address the change in English language proficiency of ELs based on their performance on the LAS Links assessment. When the COVID-19 pandemic hit, all state testing was canceled for the spring of 2020, including the LAS Links assessment rendering this question void as there was no substitute assessment to measure English proficiency. Future research could focus on the English language proficiency of ELs as measured by the LAS Links assessment or other such English Language Proficiency Test if used elsewhere.

Currently, the LAS Links assessment will be given in the spring of 2021. Because there is a baseline score for all ELs, the English proficiency data gained from the administration of the LAS Links assessment in the spring of 2021 can be used to determine if ELs have gained in English language proficiency or at the very least grown a level or more. While those findings will not be part of this dissertation, the analysis of those findings will be analyzed and used for guiding continued organizational improvement at VES.

Conclusions

This mixed-methods action plan with program evaluation led to a variety of conclusions for this researcher. First, teachers of first-grade ELs increased in their capacity to teach ELs.

Evidence of this improvement is found in the increase of EL proficiency on the CASE benchmark assessment as well as in the comments from both the teachers and the administrators at VES. However, the gap between EL achievement and the achievement of their English proficient peers increased. Because ELs did have a higher gain on the CASE assessment than their English proficient peers it is not because students failed to learn from what the teachers taught. Rather, it could be concluded the gaps were exacerbated by the learning loss incurred due to the school closings for the COVID-19 pandemic. Simply put, ELs had more ground to gain to become proficient and are just not there, yet. Regardless of the reason for the increased gap in proficiency, teacher capacity to teach ELs increased.

Second, the implementation of any action plan will be met with challenges. The closing of schools for the final nine-weeks of the 2019-2020 school year combined with a four-week delay to the start of school due to the COVID-19 pandemic led to learning gaps. These learning gaps had to be addressed when students began the 2020-2021 school year. Incorporating mitigation procedures such as mask-wearing, social distancing, and the choice of some students to transition to virtual learning provided extra challenges for implementing the action plan. With the faculty divided between traditional face-to-face learning and virtual learning, VES has functioned as two schools in one throughout the 2020-2021 school year.

Communication, commitment, and constant re-evaluation of goals and the timeline were crucial to continuing with the outlined plan which leads to my third conclusion. The professionalism and resiliency of the teachers at VES is something to be celebrated. Despite having to incorporate a plethora of precautions to maintain safe classrooms for students to learn, they continued with the implementation of an action plan to improve their capacity to teach the growing population of ELs in their school. This commitment to an agreed-upon change initiative even during a pandemic is a testament to the overall growth-minded culture at VES.

The engrained culture among the faculty of VES is one of organizational improvement. As opportunities open to once again attend off-site professional development, there will be new information and research to bring to the table. Combining this new information with the data-informed conversations held through PLCs will allow for reflection on the progress and practices in place. As reflective practitioners, the faculty of VES will continue to make a difference in the lives of the ELs and native English speakers who enter their classrooms for years to come.

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APPENDICES

Final Teacher Interview Protocol

Research Topic: Building teacher capacity to teach English Learners (ELs) as a means of improving English language proficiency and academic content understanding among ELs.

Research Question: What aspects of the training program for teaching ELs did teachers say improved their capacity to teach ELs and which aspects did they feel need improvement?

Conceptual Framework: English Learners, teacher development, language acquisition, academic content understanding

Statement of Consent: Thank you for talking with me today about your professional development opportunities this year as they relate to teaching English Learners, their English language acquisition and academic content understanding. The questions asked will allow us to reflect on the professional development we have offered to teachers this year in the area of teaching English Learners, English language acquisition, and academic content understanding. Further, it will help us intentionally shape professional development efforts related to instructing English Learners and developing language acquisition in the future. Personally identifiable information will not be included in the findings nor included in any reports developed from this interview. In order to capture your responses accurately, I will record our conversation. Are you willing to proceed with this interview?

Teacher Interview Questions

Icebreakers:

1. Tell me about something positive which occurred in your classroom this year.

2. In reflecting on your school year, tell me about something you wish you could go back and do over.

English Learners

3. In general, describe the home languages, backgrounds, and characteristics of the English Learners in your classroom.

4. What concerns you most about teaching English Learners?

5. Tell me what unique challenges come with teaching English Learners.

6. What methods have you employed to help English Learner(s) learn academic content?

7. Share a success or successes you had in teaching English Learners this year.

8. What challenges have you had in teaching English Learners this year?

Language Acquisition

9. Describe what language acquisition means to you as it relates to English Learners?

10. How long does it take for an English Learner to acquire proficiency in English?

11. Tell me how a student's home language can impact their acquisition of English.

12. Describe your understanding of academic language acquisition.

13. How is social language acquisition different from academic language acquisition?

14. Why is language acquisition a factor when teaching English Learners?

Teacher Development:

15. Thinking about any workshops, conferences, school or district trainings, tell me about any professional development opportunities you have been involved in this school year.

16. Outside of PLC meetings, were any of these professional development opportunities specifically related to teaching English Learners? If yes, explain the training.

In PLCs this semester, we discussed research-based strategies for teaching English Learners. The next few questions are related to what we discussed in PLCs.

17. Tell me about your use of graphic organizers, note taking documents, sentence frames, and other types of documents with ELs.

18. What have you noticed about the participation of your ELs when speaking and writing in English?

19. Describe your use of visible language (labelling items in English and Spanish) in your classroom.

20. What did you notice about how your students worked in triads?

21. How has your teaching changed because of your training in _____? (Customize questions to refer to specific pieces of training the teacher mentioned in questions 17, 18, 19, and 20.)

22. Thinking about all professional development you have participated in this year, tell me what have you found to be particularly useful in teaching English Learners?

    a. Why was/were this/these method(s) particularly helpful?

    b. In what areas would you like further professional development?

23. What strategy did you find most helpful for building language acquisition for English Learners?

24. Give an example of how classroom content was made more accessible for your English Learners as a result of a strategy you tried this year.

25. Was there a training concerning English Learners which was not helpful?

26. How can we better support you in teaching English Learners?

27. Is there further information you would like to share with me about English Learners, language acquisition, or your professional development?

Appendix B

Final Administrator Interview Protocol

Research Topic: Building teacher capacity to teach English Learners (ELs) as a means of improving English language proficiency and academic content understanding among ELs.

Research Question: What perspectives do administrators and English as a Second Language certified teaching staff have concerning the effective and/or ineffective implementation of language acquisition methods in the classroom?

Conceptual Framework: English Learners, teacher development, language acquisition, academic content understanding

Statement of Consent: Thank you for talking with me today about the implementation of professional development opportunities this year at VES as they relate to building teacher capacity to teach English Learners. The questions asked will allow us to reflect on the professional development we have offered to teachers this year in the area of teaching English Learners, English language acquisition, and EL academic content understanding. Further, it will help us intentionally shape professional development efforts related to instructing English Learners and developing language acquisition in the future. Personally identifiable information will not be included in the findings nor included in any reports developed from this interview. In order to capture your responses accurately, I will record our conversation. Are you willing to proceed with this interview?

Administrator Interview Questions

Icebreakers:

1. Tell me about something positive which occurred in your school this year.

2. In reflecting on your school year, tell me about something you wish you could go back and do over.

English Learners

3. In general, describe the home languages, backgrounds, and characteristics of the English Learners in your school.

4. What concerns you most about teaching English Learners?

5. Tell me what unique challenges come with teaching English Learners.

6. What strategies have been employed to help English Learner(s) learn academic content?

7. Share a success or successes you observed related to teaching English Learners this year.

8. What challenges have you observed related to teaching English Learners this year?

Language Acquisition

9. Describe what language acquisition means to you as it relates to English Learners?

10. How long does it take for an English Learner to acquire proficiency in English?

11. Tell me how a student's home language can impact their acquisition of English.

12. Describe your understanding of academic language acquisition.

13. How is social language acquisition different from academic language acquisition?

14. Why is language acquisition a factor when teaching English Learners?

Teacher Development:

15. Thinking about any workshops, conferences, school or district trainings, tell me about any professional development opportunities:

    a. You have been involved in this school year.

    b. Your teachers were provided this school year.

16. Outside of PLC meetings, were any of these professional development opportunities specifically related to teaching English Learners? If yes, explain the training.

In PLCs this semester, we discussed research-based strategies for teaching English Learners. The next few questions are related to what we discussed in PLCs.

17. Tell me about the use of graphic organizers, note taking documents, sentence frames, and other types of documents with ELs you observed in your school.

18. What have you noticed about the participation of ELs when speaking and writing in English?

19. Describe the use of visible language (labelling items in English and Spanish) you have observed in classrooms.

20. What did you notice about how teachers implemented triads in the classroom?

21. How have you seen teaching change because of the training in _____? (Customize questions to refer to specific pieces of training the teacher mentioned in questions 17, 18, 19, and 20.)

22. Tell me about a specific strategy your teachers seemed to implement successfully.

23. What seemed to be the least effective strategy used by your teachers? Explain.

24. Describe any shifts you noticed regarding the teaching of English Learners.

25. Was the training

    a. Timeline appropriate in length?

    b. Means of delivery appropriate?

    c. Implementable for teachers?

26. In thinking about the time on task observation tool

    a. Describe the level of training you received prior to using the time on task observation tool.

    b. Describe the usefulness of the information collected with the time on task observation tool.

    c. What improvements could be made to the time on task tool to make it more usable?

27. Thinking about the feedback loop conversations

    a. What do you perceive about teachers' participation in the conversations?

    b. Describe the benefits of the feedback loop conversations.

    c. Describe the challenges of the feedback loop conversations.

28. Is there further information you would like to share with me about English Learners, language acquisition, or professional development for teachers?

Classroom Observation Tool: EL Student Opportunities to Use English

Classroom: _____ Grade: _____ School: _____ Date: _____ Time: _____

Time: Every 2-minutes	Teacher Activity/Location	Student Activity/Location	Speaking	Reading	Writing

Speaking, Reading Writing Code Key: For each time interval, you will mark three different indications.

*Codes 1-4 indicate the interaction of the EL.

*Codes L1/L2 indicate the language of the interaction.

*Codes S/A indicate social vs. academic language use.

CODES:
1. EL Students
2. Teacher
3. Triad
4. Whole Class
L1: Home language
L2: English
S: Social Language
A: Academic Language

Notes:

Observer: _____

VITA

Mary Greenlee Moak

EDUCATION

2015
Master of Education, K-12 Leadership, The University of Mississippi

1994
Bachelor of Music Education, Mississippi College

1989
High School Diploma, Shannon High School

ACADEMIC EMPLOYMENT

2016-Present
Assistant Director of Research and Development, Madison County Schools

2015-2016
Assistant Principal, Claiborne County School District, Port Gibson High School

2014-2015
Assistant Principal Intern, Petal School District, Petal High School

2010-2014
Choir Director, Petal School District, Petal Upper Elementary School

2006-2010
Choir Director, Madison County Schools, Madison Crossing Middle School and Germantown Middle School

2002-2006
Music Teacher, Oak Hill Academy

2002
Music Teacher, Rankin County School District, Florence Elementary School

1994-2001
Music Teacher, Clinton Public School District, Clinton Park Elementary School and Eastside Elementary School

2001-2002
Middle School Math Teacher, Cleveland School District, Margaret Green Junior High School

PROFESSIONAL CREDENTIALS

K-12 Vocal Music Education, Mississippi License
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