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Eliminating the Gap: Proposed Implementation Methodology for Phonemic Awareness and Phonics Professional Development

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Eliminating the Gap: Proposed Implementation Methodology
for Phonemic Awareness and Phonics Professional Development

By
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Abstract

Teachers have the opportunity to improve students' early literacy success by becoming more proficient in phonemic awareness (PA) and phonics instruction through Professional Development. While some studies show that teachers struggle with PA and phonics concepts, application of implementation best practices could provide teachers with the instructional guidance and support needed to help students achieve the best early literacy outcomes.

This project explores the unique challenges of phonics instruction and the best practices in professional development implementation that can bridge the gap between what the curriculum learning goals and teachers' practical instruction actions. The project identifies a framework for the use of Professional Learning Communities over the course of six months to transform phonemic awareness from a theoretical construct into a practical classroom application methodology.

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Chapter One: Introduction

Problem Statement

There is a gap between the critical nature of phonemic awareness (PA) and phonics as part of a comprehensive early literacy curriculum and teachers' skillset for practical classroom instruction that provides proficiency in these two areas (Brady et al., 2009; Carson & Bayetto, 2018; Driver et al., 2014; Wilson et al., 2015; Nicholson & McIntosh, 2020). Although curricula may have incorporated some primary and interventional learning goals, there are teachers who likely have insufficient knowledge in PA and phonics (Carson & Bayetto, 2018; Driver et al., 2014).

Importance and Rationale of the Project

Balanced literacy has been a focus of curriculum development for the past few decades, however "teachers must be well versed in research and balanced literacy in order to make the best choices for their students within a particular context" (Madda et al., 2011, as cited by Thoma, 2021, p.3). In 2000, the National Reading Panel (NRP) put forward five factors of instruction for balanced literacy: 1) phonemic awareness, 2) phonics, 3) fluency, 4) vocabulary, and 5) comprehension (Thoma, 2021 (citing NRP; National Institute of Child Health and Human Development [NICHD], 2000)).

Yet even as a critical part of the NRP curriculum, many early educators are not able to accurately identify syllables or phonemes, for shorter or longer words

(Skibbe et al., 2016). This study is critical to understanding what professional development (PD) methodology is best for supporting the successful implementation of PA and phonics into teachers' classrooms and reducing the gap in teachers' instruction of two of the five factors of instruction for balanced literacy.

Background of the Project

Recent podcasts ("Sold a Story" by American Public Media) and articles have resurfaced the discussion and history of a debate that has shaped literacy curriculum over the last 30 years. As discussed by Double et al. (2019), the battle of the "Reading Wars" has been a debate of whether to shape early literacy curriculum with a focus on phonemic awareness (PA) -- understanding relationships between letters (graphemes) and their sounds (phonemes) -- or a focus on reading at the whole-word level. During the 1980s, phonics -- and its curricular opponent, whole-language -- became the forefront of many political debates as legislators passed bills that moved toward one extreme of instruction at the cost of the other (Lemann, 1997). While the dispute between the methods can be traced as far back as the 1920s, the ebbs and flows of phonics in the classroom has led current teachers to be underprepared to execute on the balanced literacy enshrined by the NRP (Lemann, 1997; Thoma, 2021).

Currently available phonics Professional Development (PD) programs have been utilized to introduce PA and phonics to a new generation of teachers. Courses such as Phonics International (Hipplewhite, n.d.) were founded on the

implementation methodology of synthetic phonics in the United Kingdom as the result of a government focus on phonic testing in young students (Double et al., 2019). According to Brady et al, (2009) teachers in the profession, preservice and inservice, require additional training in PA and phonics.

A majority of teachers know that PA and phonics are an important part of early literacy, but don't know how to teach it effectively (Carson & Bayetto, 2018; Driver et al., 2014; Skibbe et al., 2016). Every teacher deserves to be taught this critical aspect of reading instruction by a professional through a PD course.

Programs like Synthetic Phonics could introduce early literacy teachers to an arsenal of practical classroom exercises and concepts that could be utilized to address some of the greatest difficulties students encountered while learning to read. While many teachers have not been presented with a framework that makes PA and phonics accessible (Skibbe et al., 2016; Brady et al., 2009), utilizing expert-driven, well-designed PD focused on implementation best practices can bridge the gap for teachers to bring PA and phonics to their classrooms.

Statement of Purpose

The purpose of this study is to develop an implementation methodology where PD content presented by PA and phonics experts will be able to effectively educate and empower teachers to find the PA and phonics gaps in their own early literacy curricula and address them in collaboration with their colleagues through the use of Professional Learning Communities (PLCs). This project will not include

the design of the PA and phonics content, as there are many programs that are available through US curriculum providers or from the UK. This proposal will be referencing the general type of content that might be covered in a PA or phonics curriculum or part of a larger reading curriculum.

This project looks to address the issue of the implementation gap – not by focusing on developing content, but by focusing on the application of best practices in implementation to ensure that PA and phonics are actively utilized in the classroom (Fixsen, 2012). Throughout the reading wars and the last century, effective phonics content has been utilized to produce improved results over other methods (Lemann, 1997). While there may be other reasons that attribute to decreased reading proficiency scores across the United States (U.S. Department of Education, 2020) like socioeconomic factors (Herring et. al, 2022), this project will focus on the PA and phonics. By creating a framework that brings the best practices of PD that translate to teachers utilizing the knowledge in the classroom, teachers will have their best results in implementing the knowledge provided by a PA and phonics expert.

Objectives of the Project

The objectives of this project include three key elements:

- 1) To apply the best practices of professional development that will give administrators and other educational staff of the implementing school expert-led instruction on:
 - a. PA and phonics (as many of the teachers will not have experienced this in their own elementary classrooms)
 - b. the full set of tools, knowledge, and techniques needed to teach early readers PA and phonics
 - c. the unique educational challenges of PA and phonics throughout early literacy
 - d. the necessary collaboration across and between all elementary grades to address vertical and horizontal integration of PA and phonics methodologies
- 2) To develop an infrastructure that provides teachers with consistent and reliable support from other teachers as they introduce PA and phonics into their own classroom instruction
- 3) To establish a timeframe that allows teachers to fully interact with the expert content, experience the challenges in the classroom over the course of the school year, and work through practical

implementation and activities together to ensure effective

implementation and eliminate confusion and doubt where possible

In order to pursue these objectives adequately, this project will propose an implementation framework that incorporates the best practices of professional development and professional learning communities, including a template timeline and agenda that allows teachers to incorporate learnings over the course of 6 months.

Definition of Terms

Fluency- The ability to read a text quickly and accurately with expression.

Grapheme- symbols that represent sounds in writing (Roberts et al., 1967)

Phonemic Awareness (PA)- “refers to the ability to focus on, distinguish, separate, and manipulate phonemes within pronunciations of words” (Ehri, 2022, p. 53).

Phonemes- sounds of speech (Roberts et al., 1967)

Phonics - “...the teaching of grapheme–phoneme correspondences” (Bowers & Bowers, 2017, p.124).

Professional Development (PD)- Phase commonly used to refer to professional continuing education.

Professional Learning Communities (PLC)- Ongoing professional development meetings where teachers can collaborate, share student work, and discuss teaching strategies and going curriculum development (Verdi, 2022).

Professional Learning Community (PLC) Peer-Coach- A teacher that has been trained to guide participants in a PLC through collaboration and problem solving.

Sight Words- “early automatic reading vocabulary” (Rawlins & Invernizzi, 2019)

Synthetic Phonics- An approach to teaching phonics where words are broken up into the smallest phonemes. -

Systematic Phonics Instruction- According to Bowers (2020) “systematic phonics instruction “explicitly teaches children grapheme-phoneme correspondences prior to emphasizing the meanings of written words in text (as in whole language or balanced literacy instruction) or the meaning of written words in isolation (as in morphological instruction)” (p. 683).

Scope of the Project

There are specific best practices for approaching the implementation of a new teaching concept. While Phonemic Awareness (PA) and phonics are not new teaching concepts, they have been underrepresented in comprehensive reading curriculum and instruction (Skibbe et al., 2016). This project will propose an implementation methodology that combines best practices for professional development implementation and Professional Learning Community implementation that can best address implementation gaps in the practical instruction of PA and phonics.

The resulting implementation methodology of this project will be designed to be content-agnostic, so I will not be addressing particular PA or phonics curriculum

or a particular expert to hire. By focusing on the implementation methodology for PLCs that will be required for a successful Implementation Stage (Fixsen, 2012), this proposal accounts for the effective uptake and translation of PD material to the classroom (Sokel, 2019).

In addition, this project does not address the importance of positive teacher attitudes in PD success. Each teacher will have different degrees of readiness for change, and a district looking to implement this PD will need to determine which teachers would benefit most (Brady et al., 2009). This project also does not measure other literacy skills such as vocabulary, fluency, or comprehension, but focuses on PA and phonics exclusively (Carson et al., 2018).

Chapter Two: Literature Review

Introduction

Curriculum utilized by teachers often contains PA and phonics learning standards – however, this does not always translate to teachers’ preparedness for PA and phonics instruction in the classroom (Brady et al., 2009; Carson & Bayetto,, 2018; Driver et al., 2014; Wilson et al., 2015; Nicholson & McIntosh, 2020).

In order to reduce the implementation challenges of phonemic awareness (PA) and phonics as part of a comprehensive curriculum, this project focuses on the use of implementation science principles, professional development (PD) best practices, and collaboration through professional learning communities (PLC). Therefore, this literature review discusses the specific challenges presented by PA and phonics implementation, and identifies frameworks for implementation, PD, and PLCs.

Theory/Rationale

Fixsen highlights the increase in work that has been done to better understand the strengths and deficiencies in implementation frameworks (Fixsen, Naoom, Blase, Friedman, & Wallace, 2005; Greenhalgh, Robert, MacFarlane, Bate, & Kyriakidou, 2004; Aladjem & Borman, 2006; Blase, Fixsen, Naoom & Wallace, 2005; Vernez, Karam, Mariano, & DeMartini, 2006, as cited by Fixsen, 2012). Out of this research, four key stages of implementation are necessary for the best chances of

incorporation of an innovative change into a standard methodology: 1) Exploration Stage, 2) Installation Stage, 3) Initial Implementation Stage, and 4) Full Implementation Stage.

Exploration Stage

Implementation stages begin with the Exploration Stage and activities that will be familiar to many teachers in that they are required to assess needs and explore innovations that should be implemented (Fixsen, 2012). Under the Fixsen framework for implementation, those looking to implement an innovation or change should utilize the Exploration Stage to determine the most critical gaps and unfulfilled educational needs, review materials and explore resources to fulfill the needs, and incorporate teachers and administrators with thorough and frequent transparent communication (Fixsen, 2012). When exploring the implementation of a new teaching methodology or skillset, extensive activity and resources are dedicated to understanding the needs of students across all grades and a determination of what changes will best assist student outcomes. This is an extremely challenging prioritization as the scope of possibilities for innovative initiatives exponentially expands as the education professions seeks to modernize, globalize, and empower teachers at the same time as the profession looks to standardize and reduce variety in implementation.

Installation Stage

During the Installation Stage, the educators and administrators “gather the resources needed to use the innovation as intended” (Fixsen, 2012). This stage is critical, as sometimes a district considers the innovation to be meaningful and necessary, but does not take into account the resource, people, commitment, or time needed to execute (Fixsen, 2012). In discussing which activities fall into the Installation Stage, Fixsen discusses how “activities over time are required to learn about and make good use of effective education practices” (Fixsen, 2012, p. 4). Activities in support of instruction will happen regardless, but Fixsen makes the case that it is better that Installation Stage activities are purposeful and intentional before any implementer of a new method move towards implementation. (Fixsen, 2012). Many times implementation can be done “haphazardly” leading to unreliable outcomes for students. (Fixsen, 2012).

Initial Implementation Stage

The idea that the Initial Implementation Stage can be highly structured will be unfamiliar to many as it involves the process by which teachers begin to use the new way of teaching within the classroom (Fixsen, 2012). Discomfort in the classroom may lead to teachers deciding “to modify the innovation to make it more tolerable, or simply retreat to the old and familiar ways of teaching” (Fixsen, 2012, p. 4). The goal of the Fixsen four-stage implementation framework is to ensure that

there is a support structure that decreases the likelihood that a teacher might revert to the previous methodology.

When first implemented within a school district, a new approach like the implementation of PA and phonics relies on teachers and staff using their full skills and experience to make the implementation as effective as possible. In the Initial Implementation Stage, students are exposed to the exercises and materials for the first time (Fixsen, 2012). This may produce discomfort for both teachers and students as they navigate this new instruction together, and this is a critical stage to guide teachers to utilize a new method and not fall back to previous methods (Fixsen, 2012).

Full Implementation Stage

The Full Implementation Stage is used to describe when over half of teachers are using the innovation and realizing the outcomes (Fixsen, 2012). Fixsen stresses the importance that the school district support the new methodology through a structure that allows it to continue into the future (Fixsen, 2012). Without the use of best practices in implementation, only 14% of innovations reach full implementation and require 17 years to take hold, while using best practices could help 80% of innovations reach that stage in only 3 years (Fixsen, Blase, Timbers, & Wolf, 2001, as cited in Fixsen, 2012).

Research/Evaluation

Unique Challenges Present in the Implementation of PA and Phonics

Balanced literacy has been a focus of curriculum development for the past few decades, however teachers are not necessarily always aware of the research that led to the five principles in a balanced literacy curriculum, and therefore can't make the best choices for their students when it comes to classroom instruction (Madda et al., 2011, as cited in Thoma, 2021). In 2000, the National Reading Panel put forward five factors of instruction for balanced literacy: 1) phonemic awareness, 2) phonics, 3) fluency, 4) vocabulary, and 5) comprehension (National Institute of Child Health and Human Development [NICHD], 2000, as cited in Thoma, 2021). Even if a curriculum contains phonemic awareness and phonics, teachers may require additional skills to be able to successfully implement the instruction in the classroom (Brady et al., 2009).

Provided curricula do not always contain the instruction required to translate phonemic awareness exercises into effective classroom instruction. In Skibbe et al. (2016), a team examined commonly used curricula in the Head Start program and assessed how they incorporated phonological awareness and phonics (Skibbe et al., 2016). Across the curricula they assessed, each had some type of exercise that aligned with phonics recommendations, but "differed greatly in the number of objectives and instructional strategies included for PA and phonics instruction" (Skibbe et al., 2016, 225).

One aspect that was missing, however, was the explicit instruction for how to incorporate these skills into the classroom (Skibbe et al., 2016). They also identified that even when teachers understand focusing on phonics is important, they do not know how to instruct students effectively (Joshi et al., 2009, as cited in Skibbe, 2016.) Thus, a more well-developed curriculum may serve a critical role in a teachers' ability to incorporate PA and phonics into classroom instruction (Skibbe et al., 2016). Between two types of curricula they identified – overall approach curricula and “lesson-based curricula, which describe specific daily activities to engage children in learning throughout the year” – the team was surprised to see that even the lesson-based curricula did not provide adequate attention to PA and phonics (Skibbe et al., 2016).

Wonder-McDowell (2010) identified that the alignment of purchased curriculum and intervention materials with the classroom scope and sequence of instruction in PA and phonics brought benefit to at-risk students so that they were not receiving different instruction on the same topic (Wonder-McDowell, 2010). The different classes in different grades taught reading skills at different times, covered different sight words, and used different terminology to teach similar concepts, and not approaching PA and phonics from a similar perspective (Wonder-McDowell, 2010).

When it comes to phonemic awareness and phonics, it is just as important for teachers to understand why these areas are included as a focus for best practice

so that they can identify how challenges with these two factors will impact more complex foundations that present themselves in comprehension (Thoma, 2021). Students that do not form a solid foundation in phonics will find it difficult to decode words when they read (Ehri & Flugman, 2018; Martin & Mullis, 2013; Sanden et al., 2022; Schwartz, 2022). Without knowledge of the phoneme-grapheme connection and phonics as building blocks of literacy instruction, students will be unable to apply the other aspects of the comprehensive reading program – fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension (Dilgard et al., 2022).

There is a critical period in which challenges in phonics can be alleviated to improve future reading comprehension performance in students. Phonemic awareness and phonics have been proven in the UK to provide a better foundation for reading comprehension when introduced and tested at the right time in reading development. In Double et al. (2019), a longitudinal study was conducted on results of students in the United Kingdom who originally failed the mandatory phonics assessment in Year 1 (age 5-6) and compared with their year 5 (age 9-10) Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) (Double et al., 2019). The hypothesis of the study was that students who failed the Year 1 phonics assessment, but passed the Year 2 phonics assessment would perform better at reading comprehension when compared with those students who failed both Year 1 and Year 2 (Double et al., 2019).

The synthetic phonics curriculum has been a mandatory and primary aspect of early literacy education in England since 2012 when the Department of Education implemented Phonics Screening for all early literacy students (Double et al., 2019). This led to the creation of an extensive support system around PD for synthetic phonics in the UK as suddenly every early literacy teacher in the UK needed to implement a new government-mandated curriculum (Double et al., 2019). Although there has been evidence that identifying difficulty in phonics is critical at this stage (Double et al., 2019), there are debates over whether synthetic phonics as a methodology is better than other methods of teaching phonics as part of a comprehensive curriculum.

While their hypothesis was proven, there were also other interesting findings that indicate the critical incorporation of phonemic awareness into early reading instruction. The study showed moderate to large correlations with the phonics check in Grade 1 (age 5-6) compared to a teach assessment of reading ability at age 7 (Double et al., 2019). They also found a slightly smaller correlation with the PIRLS exam at age 9-10, but identified that the “phonics check is a significant predictor of later reading comprehension performance, albeit one that dissipates over time. (Double et al., 2019).

Most critically, among the students who failed the first phonics assessment and received individualized intervention, those students who improved over the course of the next year and before the second phonics check did comparably better

four years later in the PIRLS than those students who also failed the second phonics check (Double et al., 2019). This indicates that there is an ideal time for testing phonics, for teaching phonics, for intervention, and that if a school is able to address phonics difficulties it will improve performance in reading comprehension (Double et al., 2019).

Even if a teacher has a great curriculum, and excellent interventions for phonics deficits, teachers find phonics difficult to teach as their own knowledge of PA and phonics is underdeveloped (Crim et al., 2008; Joshi et al., 2009, as cited by Skibbe et al., 2016). Thus, simply utilizing a curriculum that incorporates PA and phonics may not ensure early literacy instruction success (Skibbe et al., 2016; Nicholson et al., 2019). A comprehensive curriculum and effective approach to early literacy will likely need “professional development initiatives focused on expanding teachers’ strategies for promoting PA and phonics skills more broadly” (Brady et al., 2009; Skibbe et al., 2016).

Frameworks for Effective Professional Development

In moving to standardize curriculum and teaching practices for best results for students, many studies have been conducted in recent decades that focus on the characteristics of successful teacher professional development (Darling-Hammond, 1999, as cited by Thoma, 2021). Attributes range from having a unified vision of best practices across coursework to having well-defined standards to guide and evaluate performance – but creating a development program that utilizes problem-based

methods will help create an outstanding development program (Darling-Hammond, 1999, as cited by Thoma, 2021).

Even with an excellent overarching framework, specific facets of professional development are needed for teachers to really implement what they are learning. In order for teachers to transfer the knowledge acquired in PD into action in the classroom, there must be content that presents the theory, a demonstration of how to implement the theory, practice, and prompt feedback (Showers et al., 1987, as cited by Thoma, 2021). Teachers are also more likely to practice and utilize the strategies they are taught if they receive coaching from their peers while they are trying new ideas in the classroom (Showers et al., as cited by Thoma, 2012). Teacher retention of information is critical as every moment of PD is a tradeoff of other valuable work. Studies focused on measuring impact on teacher outcomes identified that teachers having an opportunity to be observed in the classroom and multiple opportunities to practice were critical to success (Hattie, 2009, as cited by Thoma, 2021).

Even when an educational environment succeeds in fostering a culture of inquiry, many times teachers can feel that they are expected to take their own personal time to fully explore their curiosity and inquiry through professional development. Teachers often have no time to engage in conversation groups or programs during their “working hours,” even though collaboration and leadership is now cited by schools as a critical feature of teacher development (Snow-Gerono,

2005). In order to exercise best practices in professional development, schools need to give teachers time for PD as an integral part of their employment (North Central Regional Educational Laboratory (NCREL), as cited in Slick, 2002). In comparison with other regions of the world, American teachers are not given enough job-embedded opportunities for development, or opportunities to collaborate with others for planning lessons (Cook, 1997, as cited in Slick, 2002). When teachers participate in PD in the form of a PLC, “teachers are given time to collaborate with colleagues in a structure that facilitates meaningful, sensitive communication” that results in effective implementation of the PD content (Slick, 2002, p. 200).

In a qualitative study meant to focus on why a PD course was considered effective, Sokel identified that while we tend to only think about the content based features of the course, like the topic and program design (Kennedy, 2016, as cited by Sokel, 2019). However, characteristics that are also considered key to effective professional development include how active learners are in their participation, whether there is collaborative work, and the coherence of the framework (Sokel, 2019). Ultimately, professional development should be based on real-world challenges that actually arise in the classroom and properly frame the concerns that teachers have with implementation (Sahin & Yildirim, 2016, as cited by Sokel, 2019).

Active participation is also a key of Sokel’s findings, especially that the lecture-style learning typical for PD is not as effective as giving the teachers opportunities to link the concepts they are hearing to the actual teaching context in

which the participants work (Desimone, 2009; Garet et al., 2001, as cited by Sokel, 2019) Effective PD will help teachers learn through action (Bayar, 2014, as cited by Sokel, 2019), as long as the actions have coherence to the style of implementation necessary (Garet et al., 2001, as cited by Sokel, 2019). Ideally, professional development involves a series of coherent activities that provide teachers a collaborative opportunity to reflect, share ideas and strategies, and problem-solve collectively (Garet et al., 2001, Guskey, 2003, as cited by Sokel, 2019).

Frameworks for Effective Professional Learning Communities

One of the keys in improving schools is to ensure teachers understand the success objectives of their curriculum, know how to attain these goals for students, and know where to go if they identify a gap in students' current knowledge around early literacy; this can be maximized in a safe and collaborative environment where teachers talk to each other about teaching (Hattie, 2009). There are many factors that come together in an educational environment to foster effective implementation through professional learning communities, including vertical and horizontal alignment of instructional methodology and creating a culture of inquiry.

However, providing a new methodology once without follow-up is not an effective implementation methodology. Encouraging teachers to be precise and continuous when practicing a new teaching method can be achieved through the implementation of *Professional Learning Communities* (PLCs) (Joyce, 2004, as cited in Thoma, 2021). A PLC is a group of teachers who establish goals to work toward

and objectives for learning collaborative (Slick, 2002). PLCs allow teachers to share best practices on how students will learn, what they will learn, how teachers will know if the student is learning, and how communities will respond to challenges with student learning (Eaker et al., 2009, as cited by Thoma, 2021; Meesuk et al., 2021). PLCs and the use of relationship-based models of professional development have proven to be effective for improving instruction for early literacy skills, likely as early literacy is unique in needing to be primarily taught through experience (Cunningham et al., 2015, as cited in Thoma, 2021).

PLCs will be more effective if the teachers participating in the group feel that the educational environment creates a culture of inquiry. Teacher inquiry is defined by Snow-Gerono (2005) as “systematic, intentional research by teachers” (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1993, as cited by Snow-Gerono, 2005, p. 241). Teachers who come together in a PLC will have particular goals of discovery and implementation, and the environment requires that teachers feel the ability to treat their own classroom and activities as an environment that welcomes their own research (Clark, 2001, as cited in Snow-Gerono, 2005). A PLC requires that teachers are ready to participate in open dialogue and that they are able to ask questions in a group that supports uncertainty (Snow-Gerono, 2005). Any group looking to become an effective PLC will need trust and safety between the members, and work at establishing good team relationships (Clark, 2001, as cited in Snow-Gerono, 2005).

PLCs will also thrive in a school that promotes inquiry, or the idea that not every teacher needs to have every answer – but rather should be encouraged to ask questions (Snow-Gerono, 2005). Two characteristics that make a culture of inquiry stronger are “a shift to uncertainty and a shift to community” (Snow-Gerono, 2005, p. 243), especially a community that encourages collaboration and open conversation in a way that allows teachers to communicate freely within their PLC. PLCs themselves are not without tensions they bring by promoting educational change, but a well-managed PLC can promote a reflective environment that also checks and understands its own culture of inquiry and cause teachers to explore a level of conversation that is inquisitive in nature (Snow-Gerono, 2005).

Utilizing her experience in leading a two-year, learning-community-based graduate program, Slick identified that learning communities with certain characteristics had the potential to invigorate teachers around a topic area where teachers are traditionally unenthusiastic. (Slick, 2002). Even though teachers might be unfamiliar with a topic, well-structured PLCs allow teachers to connect their development goals and ideas for new concepts with applications in their own classrooms (Slick, 2002). However, in order for this professional development structure to lead to positive teaching attitudes or reenergizing teachers about their profession, teachers also need the support and alignment of their administrators, curriculum coordinators, and other teaching professionals at their school (Slick, 2002).

If one teacher is the only teacher in a school trained in PA and phonics implementation, they will likely find that they are an agent of change and innovation operating independent of the other teachers in their school. More support is needed that could help the teachers in a school come together to determine how to fill this gap in a way that was uniformly presented to students and would carry across the years of their early literacy education (Brady et al., 2009, Skibbe et al., 2016).

Vertical and horizontal curricular alignment activities allow teachers to critically compare curriculum and instruction across classrooms and between grades (Wonder-McDowell, 2010). Wonder-McDowell (2010) also began to look into the idea that the second-grade core-reading program would not include explicit PA and phonics instruction as students were expected to have mastered the skill, implying that curricula may be lacking to reteach or support students behind in these skills. While interventional material is directed toward students who had not mastered specific PA and phonics skills, the intervention was done as soon as the skill was established (Wonder-McDowell, 2010).

This made it challenging to vertically integrate curriculum across first grade year and second grade year when the PA and phonics skills are presented and retaught very rapidly (Wonder-McDowell, 2010). The team identified “the scope and sequence of instruction within the classroom core on a curriculum map” and then the PA and phonics skills and characteristics were mapped as well (Wonder-McDowell, 2010, p. 49). Each decodable text from the second grade was added to

this map and identified where target spellings were to be taught (Wonder-McDowell, 2010). This is an excellent example of teachers from multiple grades working together to map the curriculum, identify what they are really teaching from a phonetic level, and strategically and intentionally understand how teaching sounds would align with the decodable texts. In order to address these challenges, they identified where each book belonged in the scope and sequence map even if it deviated from publisher and curriculum recommendations (Wonder-McDowell, 2010). This also stresses the importance of materials being provided that align with the curriculum, but also practices that integrate vertically from grade to grade (Wonder-McDowell, 2010). Once aligned, Reading Specialists reported that there was faster student improvement with the aligned curriculum than before the teachers completed this exercise (Wonder-McDowell, 2010, p. 56). Further analysis showed that the integration “had a statistically significant positive effect on students’ . . . ability to decode phonetically regular words” (Wonder-McDowell, 2010, p. 57). In order for PLCs to be effective in PA and phonics implementation, PLCs should participate in a similar vertical and horizontal alignment exercise.

When a school-wide approach is used for curricular alignment, excellent results can be accomplished that support teachers’ ability to work together in classroom implementation. In Thoma (2021), the school district implemented a curriculum that included testing for phonological awareness and phonics. While this curriculum was originally used in only Kindergarten and first grade, it was expanded

to sixth grade within two years (Thoma, 2021). Teachers from all grades or specialists could select lessons from the same curriculum and framework, which led to student familiarity with recommended routines like how “each child knew how to ‘finger stretch’ a word using their fingers to count each phoneme in a word” (Thoma, 2021, p. 7). This vertical and horizontal integration allowed teachers to assist students, even when they had been taught the basics of PA and phonics in another class (Thoma, 2021).

Summary

Creating an environment where teachers come together to critically review their own curriculum across grades and understand exactly what phonemic awareness and phonics skills are being taught when is critical for teachers to understand what it takes to implement these challenging skills into classroom instruction (Wonder-McDowell, 2010). Even if a teacher has a great curriculum, and excellent interventions for phonics deficits, teachers find phonics difficult to teach as their own knowledge of PA and phonics is underdeveloped (Crim et al., 2008, Joshi et al., 2009, as cited by Skibbe et al., 2016). A comprehensive curriculum and effective approach to early literacy will likely need “professional development initiatives focused on expanding teachers’ strategies for promoting PA and phonics skills more broadly” (Skibbe et al., 2016).

Not all professional development (PD) is equally effective, and there are characteristics of currently implemented PD that will not address the

implementation gap between current PA and phonics curriculum and effective instruction. Current PD gives topical information to teachers, likely through passive learning like a lecture (Desimone, 2009, as cited in Sokel, 2019), but does not provide a roadmap for using it within district-mandated curriculum. Teachers must have the opportunity to link ideas from PD directly to the context they work in, which involves a specific curriculum, other teachers, and other grades to consider (Garet et al., 2001, a cited in Sokel, 2019). Current PD opportunities often do not provide adequate time for teachers within a school to meet and systematically collaborate about how the program is going to be implemented in their classrooms.

Ultimately, PLCs are critical to a culture of inquiry because posing questions and looking for answers is challenging to do alone (Snow-Gerono, 2005). PLCs are not defined just by an interest in collaboration, but by the coming together of colleagues to have discussion and discourse around the process of solving their challenges (Snow-Gerono, 2005). The dialogue may bring teachers to disagree, debate, critique, and propose different alternatives, but also acknowledges the multi-lateral nature inherent in education and the implementation of multiple ideologies and frameworks – to “embrace problem-posing as a means for professional development” (Snow-Gerono, 2005, p. 251). Even if colleagues do not come to a consensus, they have participated in productive conversation where they have learned another colleague’s perspective and experienced growth through uncertainty (Snow-Gerono, 2005).

Conclusions

By combining the best practice of effective implementation with critical skills that are overlooked in current curricula, phonemic awareness and phonics professional development could make an enormous impact in early reading instruction. Currently, there is a gap between what curriculum contains with regards to PA and phonics and what is recommended to be in a comprehensive early literacy curriculum. There is also a gap between what teachers know about PA and phonics and what they should know in order to provide effective instruction. The literature in this review supports the idea that if a professional PA and phonics expert were to teach teachers over a period of time that also allowed them to actively practice and collaborate around the topic, the implementation gap in PA and phonics could be reduced. In its entirety, the next chapter is based on the concepts synthesized from the literature covered in this review, which provides the basis for the following implementation proposal.

Chapter Three: Project Description

Introduction

This project proposes to bridge the gap between PA and phonics being critical components of a comprehensive reading program (Dilgard et al., 2022) by requiring teachers to participate in effectively structured PD that clearly gives the skills for classroom instruction through an implementation methodology that produces consistent and reliable results (Fixsen, 2012). Accordingly, the goals of this project are:

- 1) To apply the best practices of professional development that will give administrators and other educational staff of the implementing school expert-led instruction on:
 - a. PA and phonics (as many of the teachers will not have experienced this in their own elementary classrooms)
 - b. the full set of tools, knowledge, and techniques needed to teach early readers PA and phonics
 - c. the unique educational challenges of PA and phonics throughout early literacy
 - d. the necessary collaboration across and between all elementary grades to address vertical and horizontal integration of PA and phonics methodologies

- 2) To develop a PLC infrastructure that provides teachers with consistent and reliable support from other teachers as they introduce PA and phonics into their own classroom instruction
- 3) To establish a timeframe that allows teachers to full interact with the expert content, experience the challenges in the classroom over the course of the school year, and work through practical implementation and activities together to ensure effective implementation and eliminate confusion and doubt where possible

This chapter describes a project designed to meet these objectives. It begins with a discussion of the necessary actions of the Exploration Stage, followed by the commitments and resources required through the Installation Stage. The subsequent section includes the Initial Implementation Stage when teachers are expected to utilize PA and phonics in the classroom and concludes with additional steps for the Final Implementation Stage.

Project Components

Following the four implementation stages proposed by Fixsen (2012), a district looking to implement PA and phonics into classrooms should look to take the specific actions outlined in this proposal to maximize the chances of student improvement.

Exploration Stage: Identifying the Experts

One critical aspect of implementing this Professional Development will be for the administration to work with teachers to identify a phonics expert that meet certain criteria with how they approach the teaching of phonics. Thoma (2021) identified seven literacy interventions that showed evidence of effectiveness in areas of phonological awareness (e.g., “Earbotics, Instructional Conversations and Literature Logs, Leveled Literacy Intervention, Reading Recovery, Success for All, Stepping Stones to Literacy, and Sound Partners” (Thoma, 2021, p. 4), indicating that there are likely many curricula that are in place that have some type of identified phonics methodology.

The school or district that is utilizing this methodology will develop criteria based on the unique needs they see within their school, and also the extensiveness of the curriculum and supplemental materials through their current provider. There are particular characteristics identified in the literature as best practices that the school should include when searching for two experts (one for phonics and one for PLC development) to provide the content for the PD.

A primary concept of effective PD is that participating educators are provided a scaffolding for the concepts they will learn and have ample opportunities to apply the concepts to that scaffolding throughout the PD (Sokel, 2019). With phonics this is especially important as the concepts are challenging and educators struggle to identify the phonics framework themselves (Skibbe et al., 2015). This is also why this

particular PD is not an ideal candidate for teacher-led training, as it is likely that few teachers will have seen this content optimally implemented. As this is unlike what current teachers have been taught for early literacy instruction, having an expert provide a complete overview will be a supplement to instruction they should have received while in their university education program. By presenting a comprehensive PA and phonics framework and creating coherence between all the material taught and implementation in the classroom, an expert who provides the content will increase the likelihood that the material will be implemented with students in the classroom (Sokel, 2019).

There will also need to be opportunities for teachers to observe classroom methods and see the expert teaching phonics to them in exactly the way they should implement it in the classroom, so the teacher can internalize how they should pass it on to the learner (Sokel, 2019; Thoma, 2021). This is one reason why in-person PD for this topic is so important, as it is not a concept that is taught on paper, but through action and activity by the teacher. The expert should directly show teachers how the lessons should look, in addition to the research and evidence behind why a lesson should look that way. The teachers must also have enough opportunity to try teaching the content and receive immediate and constructive feedback from the expert throughout the content portion of the PD.

Another expert who will need to be engaged is a PLC expert to teach the PLC coaches how to coach. As phonics implementation is likely to be a controversial

topic as it is in the UK, PLC coaches will need to learn how to create an environment of trust, moderate and facilitate the opinions of the group, while managing dissensus and keeping the group on target for the objectives they must accomplish at each session. This is, in itself, a skillset that many professionals practice and hone over the course of their careers. The implementation will be much smoother and more effective if the PLC coaches are taught methods by an expert for keeping the implementation on track.

Identifying Criteria for Success of the Program

A critical aspect of the Exploration Stage is preparing the participating educators with the knowledge of why this is an educational need and have an opportunity to pre-read materials and attend a meeting explaining the methodology of implementation (Fixsen, 2012). This will present the opportunity to assess buy-in for the planned participants (Fixsen, 2012) and assess the interest in faculty to be trained as PLC Peer-Coaches. Within these meetings, potential participants are likely to ask if there is an agreed-upon method for assessing the progress of the implementation – how teachers will be assessed at using phonics within the classroom, and what improvements they might expect to see in student outcomes (Fixsen, 2012). As the district will likely not implement the same testing methodology as the UK by testing the whole population of students during early literacy through standardized testing, each district will need to consider if they intend to pursue student testing or if they will use the results of already

implemented comprehension testing in advanced literacy to assess the success of the program over time. This would require the program to be in place for multiple years to begin to see improvements in comprehension in later grades.

Determination of PD Availability

Districts have many programs they must train teachers for in elementary instruction, although literacy could be seen as a critical goal in addition to early mathematics. The district will need to balance the priority of phonics in relation to the time allotted for PD throughout the course of the school year. In the example district identified in Appendix A, there is enough PD for this proposed implementation, but there will be minimal time for other courses. Over time and after implementing the program for multiple years, the time commitment may not need to be as great as more educators in the school become proficient in phonics instruction, and a PLC support system in addition to a training for new teachers may be all that is necessary. What is critical is identifying what schedule works best for the district that is implementing so that teachers spend minimal amount of time outside of their work-schedule implementing the new classroom activities and practices.

Identifying if there is availability in the current PD time allocation for a PA and phonics implementation that incorporates training and PLCs is critical – however, support of faculty and administration, preparation of resources, planning

and scheduling of training and PD, and stakeholder communications can prepare any new program for success.

Installation Stage: Preparing the Time, Participation, Support, and Commitment

While districts may be familiar with the intensive and careful process of prioritizing and assessing various needs, the Installation Stage may be less familiar as it involves resources, people, space, time, activities, materials, initial training, and stakeholder communications (Fixsen, 2012). Activities in this stage will prepare the implementation for success, but dedicating insufficient time and planning for insufficient training in this stage can impair the successful implementation overall.

While current PD implementation can vary from a theoretical multi-hour lecture to a multi-year PLC course, this proposed course will involve varying levels of participation for different segments of participants. However, it is critical that adequate time is given for each group – whether administrators, support staff, PLC coaches, grade K-2 teachers, or grade 3-6 teachers – to fully understand the material and translate the education provided through the PD into practical implementation in the context of their particular school. If these groups are not given adequate time to implement, the students will not receive the benefit of the PD, which would eliminate the actualization of the investment by the district (Fixsen, 2012).

Inspired by the thirty-hour PD course length described in Sokel (2019) that takes place over three months with eight face-to-face sessions (Sokel, 2019), this PD will take place over the course of six months with ten face-to-face sessions that will

allow PLCs to conduct three specific experiments for the implementation of Synthetic Phonics concepts within their classrooms (one experiment per marking period). Although the proposed structure is 36 hours in length, it addresses the need for all PD and PLC activity to take place during the designated time allotted for teachers during working hours and does not make expectations for teachers to utilize their own time for collaboration with other teachers (Snow-Gerono, 2005).

While this may seem like an extreme time commitment in comparison to other PD, the teachers will not only be learning the content of Synthetic Phonics, but the structure of group collaboration in PLCs, and the implementation structure required for innovation and experimentation that can be readily applied to other areas of education (Fixsen, 2012). Schools must set this time aside if they would like teachers to do the critical work of addressing implementation gaps in curricula (Slick, 2002), and dedicating this time and attention will highlight the importance of early phonemic awareness in reading (Double et al., 2019). Ultimately, as teaching young students to read is considered to be one of the most important responsibilities of primary grade teachers (Wonder-McDowell, 2010), dedicating this time to experimentation can give a school an understanding of whether early phonemic awareness can be improved through the use of Synthetic Phonics.

Participation of Administrators

Support of the administration is cited as one of the most critical aspects of the success of new methodology implementation, as well as some of the most

successful explorations into PA and phonics integrations (Fixsen, 2012; Slick, 2002; Snow-Gerono, 2005). Similar to the exercise in Snow-Gerono (2005), if teachers within the PLCs are going to have collaborative opportunities to critically assess PA and phonics in curriculum, explore an inquiry project, and participate in peer coaching (Snow-Gerono, 2005), they will have a more positive attitude about initiating change if that have the full support of administrators (Slick, 2002).

In this proposal, the Administrators will attend the first day that includes PD led by an International Phonics expert (“Synthetic Phonics Content PD 1” and “Synthetic Phonics Content PD 2”) that covers the basics of Synthetic Phonics and gives a unified vocabulary and framework for implementation of PA and phonics within a comprehensive reading curriculum, as well as participation in PLCs (“PLC Session 1” and “PLC Session 2”).

Through attending “Synthetic Phonics Content PD 1” and “Synthetic Phonics Content PD 2,” administrators will: (1) show support for the investment by the district into the PD, (2) receive an overview of what is being taught and implemented over the course of the PD so that they can appreciate the value and results in the classroom, (3) lead by example and show that they take the time commitment of the teachers seriously, (4) help support the implementation by providing feedback at an integral stage, and (5) hold the stakeholders participating in the PD accountable by their participation. It is also integral that these administrators build the same vocabulary for PA and phonics as the PLC Coaches and

teachers so that administrators can easily gain context for any experiment measurements or report outs by the PLCs.

By participating in “PLC Session 1” and “PLC Session 2,” administrators will have the opportunity to discuss the importance of early reading instruction with teachers. Administrators will be able to provide a unique viewpoint into what the current curriculum provides and how it is currently being taught, and then provide an aspirational viewpoint of what implementation could provide after the full process of the 6-month PD process. They will also be able to answer teachers’ questions and hear teachers’ concerns so administrators can support teachers when the new methodology is implemented within the classroom.

Participation of Support Staff

Participation of interventionist, reading specialist, and instructional coaches throughout the PD and PLC process would be integral, especially for those support staff that specifically support grades K-2 as that is a particularly effective timeframe for PA and phonics to support future reading skills (Double et al., 2019). Consistent with the experiences of Wonder-McDowell, reading specialists may prefer to be responsive to the needs of students using their own current methodologies – but learning about and utilizing activities aligned with primary instruction will give them greater ability to meet the needs of students (Wonder-McDowell, 2010). Early intervention for difficulties in PA and phonics has proven extremely effective for supporting reading performance in later schooling years (Double et al., 2019), and

support staff will be critical in the successful implementation of any PA and phonics curriculum.

Support staff also need an understanding of why the five factors of instruction put forward by the NRP include phonemic awareness and phonics in addition to the more commonly understood aspects of fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension (Thoma, 2021). Intervention programs need to be aligned with what is taught in the classroom so that intervention time is not spent working on another reading program, but that interventions support what is being taught in the classroom (Skibbe et al., 2015; Wonder-McDowell, 2010).

For interventionist (Tier 2) or SPED teachers (Tier 3), working on PA and phonics may be a familiar intervention concept (Double et al., 2019; Wonder-McDowell, 2010). What may be less familiar for interventionist is an understanding of exactly how their interventional approach matches vertically with how the material was taught in previous years, or horizontally with how that material is being taught in the primary (Tier 1) instruction at that moment (Wonder-McDowell, 2010). By participating fully in this PD, support staff will participate in the vertical and horizontal alignment of PA and phonics curriculum, the implementation of Synthetic phonics, and ultimately be better able to differentiate the instructional activities that are being utilized and help students progress faster (Wonder-McDowell, 2010). Students who are pulled out of class for intervention groups will be able to see the

same implementation methods being utilized across their education and will benefit from complete alignment (Wonder-McDowell, 2010).

Participation of Early Literacy Teachers (K-2)

Early literacy teachers will have the most to learn from this PD as they are responsible for the most critical period of implementation for PA and phonics knowledge (Double et al., 2019). Learners who struggle with phonics have the most to gain from intervention methods and are proven to have the ability to catch up and succeed with later reading comprehension (Double et al., 2019). However, phonics as an isolated teaching goal is not as effective as incorporating phonics into already practiced reading instruction (Double et al., 2019). Providing high-quality early literacy instruction requires teachers to consider balanced literacy as well as an understanding of why the five factors of instruction put forward by the NRP include phonemic awareness and phonics in addition to the more commonly understood aspects of fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension (Thoma, 2021).

Participation of Upper-Elementary Reading Teachers (3-6)

The continued development of PA and phonics skills and capabilities does not stop when PA and phonics are no longer in the primary and interventional curriculum (Double et al., 2019), therefore it is important for teachers in later grades to be able to identify deficits in PA and phonics skills in their classroom – and have the vocabulary and implementation knowledge for review. Those students who are not proficient in PA and phonics could have difficulty extracting critical information

from graphemes even into adulthood (Double et al., 2019), and all teachers should be aware of the methods for reviewing and enforcing PA and phonics skills. When it comes to balanced literacy, teachers of upper-elementary readers may focus on fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension but need an understanding of how phonemic awareness and phonics are the foundation of the five factors of instruction put forward by the NRP that make up a comprehensive reading curriculum (Thoma, 2021).

Preparation and Participation of PLC Peer-Coaches

While participation of administrators, support staff, and teachers is critical in both the Installation Stage and the Full Implementation Stage, the employees who express interest and come forward to be trained as PLC Peer-Coaches will be in a position to either foster an open and trusting environment for experimentation or to create a group that fails to implement effectively. The selection and training of the PLC Peer-Coaches will be a critical aspect of the Installation Stage and must occur in a short period preceding the beginning of the PLCs themselves. Although seemingly challenging, the expert hired to train teachers about how to coach the PLCs and coaching in general will have the opportunity to invigorate the coaches, give them a voice and a meaningful engagement with colleagues (Slick, 2002). The coaches will have the opportunity to bring collaboration and dissensus to their colleagues, and a new energy and commitment to Synthetic Phonics will likely emerge (Slick, 2002).

Selection of PLC Peer-Coaches

Employees who would like to become PLC Peer-Coaches should have an idea of the impact they would like to have on the professional setting of the school and have an interest in bringing a culture of inquiry and problem solving (Snow-Gerono, 2005). The potential impact of the PLC Peer-Coaches is the ability to impact 5 other teachers and 150 students indirectly, creating a magnifier of the implementation effectiveness of Synthetic Phonics (Fixsen, 2012). In thinking about how to develop high quality, effective coaching services, greater emphasis will need to be placed on the Selection of Coaches as there is not necessarily going to be leaders who both know Synthetic Phonics and the process of coaching and establishing PLCs (Fixsen et al., 2018). The expectations and accountability that the coaches will be held to will need to be explicit and pre-determined, as well as the anticipated time commitment and schedule. Additionally, PLC coaches should be given a stipend for their additional work through this process. This will show the educators that the administration values the process and acknowledges that the time commitment to oversee this process will, at times, require additional work outside of traditional working hours. In my own experience, a small stipend conveys a school district's understanding that there will be additional work by taking this position.

Creation of PLC Peer-Coach PLC

The first aspect of preparing the PLC Peer-Coaches is to create a PLC Peer-Coaches PLC. As these coaches will be introduced and trained in a new skill that they

do not likely have experience with, there will need to be ample opportunity for support and feedback for coaches throughout the implementation to compensate for minimal direct interaction and training with a skilled Synthetics Phonics expert (Fixsen et al., 2018). In order for the implementation of the professional development to be as effective as possible, peer-coaches need practice and collaboration among themselves to implement the other expectations of the professional development (Thoma, 2021). The PLC Peer-Coach PLC will serve as a community for the PLC Peer-Coaches to ask questions about the skills they learned, ideas for implementing, challenges, and clarifications for the objectives that they are driving toward for each PLC session.

Training of PLC Peer-Coaches

The goal of PLC Peer-Coach training will be to achieve the competence and confidence that will allow the coaches to guide discomfort with a new teaching methodology as well as continual experimentation in the classroom (Fixsen et al., 2018). As a PLC implementation expert will be hired to train the PLC Peer-Coaches, that expert will draw on their own experience or program to provide content for the 4-hour training that will take place immediately before the PLCs will form and begin work. PLC Peer-Coaches will also be trained in technology and methodology specific to the school that is implementing the PLCs. For example, the use of a particular notecatcher for each PLC Session or how to submit the notecatchers to a shared folder, like Google Drive, for all stakeholders to view.

One particular aspect of PLC Peer-Coach training will need to be the ability to create an environment that welcomes open discourse and dialogue, but also can manage the discomfort teachers are likely to feel with being asked to instruct in early literacy using a different method than they have been taught, or practice throughout their career (Fixsen, 2012). This might be an uncomfortable situation for a colleague to guide a team through, and therefore Peer-Coach training should include specific guidelines for how to manage discourse in a way that the environment remains open and considerate. Peer-Coaches will be critical to guiding colleagues to disagree and continue to collaborate productively.

Now that the Exploration and Installation Stages have provided the foundation for PD, the initial implementation stage will allow administrators and teachers to learn about the importance of PA and phonics and utilize their skills and extensive experience to collaborate on the best way to implement and produce excellent results for student outcomes.

Initial Implementation Stage: PD Utilizing Expert-Taught Content in Combination with Professional Learning Communities

This proposed implementation of PLC participation supports teachers to practice as public and transformative intellectuals (Snow-Gerono, 2005), but also to do it within a group as promoting and living an inquiry culture within a school is incredibly difficult to do alone (Snow-Gerono, 2005). By identifying curriculum gaps in PLC Session 2, planning what to do to address it as a PLC group, and then

designing the experiment and measurements in PLC Session 4, this structure will empower teachers to learn to work together to identify gaps in implementation and the tools to work together to try to improve student results. The teachers will also participate in the activities of an experiment in a purposeful and efficient method three times over the course of three marking periods (Fixsen, 2012), giving them the chance to practice and refine their understanding of how to implement new practices as a group.

By incorporating the absolute best practices in PD with the collaborative possibilities of PLCs, this Initial Implementation Stage proposal provides the best opportunity for closing the gap in PA and phonics for student performance. Through Professional Learning Communities (PLCs), this framework will offer a method through which teachers and administrators can utilize current mandated curricula and purchased PD while actively engaging teachers to identify gaps and work together to fill them.

Every single theory session is accompanied by a direct practical application session (Sokel, 2019) that allows a Peer-Coach who is in the field and actively implementing to ground the intangible aspects of PA and phonics into exercises and applications the teachers can use immediately. Through the framework of Peer-Coaches giving very clear expectations, agendas, and guidance at every PLC session, this implementation methodology is intended to prevent teachers from reverting back to their previous methodologies or fail to use the phonics instruction as

intended (Fixsen, 2012). By designing experiments and setting expectations as a small group within the PLC, the PLC participants should be more willing to try at least the amount that was defined by the group, and hopefully narrow the gap between the PA and phonics theory they learned, and the challenge of implementing new instruction activities. As the PLCs will carry so much of the burden for the effective implementation of this PD, I will define in detail the anticipated stages that the PLCs will go through and the importance of each stage.

Stages of PLCs

The stages of this PLC are designed to flow from one to the other (Sokel, 2019) to provide coherent structure, engage the learners constantly, and promote extreme collaboration through the PLCs (Sokel, 2019). The stages could be established throughout a particular session or agenda, but the principles of each stage of the PLC could be reinforced through interactions or revisited by the PLC Peer-Coach at any time. Some of the stages are designed more towards building an atmosphere of trust and safety (Slick, 2002; Snow-Gerono, 2005), while other stages are meant to infuse structure and coherence (Sokel, 2019). Ultimately it is critical that participants make clear connections between the theory they all learn together and the practical content they will create together (Sokel, 2019).

Formation of PLCs

Each PLC should consist of all grade level classroom teachers, interventionists that support a grade level, and an administrative representative. The administrative

representative could be a principal, assistant principal, instructional coach, reading specialist, Dean of Students, and if needed someone from central office such as the K-12 Consultant for Curriculum & Professional Development or the Director of Assessment, Research, and Evaluation. Having these administrative representatives has numerous benefits. First, this will give administrators first-hand knowledge about what is being taught in the classroom and the planned method of instruction. Second, it will be an accountability measure to ensure that the PLCs are functioning as planned. Third, it will show teachers how dedicated the school and district are to this PD and PLC, they are attending the sessions as well because this information is pertinent to all parties.

In the initial PLC session, PLC members must guide the group through developing the norms for their PLC. These are agreements between PLC members that will be adhered to by all. Some examples of PLC norms may be: a) assuming positive intentions b) starting on time c) sticking to the agenda d) scheduled breaks e) and an agreement of how workloads will be divided. They will document these norms on their PLC Agenda & Minutes Notecatcher (See Appendix C) and be reviewed at the beginning of each PLC meeting. These documents will then be added to a school-wide drive where the documents can be accessed by all invested parties. This is an important part of accountability and well as helpful for vertical alignment. While all grade levels are not able to meet in PLC they can look at each other's PLC Agenda & Minute Notecatchers.

Norms of PLCs

Many teachers reach out to colleagues with questions and discussion, however the formation of formal, structured PLCs that have outlined agendas will avoid many pitfalls of other implementations of PLCs (Snow-Gerono, 2005). A group of professionals joining together to accomplish an initiative can be structured for success, or – if left to their own devices – can transform into a time-consuming burden that does not provide the promised value. In order to do this, a team can create norms focused on promoting good conversations, creating an environment of safety, trust, care, respect as well as the structure for voluntary collaboration and creation with a group (Snow-Gerono, 2005). Identifying and consistently reviewing and revisiting norms of a PLC is essential to structuring a PLC for continued success. Giving group members the ability to create their own norms allows them to give their opinions on how part of the PLC process will occur.

For example, each PLC group can agree upon who takes minutes in the PLC Agenda & Minutes Notecatcher or how the individual is selected. Are people assigned new tasks at each meeting or for a predetermined period of time? These are choices that each PLC group must make together in order to create an effective collaborative atmosphere with adequate buy-in. Some ideas to get a group started are: What time will the meeting start? Where will the meeting take place? How will roles be divided? Who will take minutes? How will workload be divided? How will parties be held accountable? What does “professionalism” look like? Are teachers

allowed to grade during the PLC process? How will participation be monitored? Who is responsible for creating the agenda/how will the agenda be decided? Who will communicate with administration about tasks that will need to be completed during the PLC? How will it be addressed when people are off task or do not follow the norms? This is not an exhaustive list, but a jumping off point for PLC members to discuss their ideal PLC meeting and how members will act. This will support PLC members building responsibility and accountability with each other and with the process (Slick, 2002).

While there is a need to create an environment that promotes the sharing of meaningful, sensitive thoughts (Slick, 2002), there is also a need to create a record for what has been discussed as there is little likelihood that the entire PLC will be able to attend every session without fail due to illness or other unanticipated events. Teachers will also be able to reference back to these notes in their conversations with other grades, encouraging vertical alignment. Capturing the dialogue that accompanies a PLC will create a rich environment for communication across all stakeholders (Snow-Gerono, 2005), but PLC Peer-Coaches will need to guide the team through creation of norms that strike the right balance between privacy and transparency.

The development of norms is not the end of this phase of the PLC – the norms will be reviewed and relied on by the PLC Peer-Coach to drive towards the objectives of the PLC, and remind participants of their guidance and commitment to

each other. This will be difficult throughout the school year as teachers become busier with instruction, testing, and accruing responsibilities and requirements on their time. Norms set at the beginning of the PLC should be practical for implementation over the course of the six months of PD. Some of the key components of this later implementation of the PLC norms will involve Norms identifying expectations for tolerance and understand, respect toward all participants, and support and communication as challenges continue to accrue (Slick, 2002).

The practice of norm-setting that is guided by a PLC Peer-Coach will have benefits beyond the optimal functioning of the PLC. Participants in PD note that experiencing a program with excellent structure can positively contribute to a understanding of learners' need for more structure throughout lessons (Sokel, 2019). Similarly, once teachers experience the establishment of norms that allow them to be most productive when they try to collaborate, other collaborations throughout the school may become less frustrating as they carry the best practices across other initiatives. If participants in any initiative know what is going to happen, what is going to be expected, what the order of activities will be, and the anticipated conclusion, they can be more focused on productive collaboration and content and less anxious about the challenges of working collaboratively with others (Sokel, 2019).

Collaboration of PLCs

Collaboration is not always more productive than individual contribution – however, the traditional instructional activity of the teaching profession has isolated teachers to implement on their own, with little formal structure to constructively discuss, debate, and understand the thoughts and methods of their colleagues (Snow-Gerono, 2005). Strength and innovation can be reinforced when colleagues are able to consider, together, the knowledge, skills, and capabilities needed for effective practice in their field (Sokel, 2019). More importantly, teachers are presented with a lot of theory about the educational process, and yet every student and every classroom and every school year is different than the ones before. Colleagues need collaboration to clearly connect the theory to the ways in which they can address the continually changing needs of their students (Sokel, 2019).

As discussed previously, it is critical that teachers have a framework for understanding PA and phonics across their own grade (horizontal alignment) as well as across different grades (vertical alignment) (Wonder-McDowell, 2010). One unique feature that this PLC process will have is when multiple grades will be able to meet to combine their PLC groups to discuss vertical alignment. This will inform teachers what skills upper grades see lacking in students coming into their classroom (Sokel, 2019). This will not happen often, but will give teachers insight into what standards and skills that they may need to focus on more (Snow-Gerono, 2005). It is important at the beginnings of these cross-grade PLC meetings that the norms of the

individual groups are shared so that everyone is on the same page with the expectations. In addition, teachers should have the agenda of a cross-grade PLC shared with them at least two weeks prior to the PLC so that they can come with data they have collected.

The formation and norms of PLCs do not automatically create collaboration. PLCs are not effectively implemented when one colleague pushes their own definition or interest of collaboration, but when the PLC struggles together to use the norms to gain multiple perspectives on their practice and profession (Snow-Gerono, 2005). One advantage of utilizing a PLC for PA and phonics is that many of the teachers will be coming to the conversation with curiosity and uncertainty as that is not a subject for which they likely received extensive education (Snow-Gerono, 2005). One challenging aspect of the lack of exposure to PA and phonics is that teachers may have questions, uncertainties, or even explicit doubts about the needs of PA and phonics instruction given that they may not be currently using it in their classrooms. This disagreement and dissensus with the PD content will be an important aspect of the benefits of collaboration in PLCs, but will be a particular stage of the PLC that will need to be navigated.

Dissensus of PLCs

One critical feature of the PLC is that it is a place where teachers can pose critical questions, doubts, and concerns to colleagues to hear their multifaceted perspectives on what could be done. Teachers who do this will be showing humility

in the fact that they do not have all the answers (Snow-Gerono, 2005), and this questioning environment will be uncomfortable for some. Collaboration is only really attained when people are assisted and supported with their questions, and this will naturally bring forward multiple conflicting viewpoints of how those questions would be answered.

This will be especially prominent for the PA and phonics PD where the concepts are going to be very new to many teachers, and might even be in conflict with what they were taught due to the varied positions taken to curriculum over the course of the 'reading wars' (Double et al., 2019). Teachers may not want to explore the changes to be made in classrooms because it could send a message that previous curriculum or instruction was inferior to what is being taught through the PD.

During PLCs it is important that teachers feel free to share their ideas and listen to those of other educators. It is during this time that they are able to reflect on their teaching practices and add strategies they learn from their colleagues (Sokel, 2019). This practice may be uncomfortable for some teachers, but it is an essential part of the PLC process (Fixsen, 2012). When teachers are able to confer with each other in an honest and trusting environment, they are able to accurately reflect and contemplate how to improve their craft without judgement (Sokel, 2019). During the norms process teachers should have discussed how they would deal respectfully with a difference of opinions, and the PLC Peer-Coach can guide the PLC

in using these norms (Slick, 2002). It is okay if teachers do not reach an agreement on the “right” way to teach phonics, however all teachers must be open to the training they are getting from the PD professionals (Snow-Gerono, 2005).

Ultimately, the community perspective of the PLC should be valued in equal part to the individual beliefs expressed, and the PLC should utilize their norms to move beyond disagreement towards productive experimentation (Snow-Gerono, 2005). The PLC environment will foster professional dialogue, and maintain a community of mutual sharing and collaboration (Slick, 2002). Teachers may disagree with the community perspective and agree to respect the decisions of the PLC as to how to move forward with the next steps of experimentation.

Experimentation of PLCs

While this stage of PLC implementation is not directly supported in the literature, I believe that it is a critical aspect of innovation to incorporate into the structure and philosophy of effective PLC implementation. It is rare to have an initial idea about ideal implementation of a new instruction practice or methodology be the perfect approach, and the scientific method supports experimentation and measurement for the purposes of peer-reviewed publication and to further the entire profession in their understanding. Little structure or training is provided in professional educational environments for individual experimentation, even though that is what teachers do on a daily basis. In order to account for the continued provision for current and direct needs of students and colleagues, effective teachers

learn and experiment in their own classrooms and adjust based on the results (Sokel, 2019). Even more important is an educator's consistent experience as a learner of a new topic or study that they can take and adapt into their teaching – teachers are consummate experimenters and innovators. PLCs will offer teachers the opportunity to try this experimentation in a formal structure, through collaboration with colleagues, that could cultivate an entire staff of teacher researchers who are prepared to find the answers to their curiosity and questions together as opposed to in isolation (Snow-Gerono, 2005).

In this proposed framework for implementation, the PLCs will run three experiments on the implementation of PA and phonics into their classrooms – one experiment each marking period. In the example agenda, the initial experiment will be supplemented by two in-person meetings of the PLCs so that they can have mid-point check ins as they become familiar with the new experimentation methodology. By repeating an experiment in the second and third marking periods, the PLC participants will be honing their new skills on how to run an experiment and have the opportunity to shift to address aspects of the first experiment that did not meet their expectations. Participants will be able to bring their real experiences with the first experiment into the creation of the second experiment, making the PLC discussions more dynamic and applicable (Sokel, 2019).

PLC participants will also have the opportunity to gain a sense of success with each round of the experiment, which will be beneficial as it is possible that the long-

term success to students in their future reading comprehension may only become apparent after multiple years. By giving structure to the cycle of expectations and execution, it also allows PLC participants time to work together and to work individually. Conducting the experiments over the course of six months provides an adequate timeframe to guide the team toward exceptional collaborative performance (Slick, 2002). This format will also allow PLC participants to have their own autonomy over the application of what they've learned, and utilize higher-order thinking skills that transform theory into practical classroom action (Sokel, 2019).

When teachers hear “professional development,” they are likely not thinking about a methodology that implements this level of rigor in the translation of theory into the classroom. However, if PA and phonics are under implemented as core aspects of a comprehensive reading curriculum, implementation is the likely culprit. Extraordinarily successful teacher training requires a rigorous curriculum, use of problem-based methods, clinical experiences, and strong relationships among the school (Thoma, 2021). The implementation of experimentation in PLCs will ensure that teachers can take a presentation about PA and phonics theory, demonstrate the new strategy through an experiment designed with colleagues, receive initial practice with feedback from peers and experts, and create a framework for new ideas to be tested and tried in the classroom (Thoma, 2021).

Measurement by PLCs

As with all well-designed experimentation, the PLCs will need to develop their own ideas of how to measure the success of the implementation of their experiment. When thinking of the effects of a change in the classroom, the focus can be on the extent to which a teacher is using the new method (Fixsen, 2012) or looking at the student testing outcomes. There are various forms of assessing teacher implementation, from measuring the frequency of how often a new instruction method is used in the classroom to in-classroom assessments to determine how effectively a new instruction method is being used (Wonder-McDowell, 2010).

For the PA and phonics experiments being tested by the teachers, they should look for measurements that are taken on a weekly basis as relying on standardized testing will not give them frequent enough feedback to make modifications between experiments. If teachers have difficulty implementing PA and phonics, the PLC will be able to see the results through the weekly measurements or the communications on the notecatcher. The participants and PLC Peer-Coach are well positioned to propose further training or techniques, and advise and coach educators throughout the PD process, and the measurements need to reflect the progress the PLC accomplishes together.

Another critical aspect of measurement will be to identify if there are students who are struggling with PA and phonics skills. While the UK has

implemented a standardized test for this, it is an expensive and controversial approach (Double et al., 2019). Teachers are best positioned to identify how they would like to distinguish those students who excel at PA and phonics, and those who are behind, even if it is a qualitative assessment determined by the teacher. This will be a critical assessment as early literacy seems to be a critical period for developing this skill (Double et al., 2019) and that students who can be targeted for intervention early are able to catch up by the time students are moving to comprehension skills (Double et al., 2019). This data will be critical throughout the PD for teachers to identify which experiments provide the most progress for students, but also to strengthen the PLC in their discussion and assessment of how to approach reteaching. Reteaching is a reality of having classrooms with students at various levels of proficiency, and the PLCs can create measurement techniques that allow them to be agile as opposed to standardized type of testing that may not best suit their needs.

The PLC Peer-Coach should guide the PLC through selecting meaningful metrics where they are willing to present and stand behind the results. As PA and phonics will be a new aspect of a current reading program, teachers may have various levels of apprehensiveness for how, when, and why to implement the methods. By allowing the PLCs to select and guide the measurement, it will increase buy in and trust in the results and contribute to the monitoring of the success of the implementation.

Full Implementation Stage: Iteration, Success, and Wide-Scale Adoption

The first round of teachers, administrators, Peer-Coaches, and stakeholders will be part of an experiment in the future of collaboration in professional development and the future of PA and phonics instruction within their schools. By setting them up for success with a successful Exploration and Installation Stage and providing sufficient time and resources to collaborate on methodology, support, and outcomes through a successful Initial Implementation Stage, the next steps will become apparent at the conclusion of the proposed implementation. Through reflection, the PLCs will discover together the depth of their ideas and practices, as they deconstruct what has happened with their experiments and why (Snow-Gerono, 2005). This PD that incorporates content and collaboration will extend teachers outside of their isolation and strengthen their practices as a community (Snow-Gerono, 2005).

Similar to how an initial idea is not perfect and must be iterated to provide maximum value and success, this implementation method is not perfect and will need to be iterated before moving to the Full Implementation Stage. Given the nature of the experimentation supported in this proposal, it would be unusual if the PLCs did not provide an extensive amount of feedback that initiated changes before a district would attempt full implementation. Teachers will be armed with specific examples from their classrooms and experiments, and approaching this program as one that can be shaped by the teachers honors their efforts and experience (Sokel,

2019). Under Fixsen (2012), Full Implementation is defined as the stage in which at least half of the teachers and staff in a district are using the PA and phonics instruction and are realizing the intended student outcomes. It may be years and many cycles before the proposed methodology is refined enough to determine it is ready for this level of deployment.

The first step in understanding the success of the Initial Implementation is the reporting out of the PLCs to the administration and full cohort of PA and phonics PLCs. This will help all the PLCs and administration understand the connections between the PD and the specific needs of the participants in their own instructional practice (Sokel, 2019). It also helps the administration to evaluate the effectiveness of the PD and incorporation of PLCs and make adjustments and plans for when and how often to repeat this method (Sokel, 2019). It may not require such an extensive time requirement each year but must be designed to ensure the education and practices endure “from one cohort of teachers and students to the next” (Fixsen, 2012, p. 4). Similar to the PD discussed in Slick (2002), when you give teachers autonomy in how they apply best practices to their own classroom but teach them to do so in a way that promotes research and measurement, teachers will get focused and energized. The true success of this proposed methodology is training a force of teacher-researchers who will be armed with the scaffolding and framework to collaborate with their colleagues continually. This will be the true future of PA and phonics implementation. If teachers are given the skills needed to meet the future

challenges of their students together, any challenges they face are a matter of constructively collaborating and experimenting to produce the best student outcomes possible.

Project Evaluation

The purpose of the plan outlined in this project is to support teachers during PD by integrating the PLC process that gives support to participants. Supporting teachers and improving their PD will in turn help students understand and learn the curriculum chosen and provided by the school district. The first way to evaluate the effectiveness of the project is to give teachers pre-PD and post-PD feedback forms (See Appendix C). The pre-PD feedback form should include their rating of the effectiveness of PDs and how likely they are to implement the information provided. The post-PD feedback form should include the same questions, but also include if their rating was impacted by the integration of the PLC process. These feedback forms should be done before and after every PD throughout the year. At the end of the year teachers should be given a survey to give their opinions and views on the PLC process completed throughout the year. The second way to evaluate the plan outlined in this project is to give students a pre-test and post-test on their phonics skills. Also, year-to-year state and district standardized testing data should be compared, and teacher reported reading scores should also be looked at to determine program efficacy.

This project can be considered effective if teachers feel that they were better supported during PD, if they were more likely to implement the new curriculum or initiative (or if they implemented a bigger percentage in comparison to the past), or if the overall feeling about changes in curriculum trended higher. In combination with teacher PD/PLC feedback, if students testing scores improve or there is a positive trend in teacher reported reading scores, that can also show this project is effective.

Project Conclusions

The determination of what should be incorporated in early literacy instruction has been a topic of debate for nearly a century for a good reason – teaching children to read establishes the foundation by which they have the capacity to “read to learn” throughout their lives. Of the five components of a comprehensive reading curriculum, the incorporation of phonemic awareness and phonics has had various proponents and opponents over time, which has led to an uncertain exposure to the topic for many teachers. Even if teachers have PA and phonics as part of their curriculum, many teachers cannot answer questions related to critical components of PA and phonics (Driver et al., 2014).

This implementation gap can be addressed utilizing the best practices in research-backed implementation methodology in combination with the best practices in professional development (PD). Implementation literature indicates that the preparation for implementation is critical to success, and that creating a

structure that ensures that teachers do not revert to previous methodology is a key part of ensuring a new innovation successfully makes it into student instruction. As teachers are under skilled in PA and phonics, a professionally-led PD course will be needed to introduce accurate concepts and a unified approach and terminology for teachers to utilize. Aside from the content aspect of the PD, utilizing collaboration to provide support and feedback as teachers perform the Initial Implementation Stage is crucial for PA and phonics because they are largely verbal skills. Unless a teacher understands the notation of the International Phonetic Alphabet, they are not necessarily going to be able to translate a written curriculum to active instruction in the classroom without assistance and practice. PLCs are a best practice in collaborative teaching and problem solving, and by letting teachers experiment on implementation methodology and learn together, PA and phonics PD is more likely to bridge the gap between theory and execution.

Plans for Implementation

In addition to implementing the steps outlined in the Project Components, I would first suggest that schools and districts look to see if they have an implementation gap within their phonics program. If they identify a gap, administrators should do observations to try and identify the cause of the gap. Is the gap due to inaccessibility to a curriculum or is the gap due to a lack of foundational knowledge on how to implement the curriculum. If a curriculum needs to be purchased, the school or district should go through their curriculum procurement

process and then implement the PD/PLC process. If they already have a curriculum, they should plan to go through the process the following school year so that their established curriculum can be effectively implemented. This researcher plans to share this PD/PLC process with their district administrators during an Essential Standards PD in the hopes that can inform future curriculum initiatives.

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Appendix A- Example Implementation Agenda

Appendix A Example Implementation Agenda

Dates are utilized for general reference and may not represent the needs of any particular district.

***Synthetic Phonics Content** refers to the example presented in Appendix B. Proposed topics to cover in particular sessions are only examples, as whichever expert that is procured for the PA and phonics PD content will have a specific approach and philosophy to how the content should be presented.

****PLC Coach Content** refers to the coaching goals referenced in Section II.e.3 Training of PLC Peer-Coaches and Section III. Proposed topics to cover in particular sessions are only examples, as whichever expert that is procured for the PA and phonics PD content will have a specific approach and philosophy to how the content should be presented.

***** PLC Session Objectives** refer to the implementation of the PLC Stages in Section III. Proposed objectives to cover on particular sessions are only examples, as whichever expert this is procured for the PLC implementation PD content will have a specific approach and philosophy to how the content should be presented.

PD Session	Topics to be covered/Objectives to be achieved
Wednesday August 24th - Day 1 of “pre-school period” Professional Development	
(Afternoon Session 1) - PLC Coach Content** (2 hours)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - How to moderate and lead as a Peer-Coach - How to Form, Storm, Norm, and perform as a new team - How to design and execute an experiment as a team
(Afternoon Session 2) - PLC Coach PLC collaboration/preparation time (2 hours)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - PLC Peer-Coach PLC review of objectives for PLC sessions with opportunity to raise questions, concerns, and ideas
Thursday August 25th – Day 2 of “pre-school period” Professional Development	
(Morning Session 1) - Synthetic Phonics Content* (2 hours)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) International conclusions of research b) The Systematic Synthetic Phonics Teaching Principles c) Systematic Synthetic Phonics programme design d) ‘Two-pronged systematic and incidental phonics teaching’ and the role of the Alphabetic Code Chart e) The history and the alphabetic code of the English language to ‘set the scene’ f) The importance of the ‘Teaching and Learning Cycle’

(Morning Session 2) - Synthetic Phonics Content* (2 hours)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Methods, philosophies, and personal experience b) The English alphabetic code and phonics skills taught comprehensively as an entitlement wherever the English language is taught formally c) Phonetics and phonics – and changing the perception of ‘phonics’; d) The realities of ‘silent reading’ e) Debbie Hepplewhite’s ‘Two Stage Teaching Model’ and ‘Two-pronged’ approach to synthetic phonics teaching f) Practical classroom management considerations for phonics provision
(Afternoon Session 1) - PLC Session 1 (2 hours)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Icebreaker 2. Discuss PLC overall objective and expectations 3. Define PLC norms 4. Create and establish channels for communication and continual feedback 5. Identify schedule and next three agendas 6. Reflect on the “Reading Wars”
(Afternoon Session 2) - PLC Session 2 (2 hours)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Reflect on current curriculum, inclusion (and exclusion) of PA and phonics (horizontal alignment – please see note¹) 2. Reflect on gaps in the curriculum based on expert PA and phonics led PD
Friday August 26th – Day 3 of “pre-school period” Professional Development	
(Morning Session 1) - Synthetic Phonics Content* Modules 5 and 6 (2 hours)	
(Morning Session 2) - Synthetic Phonics Content* Modules 7 and 8 (2 hours)	
(Afternoon Session 1) - PLC Session 3 (2 hours)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Review scope and sequence of expected curriculum 2. Identify areas where PA and phonics can add words/vocab that fit in with the skills being taught
(Afternoon Session 2) - PLC Session 4 (2 hours)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Select one of the gaps identified in PLC Session 2 2. Brainstorm and hypothesize ideas for an experiment in reading instruction that could address that gap

	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 3. Select an idea, and design an experiment along with the measurement methodology 4. Draft a high level summary of experiment 1 to be distributed and shared to other PLCs in 3 weeks, and submit so it can be reviewed by other PLCs in advance 5. Launch experiment 1 to be started on first day of school
<i>Monday August 29th PM – First day of school</i>	
Friday September 16th – PLC in-person check in (4 hours)	
(Afternoon Session 1) - PLC Session 5 (2 hours)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Review of norms and expectations 2. Questions and challenges with intended experiment 3. Update of measurements and identification of any issues 4. Prepare to share high level experiment design with other PLCs
(Afternoon Session 2) - PLC Session 6 (2 hours)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. All PLC Show and Tell – Each PLC will provide an overview of the experiment they are conducting (no discussion of any collected measurements yet)
Friday October 7th – PLC in-person check in (4 hours)	
(Afternoon Session 1) - PLC Session 7 (2 hours)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Review of norms and expectations 2. Questions and challenges with intended experiment 3. Update of measurements and identification of any issues 4. Prepare for vertical alignment All-PLC session
Afternoon Session 2) - PLC Session 8 (2 hours)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Moderated discussion on vertical alignment of PA and phonics across grades and within the current curriculum
<i>Friday October 28th – End of first marking period</i>	
Tuesday November 8th – Full day PD	
(Morning Session 1) - Synthetic Phonics Content Modules 9 and 10 (2 hours)	

(Morning Session 2) - Synthetic Phonics Content Modules 11 and 12 (2 hours)	
(Afternoon Session 1) PLC Session 9 First marking period experiment results evaluation (2 hours)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Review of norms and expectations 2. Compiling and normalizing of measurements from experiment 1 3. Analysis of measurements from experiment 1 4. Conclusion of experiment 1
(Afternoon Session 2) PLC Session 10 Second marking period experiment design (2 hours)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Select a new gap identified in PLC Session 2 (or PLC can decide to address the same gap with a different experiment) 2. Brainstorm and hypothesize ideas for an experiment in reading instruction that could address that gap 3. Select an idea, and design an experiment along with the measurement methodology 4. Launch experiment 2 to be started immediately
<i>Friday January 20th – End of second marking period</i>	
Monday January 23rd – Half day pm PD	
(Afternoon Session 1) PLC Session 11 evaluation of Second marking period experiment results (2 hours)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Review of norms and expectations 2. Compiling and normalizing of measurements from experiment 2 3. Analysis of measurements from experiment 1 4. Conclusion of experiment 2
(Afternoon Session 2) PLC Session 12 Third marking period experiment design (2 hours)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Select a new gap identified in PLC Session 2 (or PLC can decide to address the same gap with a different experiment) 2. Brainstorm and hypothesize ideas for an experiment in reading instruction that could address that gap 3. Select an idea, and design an experiment along with the measurement methodology 4. Launch experiment 3 to be started immediately
March 17th – Half day pm PD	
(Afternoon Session 1) PLC Session 13 Third marking period experiment results evaluation (2 hours)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Review of norms and expectations 2. Compiling and normalizing of measurements from experiment 3 3. Analysis of measurements from experiment 1 4. Conclusion of experiment 3

<p>(Afternoon Session 2) PLC Session 14 All PLC report and collaboration, conclusion of PD and PLCs (2 hours)</p>	<p>1. All PLC Show and Tell – Each PLC will provide an overview of all experiments and present the results</p>
<p><i>Friday March 24th – End of third marking period</i></p>	

Appendix B- PLC Agenda & Minutes Notecatcher

Appendix B- PLC Agenda & Minutes Notecatcher

PLC Agenda & Minutes

Norms:

Agenda:

Date:	Members Present:	
DuFour's Essential Questions: (Highlight which questions are the focus)		
1.	What do we want students to learn? (essential standards)	
2.	How will we know if they have learned? (common assessment)	
3.	What will we do if they don't learn? (systematic interventions)	
4.	What will we do if they already know it? (extended learning)	
Essential Standard: (Type out or link the full standard)		
Common Assessment:	<u>Highlight/Link:</u> Test-	
Intervention Groups:		
Future items:	•	
Tasks and Point Person:	•	
Notes	•	

Appendix C- Pre and Post PD Teacher Surveys

Appendix C- Pre and Post PD Teacher Surveys

Pre-PD Teacher Survey

Please complete before you leave

bruneta@dearbornschools.org [Switch account](#)

Not shared

* Indicates required question

Name *

Your answer _____

On a scale of 1-5 how effective are PDs? *

1 2 3 4 5

Not Effective Very Effective

How likely are you to implement information learned during PDs? *

1 2 3 4 5

Not Likely Very Likely

How comfortable are you teaching phonics? *

1 2 3 4 5

Not Comfortable At All Very Comfortable

What questions do you have about phonics instruction? *

Your answer _____

Submit [Clear form](#)

Post-PD Teacher Survey

Please complete before you leave

bruneta@dearbornschools.org [Switch account](#)

Not shared

* Indicates required question

Name *

Your answer _____

On a scale of 1-5 how effective are PDs? *

1 2 3 4 5

Not Effective Very Effective

On a scale of 1-5 how effective was this PD?

1 2 3 4 5

How likely are you to implement information learned during PDs? *

1 2 3 4 5

Not Likely Very Likely

How comfortable are you teaching phonics? *

1 2 3 4 5

Not Comfortable At All Very Comfortable

What questions do you have about phonics instruction? *

Your answer _____

How would you use this information to direct your instruction? *

Your answer _____

Submit [Clear form](#)

Data Form



The signature of the individual below indicates that the individual has read and approved the project of *Amanda Brunette* in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Literacy Studies.

Elizabeth Stolle

5/12/23

Elizabeth Petroelje Stolle, Ph.D., Project Advisor

Date

Accepted and approved on behalf of the
Literacy Studies Program

Elizabeth Stolle

Elizabeth Stolle, Ph.D., Graduate Program Director

5/12/23

Date

Accepted and approved on behalf of the Literacy
Educational Foundations & Technology Unit

Mary Bair

Mary Bair, Ph.D., Unit Head

5/12/2023

Date