SUSTAINING A CULTURE OF INSTRUCTION THROUGH BUILDING ADMINISTRATOR AND LEADERSHIP TEAM CAPACITY

by

RICHARD FOWLER

(Under the Direction of Jami Royal Berry)

ABSTRACT

The purpose of the study was to examine the behaviors and actions of the administrative team as they work to grow the leadership team's capacity to improve the instruction culture using action research cycles. The challenges of building a positive school culture at the high school level are vast; however, building a culture specifically around instructional programming provides an equal, if not greater, challenge. Instructional leaders must hone in on specific behaviors and actions needed to develop teacher capacity to affect the instructional culture. The following thematic findings emerged from the study; 1) Collaborative feedback promotes instructional growth; 2) Modeling instructional strategies within professional learning encourages effective implementation; 3) Creating a sense of buy-in increases teacher engagement. The findings highlight that while effective instructional leadership is essential for building a culture of instruction, there is a need to deepen and develop those behaviors and actions necessary for building administrators to create a culture reflective of solid instruction.

INDEX WORDS: Collaboration, Culture, Feedback, Instruction, Leadership, Modeling, Professional Learning

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RICHARD FOWLER

B.A., Howard University, 1994

M.A., University of Texas, 2006

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RICHARD FOWLER

Major Professor:	Jami Royal Berry
Committee:	Karen Bryant
	Kaneshia Dorsan

Electronic Version Approved:

Ron Walcott
Dean of the Graduate School
The University of Georgia
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DEDICATION

I cannot express in words how the support I have received has kept me lifted throughout this journey. To my loving wife, Nikki, who initiated this entire endeavor and believed I could when I thought I could not, thank you for your unwavering showering of love and support. You have stood in the gap for me when I have seen you in the gap and in moments when you were there, and I did not know. For that, I say thank you.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

School culture, created by students, teachers, administrators, parents, and stakeholders, represents habits, beliefs, perceptions, behaviors, and norms relating to the functions of the school (Senol & Lesinger, 2018). School culture is developed over time and sustained by having a clear mission and vision to which all stakeholders are committed. Shafer (2018) articulated that a strong culture has "many overlapping and cohesive interactions so that knowledge about the organization's distinctive character – and what it takes to thrive in it – is widely spread" (p. 1). Aziz et al. (2022) recognized a connection between instructional culture and the role of a leader in building that culture. However, there is an overarching concept of what culture means within a school setting school setting. The role of leadership and intentionality in instruction leads to a culture of instruction. Atasoy (2020) explains the intersection by suggesting that a significant relationship between leadership style, school culture, and organizational change can significantly predict school culture.

Gyeltshen (2020) described the concept of instructional leadership as the impact of leadership on the instructional culture of a school. The leadership behaviors of the school principal aim to improve the capacity of teachers to teach effectually and improve student outcomes (Shengan & Halliger, 2021). Although culture is a comprehensive term that relates to the overall functioning of a school, the term comprises different aspects of the school, including instruction. Three of the most common models of instructional leadership include defining the school mission, managing the instructional program, and promoting a positive school learning

climate (Sebastian et al., 2018). This idea connects school culture to instructional culture as it integrates the effects of instructional leadership into the instructional culture of the school. Gyeltshen (2020) chronicled instructional leadership by claiming, “the first dimension outlines that principal as an instructional leader must embrace school vision of academic success through building a well-established culture of learning and creating conducive learning and working environments of both teachers and students” (p. 10).

The impact of leadership around instruction can be profound in improving student outcomes. Hou et al. (2019) spoke to the effects of this type of leadership by conveying that robust instructional leadership is extensively documented as a core factor in improving school effectiveness. Principals can lead with an instructional focus; however, this type of leadership requires specific actions. Brolund (2016) categorized some of these actions by stating that principals must expose a clear vision and support teacher growth by providing access to resources, coaching, mentoring, and professional learning opportunities.

The behaviors and actions of the principal can quantify the influence of leadership on the culture of instruction. According to Liu et al. (2021), “the instructional leadership model, as defined by many studies, corresponds to the principal’s behaviors and actions directed toward improving teaching and learning in their schools” (p. 433). The behaviors and actions of the principal have a profound impact on the instructional culture of the school. Of all the responsibilities that fall under the role of the principal, the instructional focus must remain paramount. Gurley et al. (2016) clearly stated that improving schools in the 21st century mandates principals exhibit solid skills and expertise in instructional leadership.

Although instructional leadership has been widely accepted and practiced by principals, there are some barriers to this type of leadership. Shaked (2018) denoted one barrier to

instructional leadership by stating, “Research has indicated that while some school leaders do engage in instructional leadership and do consider improvements in teaching/learning as key components of their role, many other principals continue to treat curriculum and instruction as issues of secondary importance” (p. 516). One reason for this avoidance of instructional leadership is a lack of preparation, particularly when the teachers perceive the leader as weak in their instructional leadership. Mays and Gethers (2018) found that although principals felt they were employing transformative practices, the teachers they served felt those attributes were lacking.

Bektas et al. (2022) found that the back-and-forth of collaborative leadership practices, distributed, common, or disseminated leadership, and teacher professional learning remains underdeveloped. Teachers need instructional training to effect more significant student outcomes. The principal alone cannot create a culture of instruction. Wieczorek and Lear (2018) argued that “leadership for learning emphasizes not on the role of the principal but the collective leadership capacity of all individuals to affect school-wide instructional improvement” (p. 26).

Printy and Lui (2021) contended that successful schools have influential instructional leaders. The authors also state that “researchers argue that schools where principals distribute leadership to appropriate stakeholders are more likely to achieve school success” (p. 291). While the idea of distributed leadership is considered typical, there are varying definitions. Harris (2009) and Lashway (2006) described it as a decision-making process performed by staff at multiple levels instead of a single individual. Spillane (2005) described it in four terms – public, collaborative, disseminated, and delegated leadership. The instructional culture in a building is not incumbent on just the principal but a team of educators working to create a conducive

learning culture. Bellibas et al. (2020) surmised that schools should involve multiple staff makers and stakeholders in decision-making.

While there is evidence that the instructional leadership of the principal and administrative team has a profound impact on the instructional culture of a school, there is limited research on the specific actions, behaviors, and distributive leadership practices that the principal and administrative team employ to create a culture of instruction. Specifically, this study examined the behaviors and actions of the principal, the distributive leadership practices of the administrative team, and ultimately, the skill of the leadership team to improve the culture of instruction and, therefore, increase student achievement.

Statement of the Problem

The state in which this study occurred is not immune to concerns about the quality of the instructional program offered to students. Creating and sustaining a solid instructional culture is arduous for any leadership team. Weiner and Woulfin (2018) found that school and district leadership face various pressures to improve instruction and achievement. Continuous improvement of instruction is the cornerstone of all schools and includes the climate, graduation rate, improvement of test scores, or building the capacity of educators. Ingersoll et al. (2018) argued that the key elements of instructional leadership involved having a shared purpose between administration and teachers, an atmosphere of trust, respect, and teamwork, and promoting high academic standards.

Overview of the Research Site Context

Pursuit of Excellence High School (PEHS) is an urban public high school located about 10 miles south of a major southern city. PEHS is situated in a county that is a tale of two worlds. The northern portion of the county represents a mid to high socioeconomic status, while the

southern portion of the city represents a mean to low socioeconomic status. Attaining a sufficient pass rate on state-mandated exams called end-of-course exams was challenging for PEHS. Schools received a score that reflected how students performed on the end-of-course exams in English, Math, Science, and Social Studies. Compared to the county, in 2018 and 2019, students at PEHS scored 26 points and 22.3 points behind the county, respectively. After a shift to virtual learning in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the state Department of Education suspended these exams in 2020 and 2021. When testing resumed in 2022, students at HCCA scored 46.4 on content mastery compared to the district, which scored 73.3 points.

At the time of this study, the PEHS staff comprised 41 teachers. Over half had up to seven years of experience, while four had zero to three years, seven had eight to 10 years, and 12 had over 11 years of experience. The education level of PEHS teachers included 23 teachers with master's degrees and 18 with bachelor's. For this study, the researcher surveyed teachers about their instructional practices through advanced education certification; 33% responded yes to providing instructional activities for their students daily, and 38% answered yes to connecting what students learn in school and their everyday lives. Lastly, 24% of teachers reported using a variety of instructional approaches.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, PEHS spent two years of virtual learning, which ended in 2021. Teachers faced many challenges, mainly related to social issues from virtual learning. As a result, the instructional program suffered. Zhao & Watterston (2021) argued, "However, the changes or innovations that occurred in the immediate days and week when COVID-19 struck are not necessarily the changes education needs to make in the face of massive societal changes in a post-COVID-19 world" (p. 4).

This study used action research to analyze the behaviors and actions of the administrative team in collaboration with the leadership team to instill a culture of instruction. The five administrative team members used distributive leadership to build teacher leaders through collaborative practices at PEHS.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was to examine the behaviors and actions of the administrative team as they worked to grow the capacity of the leadership team to improve the culture of instruction at Pursuit of Excellence High School (PEHS). The study sought to examine the behaviors and actions of the administrative team, comprised of the principal, assistant principals, and instructional coaches, and their impact on the instructional culture. Specifically, perspectives were sought from the leadership team and what the team was doing to instill a culture of instruction at the classroom level.

The researcher approached this study with the following questions: Can the behavior and actions of the leadership team improve the instructional culture at PEHS? What lessons can be learned from action research to improve the culture of instruction? These questions helped to frame the overall research questions to guide the purpose of the study.

Research Questions

To address the purpose of this actions research study, the following questions guided this inquiry:

1. How can school leader's actions and behaviors create a culture of instruction as they progress throughout the year in one urban, high-needs high school?

2. How do teachers describe the impact of school leaders' behaviors and actions to positively affect their teaching practices to create a culture of instruction in one urban, high-needs high school?
3. How does the action research team articulate the impact of the design and implementation of a culture of instruction for teacher leaders in one urban, high-needs high school?

The following section discusses definitions of critical terms related to the action research study. While a large body of research uses these terms, this section discussed the terms specifically associated with this study at PEHS.

Definition of Terms

For the purposes of this study, the following key terms are defined:

- "Leadership Team" in PEHS is a group of educators comprised of department chairs, assistant principals, special education lead teachers, and counselors.
- "Department Chair," in the context of PEHS, is a teacher leader who assumes an instructional leader role within each of the content departments of the school.
- "Instructional Coach" in the context of PEHS is an instructional leader over certain content areas charged with improving instructional delivery methods, leading professional learning community meetings, providing feedback on lesson plans, and observing classrooms.

Theoretical Framework

The action research study focused on the behaviors and actions of the principal, administrative team, and leadership team to build a culture of instruction. The theoretical framework of transformational leadership undergirds the action research cycle for this study.

Transformational leadership significantly contributed to the theory of change as it sheds light on how change occurs. Givens (2008) described this with a focus on the ability of the leader to motivate the follower to accomplish more than what the follower planned to perform, as well as exchanges between leaders and followers within the organization.

Burns is a leading scholar on both transformative and instructional leadership. Burns (1978), when describing transformational leadership, contended it happens when one or more persons participate with others in such a way that leaders and followers increase one another to higher levels of inspiration and integrity. Bass (1998) found significant and positive connections between transformational leaders and the amount of effort followers are willing to use, satisfaction with the leaders, job performance, and effectiveness. Additionally, Bass & Bass (2009) believed that leaders behave in specific ways within transformational leadership to raise the level of commitment from followers.

There is, however, a contrast in what researchers identify as the best approach leaders should employ to grow the instructional capacity of educators. Robinson et al. (2008) asserted that instructional leadership, as opposed to transformational leadership, had at least a three times greater impact on student outcomes. Robinson et al. (2008) went on to maintain that instructional leadership theory originated with a focus on the role of the principal and has since evolved to include principal designees in influencing instruction. This opinion contrasts with transformational leadership, centered around engaging staff to work more collaboratively to overcome challenges and reach bold goals.

Bass (1998) quantified transformational leadership into four components. Those components are:

- Charismatic leadership

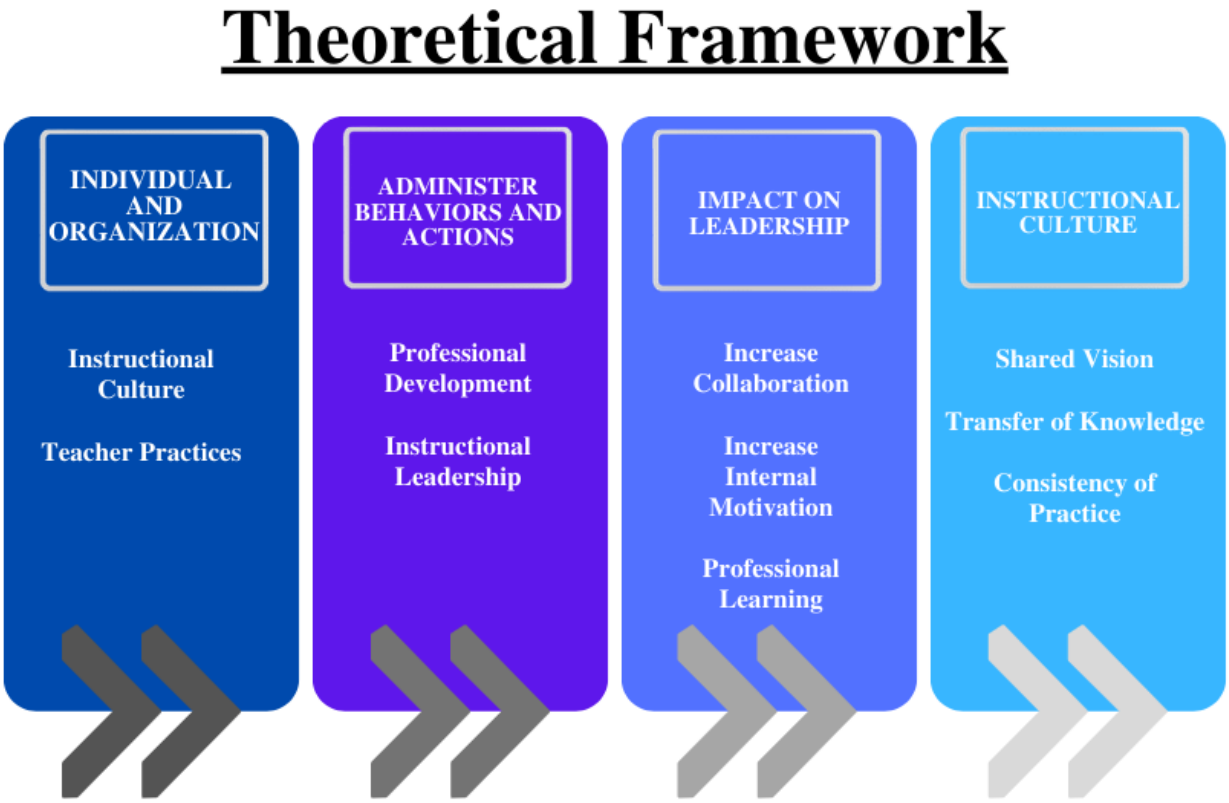
- Inspirational motivation
- Intellectual stimulation
- Individualized consideration

These four components capture the behaviors needed for transformational leadership n. These components are essential for the theoretical groundwork for an instructional culture. It is also important to consider the work of Leithwood (1994), as he was instrumental in bridging transformational leadership in the private industry to the educational field. Leithwood and Jantzi (1999) describe transformational leadership as building school vision and goals, providing intellectual motivation, offering personalized support, representing professional practices and values, demonstrating high-performance expectations, and developing structures to foster contribution in school decisions.

Transformational leadership as a theoretical framework for this action research study situates the behaviors and actions of the administrative team on the leadership team to employ distributive leadership to improve the culture of instruction. By examining both the behaviors and actions of transformational leadership, this framework highlights the need to attend to the practices of the administrative and leadership teams. Administrators need to know what behaviors make an impact on the leadership team as well as what actions are required to improve the culture of instruction. Transformational leadership within the context of the administrative and leadership teams allowed for the transfer of knowledge and skills through distributed leadership to promote and instill a culture of instruction. The present study used transformational leadership tenets, distributed leadership, collaboration, peer-to-peer support, observations, and feedback to build a theoretical framework, as depicted in Figure 1.1.

Figure 1.1

Theoretical Framework Based on Transformational Leadership

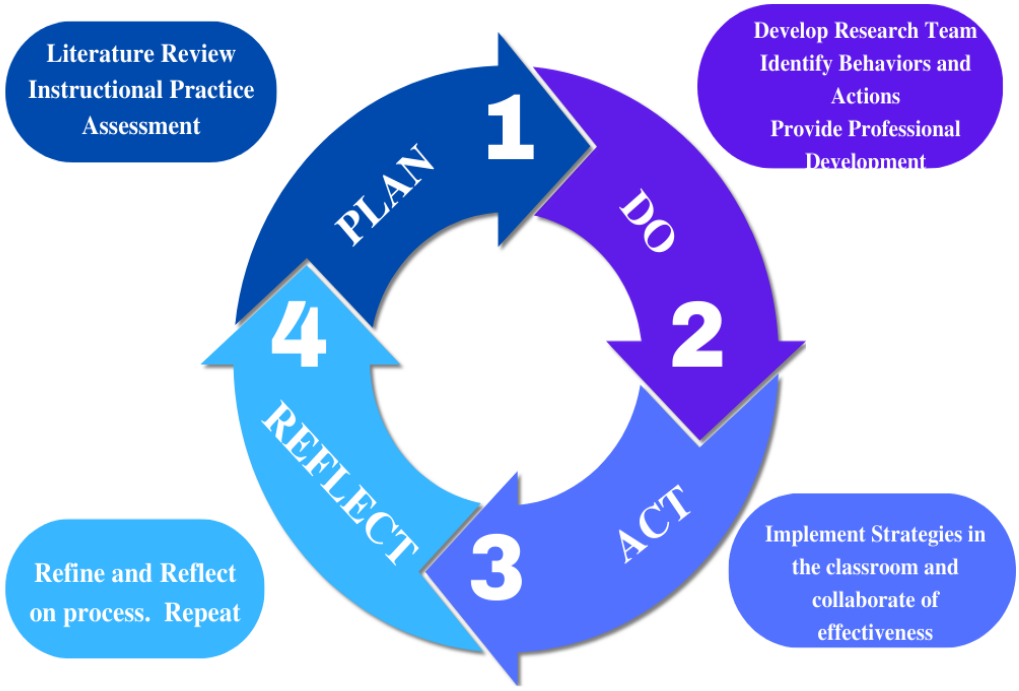


Note. Adapted from Bass (1990)

Logic Model

The logic model depicted in Figure 1.2 guided the study in examining the actions and behaviors of the administrative and leadership teams to build a culture of instruction. This model provides an opportunity for growth for the administrative and leadership team members to engage in this process.

Figure 1.2
Logic Model for Study



The researcher predicated the foundation of this study on the idea that the behaviors and actions of the administrative team may influence the leadership team to create a healthy and productive culture of instruction. The current study sought to examine how the administration can engage in this process to distribute leadership to leadership team members to continually refine these instructional practices and strategies to create a culture of instruction. The logic model provided a cycle of support for the leadership team members, including the administration.

The cycle of support started with administrators discussing the problem of practice. The problems that surfaced for implementing the culture of instruction were based on classroom observations, student performance, and the use of instructional practices, which became the

focus of collaboration and subsequent professional learning. The researcher used observations of the applied interventions to gather data on instructional strategies, student growth, and consistency of practice. The leadership team then reflected on instructional methods and student performance to clarify the problem or determine a new growth area. The researcher situated the entire process around the needs of the leadership team and the PEHS instructional culture.

Overview of Methodology

One of the primary functions of a successful school is continuously improving student outcomes. Action research supports these functions as it considers teacher inquiry and concerns for improvement at the center of the research process (Bergmark, 2022). In the context of this study, the primary researcher and the action research team used the literature surrounding instructional culture and the actions and behaviors of leaders to support the implementation team, including teachers on the leadership team. The action research team sought to improve the instructional culture by exploring the actions and behaviors of the principal, assistant principals, and instructional coaches and by bringing strategies and support that could lead to actionable change based on the current instructional culture.

Action Research

Action research was an appropriate methodology for this study because it allowed the team to engage in real-time work with the ability to make real-time adjustments as needed. The recurring framework of action research allowed the researcher to study the context of the problem and the community of educators on the leadership team. Improving how schools work can be arduous work that, at times, may feel like no real improvements are happening. However, action research supports school improvement and is now used more than ever in education to propose solutions to real problems that educators face daily (Messikh, 2020).

Action research allows the participants to identify the challenge, identify and implement a plan of action, reflect on the outcomes of the action, and then repeat with an enhanced plan of action. Participating in this type of cyclical research allows for a deeper and more holistic understanding of the practical implications of action research (Efron & Ravid, 2019). Manfra (2019) stated, "Across the studies, action research becomes a way of knowing or "a way of being" as teachers continuously reflect on and refine their practice" (p. 19).

Instructional leadership can have an invaluable impact on the instructional programming of a school, thus improving the instructional culture. Printy (2003) concluded, "When transformational and shared instructional leadership coexist in an intergraded form of leadership, the influence on school performance, measured by the quality of its pedagogy and the achievement of its students, is substantial" (p. 370). Participation in this study provided a blueprint for reflecting on the current culture and how to build upon it. The process allowed all stakeholders to deeply examine the data that suggested improvement, create responses to the data, and implement systems needed for improvement.

Throughout the study, the action research design and implementation teams worked diligently to improve the instructional culture in an urban high-poverty high school. The action research design team gathered and scrutinized data from the implementation team to guide the team in building the instructional culture based on the appropriate literature.

Data Collection

The researcher used several data collection methods for this study. These methods included:

1. Group interviews with the design team and implementation teams throughout each cycle of the research process;

2. Questionnaires with the implementation team to gain insight as to how the implementation of the strategy was progressing and their comfort level of implementation;
3. Classroom observations after the design team conducted each professional learning session to observe the transfer of knowledge;
4. Collaborative feedback sessions were conducted with select teachers to provide feedback on the strategy implementation as well as to gather information to assist in planning the subsequent professional learning;
5. Researcher journal notes were based on classroom observations, informal conversations, and notes taken in design team meetings and professional learning sessions.

The researcher analyzed the qualitative data generated from the data sources in conjunction with the design team, using a coding scheme to identify patterns. Based on these patterns, the researcher identified themes.

Interventions

The primary intervention of this study took place with the implementation team, which consisted of the principal, assistant principals, instructional coaches, and department chairs. The group focused on building and improving the culture of instruction based on data gathered about instruction programming and the implementation of instructional strategies that meet the needs of PEHS students. The action research design team, comprised of the principal, assistant principals, and instructional coaches, created and implemented the programming and strategies. The design team created interventions after classroom observations and meetings with the leadership team. The department chairs then implemented the interventions in the classroom setting.

The design team facilitated interventions in leadership team meetings, including professional developments around instructional strategies and beliefs. These were integral in establishing a culture of instruction, measurable outcomes, classroom observations, video lessons, and collaborative reflections on the progress of the school. Many of these interventions occurred during leadership team meetings twice a month, and real-time adjustments were made and implemented. The design team created these interventions to improve and sustain a culture of instruction.

Significance of Study

The spring of 2020 brought a pandemic that interrupted life in and out of school. The pandemic affected all aspects of normalcy, and education was not immune to that interruption. Returning from remote learning, which lasted for a year and a half, the disruption manifested in myriad ways, including the overall school culture, specifically the culture of instruction at PEHS. Educators adapted to teaching remotely; however, transitioning back to in-person instruction challenged them. Teachers no longer found the pre-pandemic practices and strategies relevant, and students needed to catch up before remote learning. Therefore, it is imperative that school leaders re-establish a culture of instruction that meets an ever-growing and deepening set of circumstances that have created gaps in knowledge.

This study examined what can be done in an urban, high-poverty school to improve the culture of instruction. The study adds to the research on transformational instructional leadership and how that type of leadership creates a culture of instruction. This study will also inform the literature on instructional culture and its potential impact on student outcomes.

Organization of the Dissertation

This section describes the composition of the six chapters in the dissertation. Chapter 1 provides an overview of this study and offers an overview of the research questions, the problem of practice, and the methods for the study. Chapter 2 outlines a literature review and discusses an overview of a culture of instruction, the behavior and actions of administrators, and the changing role of the principal. Chapter 3 defines the methodology involved in the action research and the qualitative methods related to the study. Chapter 4 considers the findings from the action research case.

Chapter 5 notes the Analysis of Findings from the Action Research Case established by the action research cycles related to the research questions that guided the study. Additionally, Chapter 5 describes and analyzes the intercessions implemented by the researcher and the action research team. Chapter 6 summarizes the study, provides a discussion about the findings from the research questions, and suggests implications for school leaders, as well as suggestions for further research.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE RELATED LITERATURE

According to Bush and Glover (2014), research widely recognized that school leadership is only secondary to classroom teaching in terms of its impact on student achievement. Robinson's (2007) meta-analysis shows that the leader's role significantly impacted learner outcomes. Leithwood et al. (2006) concluded that there was no documented case of any school successfully increasing student achievement without talented school leadership. Without effective school leadership, sustained student improvement will not exist. The idea of instructional leadership links leadership in the general sense to learning. This type of leadership shifts the responsibility of the principal solely to a broader understanding of shared leadership. Lamber (2003) claimed that lone leadership is over and that educators should suspend the belief that one administrator can serve as the instructional leader. Principals not being the sole instructional leader represented a shift in leadership described as distributed or shared leadership. Hallinger and Heck (2010) found that distributed leadership was pointedly related to a change in academic capacity and growth in student achievement. Leithwood et al. (2004) highlighted the importance of distributive leadership but added that a more precise understanding is needed to measure its impact on student learning. The importance of instructional leadership and building the capacity of administrators and the leadership team to sustain a culture of instruction has led to the need for more exploration of its impact.

The purpose of the study was to examine the behaviors and actions of the administrative team as they work to grow the capacity of the leadership team to improve the culture of instruction at PEHS.

To address the purpose of this action research study, the following questions guided this inquiry:

1. How can school leaders' actions and behaviors create a culture of instruction as they progress throughout the year in one urban, high-needs high school?
2. How do teachers describe the impact of school leader's behaviors and actions to positively affect their teaching practices to create a culture of instruction in one urban, high-needs high school?
3. How does the action research team articulate the impact of the design and implementation of a culture of instruction for teacher leaders in one urban, high-needs high school?

To examine the research questions, the researcher worked with an action research team to study the impact of administrators working in collaboration with the leadership team to sustain a culture of instruction. The researcher used questionnaires, interviews, observations, field notes, and focus groups to gather perspectives about the development of teacher leaders. The researcher conducted a literature review on instructional leadership and separated it into three sections to achieve the objectives. The first section provided an analysis of instructional leadership, including a history of instructional leadership, the principal's changing role, and the components of instructional leadership. The second section provided an overview of school culture, including the elements of school culture, the leaders' impact on school culture, and the connections

between school culture and instruction. The third section focused on an instructional culture and its components and building and sustaining instructional culture.

History of Instructional Leadership

The two most recognized models of leadership are instructional leadership and transformational leadership. Hallinger et al. (2020) drew on the conceptual definition of instructional leadership from Hallinger and Murphy (1985) as "school leadership intended to influence school and classroom teaching and learning processes to improve learning for all students" (p. 1631). Hallinger and Wang (2015) clarified that various researchers used this definition in over 500 empirical studies.

Edwin Bridges initiated the groundwork and research for instructional leadership in 1967. Bridges (1967) recognized that there is an expectation for principals to lead instruction while understanding that this type of leadership may be beyond the capacity of the principal. Hallinger (2015) highlighted that the difficulty in bridging the gap between the role of the principal in instructional leadership and the lack of capacity led to the effective school movement in the United States and the United Kingdom. The effective school research sought to understand why schools overcame challenges and achieved positive student learning outcomes. Edmonds (1979) asserted, "In the improving schools, the principal is more likely to be an instructional leader, more assertive in his/her institutional leadership role, more of a disciplinarian, and perhaps most of all, assumes responsibility for the evaluation of the achievement of basic objectives" (p. 18). Edmonds (1979) and Leithwood and Montgomery (1982) added that principals should exhibit strong, directive leadership that focuses on the curriculum and instruction characteristics of principals who lead instructionally. Both researchers noted that the literature would benefit from further research on instructional leadership and its implementation. Although the effective

school's research described the characteristics of effective schools, little is known about how to create an effective school or the principal's role in the process Cuban (1984). As the work on instructional leadership continued to emerge, so did the characteristics of the leader. Hallinger and Murphy (1985) developed a framework for instructional leadership that included the following:

- Framing and communicating goals
- Supervising and evaluating instruction
- Coordinating curriculum
- Developing high academic standards
- Monitoring student progress
- Promoting the professional development of teachers
- Protecting instructional time
- Developing incentives for students and teachers

Instructional leadership continued to emerge and adapt over time to meet the needs of an ever-changing landscape. According to Bamburg and Andrews (1991), instructional leadership focuses primarily on the role of the principal in coordinating, controlling, supervising, and developing curriculum. Hallinger (2000) highlighted instructional leadership by creating a three-dimensional model that includes defining the school's mission, managing the instructional program, and promoting a positive school culture. Although this model assumes a great deal of responsibility on behalf of the principal, the principal cannot do it all. Hallinger and Murphy (1985) found that the principal cannot be the only person involved in leading the academic program in larger schools. From 1980 to 1995, this was the most used leadership style, according to Hallinger and Heck (1996). Kilag and Sasan (2023) categorized instructional leadership as a

focus on growing teaching and learning through the development of curriculum, support of teachers, and providing a concentration on instructional strategies. The authors highlighted that the effects of instructional leadership are creating supportive environments for teachers, opportunities to provide professional development and support for educators, and establishing clear expectations for teaching and learning. Nguyen et al. (2022) stated that the key mediated variables for instructional leadership were promoting a positive school culture and fostering professional learning communities. However, there were some drawbacks. There were questions about whether principals could lead instructionally. Barth (1986) and Cuban (1988) both deemed instructional leadership an impossible dream for many principals, as did Bridges (1967). One of the reasons for this is the inability of principals to lead instruction at the high school level, which is because principals have less content-area expertise than teachers.

The Changing Role of the Principal

As a result of the effective school research, the characteristics of the principal became a focal point. Barth (1980; 1990) and Barth and Deal (1982) considered that instructionally solid leaders were culture builders. Andrews and Soder (1987), Bossert et al. (1982), Dwyer (1985), and Edmonds (1979) described instructional leaders as goal-oriented, focused, and having led from a combination of expertise and charisma. Cuban (1984) found instructional leaders capable of motivating staff to achieve collective goals, all while being hands-on in curriculum and instruction. In addition to these changes, Hallinger (2014) found that changing socio-political trends along with globalization precipitated the reshaping of the discourse around the importance of the role of the principal and instructional leadership.

Fullan (2006), Hall and Hord (2001), Hallinger (2011b), Hallinger and Heck (2010), Leithwood et al. (2008), and Leithwood et al. (2004) found that although effective leadership

does not guarantee successful transformation, continuous school improvement requires skillful principal leadership. O'Donnell and White (2005) added to the role of the principal, saying when instructional leadership is effective, it entails creating environments of trust where risk-taking can occur with a high level of comfort. The authors state that effective principals expect and facilitate experiences that inspire, interest, and involve students. Principals can and should establish, promote, and sustain a school environment that enhances collegial interactions, and as a result, teachers will demonstrate more willingness to learn and grow from one another (Liu et al., 2020; Lockton, 2019).

The role of the principal and instructional leadership has also grown to be far more inclusive of other people than just the principal. Hallinger (2010) provided a timeline of this change by contending that up until 1990, school leadership focused on the principal as the source of leadership but then shifted to a more distributive process in the early 2000s. This process is more of a collaborative leadership style, which includes the principal, assistant principals, department heads, teacher leaders, and other school personnel. Hall and Hord (2001) supported this by saying leadership must create maintainable change embraced and owned by teachers accountable for executing classroom instructional practices. Therefore, principals must possess the ability to grow those they work closely with to enact sustainable change. Shepard (1996) undergirds this idea by saying that when teachers perceive a principal's instructional leadership to be appropriate, the teachers will grow in commitment, professional involvement, and a willingness to transform. As the role of the principal continued to morph, the notion of distributed or shared leadership began to take hold. Harris (2012) characterized distributive leadership as a remarkable shift in the role of the principal as it was a move from the principal being at the apex of the organization and making decisions to developing the leadership capacity

and capability of others. Xia and O'Shea (2023) described a barrier to instructional leadership: principals cannot lead instructionally and highlighted the need to distribute leadership to instructional coaches and teacher leaders. Bellibas et al. (2020) deduced that distributed leadership indirectly affected the instructional quality of teachers, mediated by teacher collaboration and job satisfaction. They broadly categorized distributed leadership for learning or shared leadership. Many researchers have provided terms to define leadership roles more broadly. For example, Marks and Printy (2003) coined shared instructional leadership, York-Barr and Duke (2004) coined teacher leadership, (Dempster & MacBeath, 2008; Murphy et al., 2007) coined leadership for learning; Spillane et al. (2003) coined distributed leadership for learning, Knapp et al. (2010) coined learning-focused leadership, and Boyce and Bowers (2018); Leithwood et al., (2010); Printy et al. (2009) coined integrated leadership. The models recategorized instructional leadership as a collective process focusing on student learning and teacher development, capacity, and commitment. Cansoy et al. (2022) argue that school principals' behaviors and teachers' collective efficacy beliefs contribute to a school's effectiveness.

Overview of Components of Instructional Leadership

Shaked (2022) articulated that principals who serve as instructional leaders contribute more to an increase in students' academic results than their principal counterparts who pay more attention to other leadership styles. Tahir & Fatima (2023) validated initial research in instructional leadership, including a three-part framework that includes the school's goal, the administration of the instructional program, and the advancement of a supportive learning environment. Hallinger and Murphy (1985) proposed three dimensions for instructional leadership: defining the school's mission, managing the instructional program, and promoting a

positive school learning climate. Defining the school mission includes the principal's role in determining the school's central purpose. Framing clear school goals and communicating those goals is vital to making the school mission a part of the everyday functioning of a successful school. Hallinger (2010) expressed the importance of clear and focused academic goals instead of vague, undefined goals competing with nonacademic goals. The second dimension, managing the instructional program, focuses on coordinating and controlling instruction and curriculum. This dimension requires the principal to be deeply involved in the engagement, stimulation, supervision, and monitoring of teaching and learning in the school. Hallinger (2010) referred to this dimension as the most controversial yet needless dimension of instructional leadership. It is, however, necessary to monitor student achievement to ensure continued improvement. The third dimension, promoting a positive school learning climate, has several associated functions. Hallinger (2010) outlines these functions as protecting instructional time, providing incentives for teachers, promoting professional development, developing high expectations, and providing incentives for learning. Bossert et al. (1982) and Purkey and Smith (1983) emphasized that this dimension is broader in scope as it conforms to the notion that effective schools create a press for instructional growth and development through developing high standards and expectations for students and educators.

Zepeda (2019) highlighted the importance of professional development, claiming that when teachers connect to a team working with a common goal within opportunities for professional collaboration, shared decision-making shapes their career decisions. Kilag and Sasan (2023) found that instructional leadership practices that promoted a culture of continuous learning and provided professional development opportunities were positively associated with teacher learning and improvement. The model proposed by Hallinger and Murphy (1985)

consists of three dimensions and 11 descriptors. Murphy (1990) continued to grow the framework by using the work from effective schools, school improvement, staff development, and organizational change. Murphy developed a framework that included four dimensions and sixteen different roles.

The four dimensions in Murphy's (1990) framework included developing a mission and goals, managing the educational production function, promoting an academic learning climate, and creating a supportive work environment. One of the critical expansions was promoting an academic learning climate. Murphy (1990) concluded that promoting an academic learning climate and developing a supportive work environment was vital to instructional leadership. Lynch et al. (2013) linked school climate characteristics to increased student outcomes, including academic and behavioral outcomes.

Tahir and Fatima (2023) recently stated that although there is no uniform definition, there is a shared perception that instructional leadership practices significantly impact school cultures and academic achievement. A positive school climate can affect several variables in a highly functioning school. Hall and Hord (2015) recognized best practices for shaping school culture for instructional leaders and, among other things, called out building a shared vision. Rhodes et al. (2009) also found that instructional leaders could improve the perceptions of teachers on school climate by instituting a collaborative decision-making process and removing obstacles to allow teachers to focus on instruction.

Alanoglu (2021) discovered instructional leaders can influence teachers to determine the direction of the school, improve the learning-teaching process, and coordinate classroom-based strategies. The author adds that instructional leaders are a coalescence of knowledge and personality that is culture-building and goal-oriented. Additionally, they set clear directions for

the school, encouraged the involvement of stakeholders, and determined the strategies and activities of the school according to its academic mission.

Weber (1996) added to this work by surmising that for educators to do this effectively, even if the instructional leader was not the principal, such a leader was imperative. Weber (1996) promotes the idea of shared leadership by concluding that instructional leadership is necessary and relevant regardless of any hierarchical school organization. The author outlined five domains of instructional leadership. All of these align with Murphy (1990) and Hallinger and Murphy (1985), with the addition of observing and improving instruction and assessing the instructional program.

Heck et al. (1990) synthesized the models of Bossert et al. (1982), Hallinger and Murphy (1982), analysis of multidimensional nature of principal leadership behavior into four variables that influence student achievement. The four variables were school climate, governance, instructional organization, and student achievement.

School Culture

Components of School Culture

Dutta and Sahney (2021) contended that although one size does not fit all, a thorough understanding of how the actions of leaders permeate and infuse the school context, culture, and mission determines the degree to which leadership behaviors shape learning outcomes. School-level leaders often interweave the terms climate and culture. Levine and Lezotte (1990) support this notion, stating that climate and culture are frequently used interchangeably in much of the published literature. Therefore, it is vital to establish a definition or explanation of culture to be sure everything is clear with climate. An early definition of culture began with Waller (1976), who noted that schools would have their uniqueness, with complex rituals of personal

relationships, folkways, traditions, agreements, and moral codes. This global definition of culture provided the groundwork for more focused definitions of culture concerning school cultures.

Deal and Kennedy (1983) noted that culture consisted of the shared beliefs and values that joined a community. Hargreaves (1994) described culture as the lens through which members saw themselves and the world. Lastly, Peterson and Deal (1998) defined school culture as "unwritten rules and traditions, norms, and expectations that permeate everything: the way people act, how they dress, what they talk about, whether they seek out colleagues for help or do not, and how teachers feel about their work and their students" (p. 2-3). Stoll (1999) described school culture as a system of meaning that influences how people think and should act within the school environment. The building blocks for school culture emanated out of the work of non-educational contexts. Shein (1985) established components or levels of culture in business management and organizations' sociology as artifacts, espoused values, and basic underlying assumptions. These three levels provided a connection between non-educational components of culture and educational components of culture. Shoen and Teddlie (2008) made this connection and connected symbols of school culture to artifacts, school climate to espoused beliefs, and school culture to basic assumptions. The authors compiled a list of descriptors from the literature that best describe dimensions of school culture. The four dimensions established were professional orientation, organizational structure, quality of the learning environment, and student-centered focus.

Fullan (2001) and Peterson and Deal (1998) described the components of school culture: valued professional learning and commitment to student learning, a shared sense of purpose and values, standards of continuous learning and improvement, collaborative relationships, and opportunities for shared experiences. These components certainly expound on the previously

shared principles and provide more direction and purpose for leadership. Although the elements of school culture have grown over time, there are undoubtedly core components that leaders can use to gauge their school's culture.

Leader Impact on School Culture

Veletic et al. (2023) contend that school roles, practices, and actions connect leadership and learning. Principals and school leaders profoundly impact all aspects of the school, including culture. Marzano et al. (2005) outlined a link between culture, leadership, and student improvement from a meta-analysis of empirical studies of leadership and student achievement. The authors concluded that leader behaviors should include promoting a cohesive staff, a sense of well-being, and a sense of purpose among staff, as well as the development of a shared vision of what the school should be like. The authors concluded that these behaviors are directly related to establishing a strong school culture.

Zepeda (2013) described a healthy school culture as principals working with teachers, establishing a shared vision and mission, focusing on student learning, and operating under a common set of assumptions around learning for both students and educators. Nehez (2022) highlights the most recent research underscoring the importance of principals building and carrying professional school cultures and leading culture change. The authors express that cultures are complex for school leaders to transform. However, the workaround for a healthy school culture is not the sole responsibility of the principal but rather the principal's influence on the organization. Lane (1992) stated the building of culture is not constructed solely by the principal. Still, instead, the principals work to shape the values and norms that exist in the direction that best supports the effectiveness of the instructional program. Banwo et al. (2021) give rise to leader characteristics by claiming a focus on school characteristics that ultimately

contribute to student achievement were positive organizational psychology: efficacy, organizational trust, happiness, optimism, zest, high-quality connections, relationships, and resilience.

Another way principals can use their influence is in shaping teachers' perceptions of their leadership. Rhodes et al. (2009) found that principals can influence teacher perception by exhibiting collaborative decision-making and removing obstacles that prohibit the focus of teachers from being on instruction. Principals and school leaders must provide teachers with support and resources to build a healthy school culture. Munifah and Purwaningrum (2022) assert the process of change in a school culture dramatically depends on the leader, which indicates the school principal is a mediator of change to guarantee the effectiveness of a school.

Fiore (2001) identified principals' roles in creating a healthy culture. Among them were visibility, effective communication, being role models, accepting responsibility for the culture, empowering others, and demonstrating stewardship. Dinsdale (2017) describes leadership's role in creating a positive school culture as being collaborative and supportive, providing the necessary resources for teaching, including stakeholders in the vision, and engaging in their professional development and growth. Bettini et al. (2016) assert that schools with high levels of collaboration tend to have higher behavioral and academic standards than schools with less collaboration. Collaboration increases the needed resources to teach and allows teachers to focus on teaching, which increases teacher efficacy and builds a positive culture. Bredeson & Kose (2006) found that leaders who focus on teacher resources create conditions to encourage teachers to develop, which allows students to achieve their goals more effectively. Kruger (2003) also found that principals can influence student achievement by impacting teacher satisfaction and working conditions. Cansoy et al. (2020) revealed that school principals' instructional leadership

behaviors can predict teachers' school commitment by influencing teacher collaboration. Removing conditions in how teachers focus on their instructional programs and providing the resources needed is vital to creating a school culture that promotes student improvement.

According to Barnett & McCormick (2004); Leithwood et al., (2006); and Ogawa & Bossert, (1995), the literature discloses that school culture is an aspect of schools that a leader can influence. Barnett & McCormick (2004); Hallinger & Heck, (1996); and Hallenger et al., (2005) have found that school leadership and culture profoundly impact student academic achievement. When all stakeholders, parents, students, and staff clearly understand the leader's vision for the school, it leads to a healthy and transparent culture. Bates (1987) concluded that when school leaders used the characteristics of school culture to transform the current practices for the enhancement of the school, the school leaders should move toward collaboration and democracy for all stakeholders.

Inherent in the work of the principal is the establishment and sustainability of a strong school culture. A culture that supports continuous student improvement, as well as teacher efficacy, will thrive. The school's principal strongly influences the relationships that shape school culture (MacNeil et al., 2009). "In schools where achievement was high and where there was a clear sense of community, we found invariably that the principal made the difference" (Boyer, 1983, p. 219). The role of the principal has the potential to influence the culture of a school significantly. Leithwood (1992) described the principal's role as a change agent and implied that the principal can transform culture. Witziers et al. (2003) stated that research also suggested that the indirect effect of principal leadership on student outcomes means that educational leadership connects to the culture of the school, which is ultimately related to student achievement. Nguyen et al. (2022) surmised that instructional leadership involves promoting

school climate, fostering professional learning communities, defining and sharing the school vision, and developing teacher competencies.

Of all the characteristics and behaviors outlined, the leaders should exhibit in creating school culture (Lee & Louis, 2019) contend that the main task in forming a solid culture is increasing the employees' commitment and meeting their individual needs. Schools with high motivation to teach and solid and relevant relationships exemplify a healthy school culture. Administrators who work with a sense of focus and support of educators do well in creating a school culture that promotes continuous growth. In describing the characteristics of administrators, Kalkan et al. (2020) contend that when administrators have a clear sense of duty and purpose, develop positive relationships with teachers and students, and transform the school into a learning organization, a strong and healthy culture will follow.

The connection between school culture and instruction

The effects of the culture of a school permeate every aspect of schooling, from student discipline to attendance to stakeholder perception of the school. Bellibas et al. (2020) found that principals' leadership practices with a specific emphasis on teaching and learning were vital for enhancing school culture. To improve instruction and student outcomes, leaders must focus on the culture first. Without a healthy culture, a robust instructional program cannot sustain itself. Nomura (1999) upholds this notion but suggests that successful principals should focus on the school's culture as a learning environment to improve teacher morale and student achievement. The leaders must establish a healthy culture and link the attributes to a culture of instruction. Davidoff and Lazarus (1997) recognized the link between culture and instruction and pointed out that the written and unwritten rules and norms determine the organization's behavior pattern. However, leaders must establish a strong culture before focusing on instructional programming.

This type of culture is necessary for better instruction and improved student outcomes. According to Chisholm and Vally (1996), a lack of a culture of learning also leads to poor attendance, lack of educator desire, tensions in the school community, drug abuse, high dropout rate, weak leadership, and low morale. Additionally, Ohlson et al. (2016) claimed that schools with toxic or unhealthy cultures exhibiting little collaboration were likelier to produce poor academic performance. Conversely, Nehez and Blossing (2022) contend that practices in school culture have an essential impact on the outcome of a principal's school improvement efforts.

Kruger (2003) maintains that of the myriad of duties that leadership in a school has, the primary responsibility is to create the conditions in the school wherein students can receive quality instruction. The connection between the overall school culture and the culture of instruction is powerful. The difficulty in this work is that each school has a culture that is unique to itself. Therefore, leaders must be able to recognize this to create the type of culture that leads to effective instruction. Phillips and Wagner (2003) support this idea, emphasizing that schools have unique cultures and that leaders have to consistently link and validate the impact of culture on the direct influences of student achievement and job satisfaction. One connection between a positive school culture and its implication on the instructional program is prioritizing quality instruction, which can sometimes be difficult with all the assignments that fall under leadership.

Hsin-Hsiange and Mao-neng (2015) claimed that school culture reinforces the relationship between effective teaching and effective leadership. Nehez and Blossing (2022) assert that in collaborative cultures, teachers improve as professionals and improve their teaching. School leaders characterize highly effective schools through cultures fostering high student achievement through solid instruction. A strong culture can influence other aspects of student performance besides instruction. (Anson et al., 1991; Becker and Hedges, 1992) offer

that when a school exhibits a strong culture, in addition to its impact on instruction, it also shows an increase in attendance rates and reduced suspensions. Culture is the identity of a school and the instructional program links to the culture.

Bossert (1982) suggested that culture directly impacts the behavior of teachers. Linking or connecting instruction to the school culture highlights the importance of teaching and learning in schools. Hallinger (2010) has related leadership to learning through the leadership's ability to create vision and goals, academic structures and processes, and people. These characteristics connect to a positive school culture. School culture indicates a school with a clear vision and well-established goals, a keen focus on the educational process, providing resources, and removing barriers for teachers and students. There is a strong connection between school culture and instruction. With a strong, healthy, and positive school culture, a robust, rigorous, and thriving instructional program will be present.

Instructional Culture

Instructional Culture Overview and Components

As with school culture, the characteristics and components recognized within a school influence the instructional culture. The school mission and vision, shared norms and values, and removing barriers to allow teachers to focus on instruction makes up the school culture. Components that build upon and sustain continuous student achievement distinguish a culture of instruction. McGinnis (2010) referred to the culture of instruction as reflecting the learning experience of its representatives, whether teachers or students. Hallinger (2003) refers to instructional culture as academic press. The author described the academic press as developing high standards and expectations and a culture of continuous improvement. Hallinger (2003) said that protecting instructional time, promoting professional development, maintaining high

visibility, and providing incentives for teachers and learning are necessary for instilling this culture. In addition to those functions, the principal cannot initiate or sustain a culture of instruction alone. Still, it must be implemented and supported through collaboration, distributive leadership, and teacher leaders.

Dinsdale (2017) found schools with a high level of collaboration tend to promote higher academic standards. School leaders need to implement structures and systems to encourage effective collaboration and achieve a high level of collaboration. One structure to foster collaboration is professional learning communities. Dufour and Mattos (2013) contend that many principals have implemented professional learning communities to create a collaborative culture that will improve teaching and learning. The authors went on to find that teachers working within professional learning communities were more likely to do the following:

- Take collective responsibility for student learning.
- Share teaching practices.
- Improve student achievement.
- Experience beneficial professional development.
- Remain in the profession.

These behaviors will lead to creating a culture indicative of solid instruction.

Building-level leaders must share responsibility to build and sustain a culture of instruction. One way of instituting this shared responsibility is through distributed leadership. Harris (2009) defined distributive leadership as “leadership shared within and between schools” (p. 16). Distributive leadership allows for collective responsibility for instruction and student achievement. Hallinger and Heck (2009) contend that evidence supports a positive relationship between distributed leadership and student achievement. Using the expertise of teacher leaders is

of utmost importance in building a culture of instruction. According to Harris (2012), a study by Leithwood and Jantzi (1999) suggested that distributing a portion of leadership activity to teachers encouraged teacher effectiveness and student engagement. They also noted in the study that teacher leadership far outweighed principal leadership in student engagement. A second study by the authors, conducted by Silins and Mulford, found that student outcomes were more likely to progress when principals distributed leadership and empowered teachers in areas significant to them.

Researchers have described teacher leadership in many ways over time. Wasley (1992) described teacher leadership as an extension of the administration, Silvia and McGuire (2010, in their first wave, described teacher leadership as teachers serving in formal roles such as department heads and managers, and in their second wave as teachers capitalizing more fully on their instructional expertise as curriculum leaders and mentors of new teachers. The third wave included an increased understanding and promotion of instructional improvement that supports collaboration and continuous learning, as well as teachers as primary creators and re-creators of school culture. In this manner, teacher leadership must be a component of a culture of instruction.

Teachers must be able to lead instructionally so that the culture reflects administrators and teachers. Hart (1995) suggested building a school culture conducive to teacher leadership, the expectation of leadership of teachers, trusting and empowering teachers, sharing the responsibility of success and failure, and redefining the role of the principal from instructional leader to developer of leaders are all necessary. When teachers can collaborate, plan, and discuss their teaching practices, their efficiency increases.

Building and Sustaining Instructional Culture

Building the instructional culture in a school is an endeavor that begs for inclusiveness. It is an effort that will take the input and efforts of leaders, teachers, and students. Owens et al. (2013) contends that work is a group function, and leaders must seek to influence the behaviors of others. However, characteristics used to describe leaders include dominance and decisiveness. Dinham (2005) provides a different thought by saying that in building culture, leaders must be interpersonal, involving individuals and teams to transform teaching and learning. The author highlights that leaders need an understanding of human nature, particularly when establishing a sense of collaboration, commitment, trust, and purpose.

Shein (1985) highlighted behaviors of leaders that were necessary for shaping culture. They were what leaders paid attention to regarding reactions to critical incidents, teaching and coaching, allocation of rewards, and selection and promotion of teachers. The author contended that these actions provided specific standards and the acceptance of standards for teachers to work within. These works create and sustain cultural norms.

Bass (1985) outlined four transformative behavior factors that leaders must display to build a sound culture. The four behaviors were idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration. The behaviors and actions of the leader of the building and their impact on the teachers will ultimately create the type of culture conducive to learning.

Hallinger and Wang (2015) referred to instructional leadership as leadership customs that the principal instituted to enhance the capacity of teachers to teach successfully. Moreover, Hallinger and Murphy (1985), in their description of the dimensions of the leadership's role in instruction, called to attention that, when done effectively, will promote a positive school

learning environment. The intersection of sound instructional leadership and building a culture of instruction is essential. The absence of a robust instructional structure facilitated by the instructional leaders in the building can hinder the promotion of a strong learning climate.

There are a myriad of reasons as to why a school may not have an observable culture of instruction. Instructional leadership is a skill set that must be cultivated and developed over time in building leadership. There is a connection between Leadership behaviors and actions around instructional leadership and teacher performance. Simply saying leaders delivered professional learning is not enough to build a culture. The connectivity of professional learning around a particular strategy, observing the implementation, and adjusting the professional learning to meet the needs of the observations must be a cyclical and timely process.

When leaders do not scaffold the process to teacher learning and implementation, a culture that does not indicate instruction emerges. Poor professional learning, slow instructional growth of leadership, and insufficient observations with limited feedback are all attributed to a lack of instructional culture. These challenges can potentially cause a culture devoid of norms and behaviors related to instruction.

The impact of not having a culture of instruction warrants the attention of leaders in the building. Poor professional learning series, lack of classroom observations, lack of individual and collective feedback sessions, and the inability to react to concerns promptly will lead to a deficiency of a culture of instruction.

Chapter Summary

Jones (2009) linked the effectiveness of instructional leadership to student outcomes and student achievement (Jones, 2009). Principals who exhibit instructional leadership make instruction a priority and incorporate this priority into both their mission and vision. McEwan

(2002) proposed that successful instructional leaders attributed their success to having a vision, a solid knowledge base, a willingness to take risks and constantly grow, and empowering others. Leaders and leadership teams that lack these characteristics may experience schools where there is a lack of culture and consistency around the instructional programming and practices within their school.

Instructional culture represents the consistent practice throughout the school to implement instructional strategies consistently. A lack of professional development of an instructional strategy and the implementation of that strategy can lead to an inconsistent culture of instruction. A lack of instructional support can lead to decreased student achievement, which creates urgency for more leader attentiveness in the building. The link between culture and instructional leadership validates the importance of school culture, particularly the link between culture and school improvement (Jones, 2009). The school's leadership should embody the necessary actions and behaviors to improve the instructional program and culture. The mission and vision of the school reflect the actions and behaviors of the leaders, which should prioritize instruction. The actions and behaviors should foster collaboration, a shared sense of responsibility, and a willingness to grow and learn.

An effective school leadership team will find ways to build and sustain a culture that supports teacher development and support. School culture directly impacts teacher behavior (Bossert et al., 1982). The skills, traits, and leadership perceptions embraced by leaders will ultimately influence the monitoring of teachers, and these practices are essential for school improvement to occur and be maintained (Jones, 2009).

CHAPTER 3

ACTION RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The effective ability of a principal to lead instruction, including teaching and learning, directly correlates to the core activities of a school (Kruger, 2003). Instructional leadership shared across principals, assistant principals, and teachers can transform a school's culture (Ezzani, 2019). Therefore, leaders in the building must lead instructionally and collaboratively to instill the type of culture that reflects a healthy social culture and a healthy instructional culture.

Chapter 3 explores the logic model that served as a guide to the study and describes the research design, the data collection methods, the analysis of the data, and a discussion of the study's reliability, validity, and trustworthiness.

The purpose of the study was to examine the behaviors and actions of the administrative team as they work to grow the leadership team's capacity to improve the culture of instruction at PEHS. The study sought to examine the behaviors and actions of the administrative team, comprised of the principal, assistant principals, and instructional coaches, and their impact on the instructional culture. Specifically, perspectives were sought from the leadership team and what the team was doing to instill a culture of instruction at the classroom level.

To address the purpose of this actions research study, the following questions guided this inquiry:

1. How can school leader's actions and behaviors create a culture of instruction as they progress throughout the year in one urban, high-needs high school?

2. How do teachers describe the impact of school leader's behaviors and actions to positively affect their teaching practices to create a culture of instruction in one urban, high-needs high school?
3. How does the action research team articulate the impact of the design and implementation of a culture of instruction for teacher leaders in one urban, high-needs high school?

Rationale for Qualitative Research Design

A qualitative study designed to track the effects of instructional leadership and its impact on school culture found that both instructional and distributive leadership impacted building a positive school culture and promoted teacher collaboration (Liu et al., 2021). However, the authors found that, surprisingly, there was a lack of comprehensive evidence (Liu et al., 2020). The authors additionally found the importance and impact of instructional leadership on school culture throughout the literature and noted that many researchers used qualitative surveys to assess principal effectiveness. However, the framework used was not the most comprehensive as it did not include such elements as the communication of school goals, managing the curriculum, being visible, and the possibility of providing incentives for successful teaching and achievement.

Although this study did not connect instructional leadership to overall school culture, it did provide data-based, triangulated qualitative research based on instructional leadership and its impact on building and sustaining a positive instructional culture. This aspect of the study is relevant as it outlined the effect of the instructional leadership of the administrative team on building a culture of instruction.

Malterud (2000) defined qualitative research as “the systematic collection, organization, and interpretation of textual material derived from talk of conversation” (p. 483). The author contended that the research methodology supports discovering meanings of social experiences faced by individuals in a then-natural context. Qualitative research supports various approaches to studying natural social life (Saldana, 2011). In addition, information or data in qualitative research is obtained and investigated nonquantitative, consisting of interviews, notes, documents, video recordings, surveys, and interviews.

The purpose of this study was to examine the behaviors and actions of the administrative team and the leadership team in building and sustaining a culture of instruction. The researcher selected a qualitative research approach because this study focused on participant perspectives and actions based on the influence of the administrative team. The study explored the lessons learned about building and sustaining a culture of instruction using action research methods that included interviews, individual and collective feedback sessions, classroom observations, and surveys of leadership team members.

Overview of Action Research Methods

Stringer and Aragon (2021) described action research “as an approach to investigation that uses continuing cycles of observation, reflection, and action to reveal effective solutions to issues and problems experienced by people in their everyday lives or in times of crisis” (p. 4). Altrichter et al. (2002) stated that action research is a collective and self-reflective inquiry that allows participants in a social setting to improve the rationality of their educational practices while understanding these methods and the circumstances in which they carry out.

McNiff and Whitehead (2002) described action research as studying your learning. It allows the practitioner to claim that either the practice is satisfactory and provides evidence to support their claims or the practice is unsatisfactory and requires action for improvement.

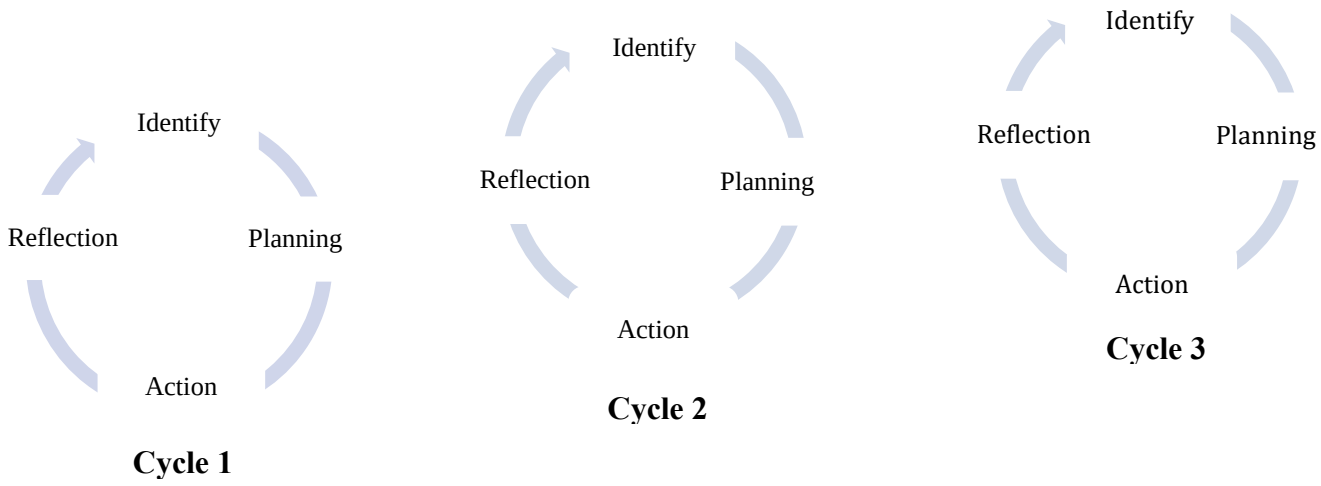
Action research in this study is applicable as it allows the researcher to examine how to build a culture of instruction in a cyclical format. Researchers explained action research as a cyclical process that included problem diagnosis, planning, gathering data, taking action, and fact-finding around the results to plan and take additional actions (Coghlan & Brannick, 2014; Given, 2008; Glanz, 2014). A further attribute of action research is that it is collaborative. The purpose of this study was to examine the behaviors and actions of the administrative team and the overall leadership team to build and sustain a culture of instruction. Consequently, action research was the chosen methodology for the study as the Action Research Implementation Team (ARIT-Instructional Leadership Team) worked together to create and implement instructional strategies that helped to build consistency in classroom instructional practices.

Action research best suited this study because it sought to understand how the behaviors and actions of the administration team impacted whether the leadership team would build and sustain an instructional culture. Land (2000) stated that the research method in this context was most appropriate due to its feasibility and application within the work setting and the essential workings of individual reflection, collaboration, and focus on school improvement.

Figure 3.1 illustrates the research cycles that the ARDT and researcher conducted and the highlighted role of the behaviors and actions of the administrators on the leadership team. This process includes identifying the problem, planning for action, taking action, and reflecting on the process (Coghlan & Brannick, 2014; Givens, 2008; Glanz, 2014).

Figure 3.1

Action Research Process



Action research allowed the researcher to draw upon information from the context of the study to review practice and make the necessary adjustments. Brydon et al. (2003) said action research goes beyond the idea that theory can inform practice and instead asserts that practice can and should generate theory. Altrichter et al. (2002) provided that action research allows the participants to grow because the study is for them instead of on them. The measure of instructional leadership focuses on developing teacher instructional strategies, evaluating classroom instruction, and managing instruction through professional development (Sebastian et al., 2018). This leadership type is collaborative and inclusive, which links explicitly to the tenets of action research.

One primary use of action research is that practitioners conduct it to improve practices in educational settings, which is the setting where the researcher conducted this study (Glanz, 2014). This study aimed to build and sustain an instructional culture, and action research allowed this process to unfold without prescribed objectives (Altrichter et al. 2002).

An additional attribute of action research is allowing participants to fully engage in the process by participating collaboratively. The purpose of this study was to examine the behaviors and actions of the administrative team and the overall leadership team to build and sustain a culture of instruction. Consequently, based on the nature of action research, it was an appropriate methodology for the study. The ARIT worked together to create and implement instructional strategies that helped to build consistency in classroom instructional practices.

Action Research Design

During this study, the Action Research Design Team (ARDT) worked through the plan, do, act, reflect cycle as the study aimed to implement and sustain the instructional strategy to build a culture of instruction at Pursuit of Excellence High School. Action research provided the best vehicle for the researcher and participants to study the behaviors and actions of administration related to implementing instructional strategies. It also allowed teams to adjust in real-time and collaboratively improve practices to build and sustain a culture of instruction. The focus on the behaviors and actions of the administrative team in the action research design process bolstered the importance of collaboration, professional development, and implementation of strategies for both the ARDT and ARIT.

The Spiraling and Iterative Nature of Action Research

Stringer and Aragon (2020) gave the context that action research is a process that provides schools, businesses, and community agencies with a way to increase the effectiveness and efficiency of their work and build a body of knowledge that can enhance professional practice. “A primary purpose of action research is to provide people with the capacity to engage in a systematic inquiry and investigation to discover effective ways of resolving problems and issues experienced in their work or community lives” (Stringer & Aragon, 2020, p. 7). Figure 3.2

describes the action research cycle adapted from Bass (1998) who stated action research is used by those eager to help enhance an organization's performance and contribute to scholarly literature.

Figure 3.2

The Spiraling Nature of Action Research

Note. Adapted from Bassey (1998)

The repetition associated with plan, do, act, reflect of the action research cycle promotes both the researcher and participants to spiral through reflection to gain a better understanding of the current instructional culture at Pursuit of Excellence High School as well as how the process of seeing a new vision can build and sustain a better more established culture of instruction. The logic model defined this study's cycles and provided the framework for the researcher and participants.

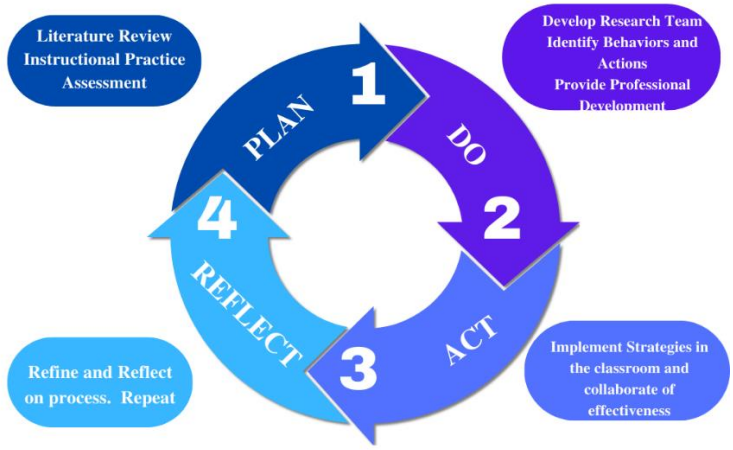
Logic Model

This researcher framed this study, which examined the action research work of an instructional leadership team to build and sustain a culture of instruction in a way that allowed for a cyclical approach of implementation, evaluation, and reflection. The logic model served to frame the scope of the study and identify the themes connected to the study. The Plan-Do-Act-Reflect cycle depicted in Figure 3.1 provided a very defined construction for the Action Research Design Team to articulate the problem of the culture of instruction and determine and apply an instructional strategy to create a culture that is indicative of consistency in instruction.

Additionally, the team considered the data gathered and made necessary changes to interventions based on feedback from the Action Research Team (Bryk, 2020). The Plan-Do-Act-Reflect cycle depicted in Figure 3.3 provided an intentional structure for the ARDT to identify the problem of culture, execute interventions to build culture, reflect on the data collected, and apply interventions based on feedback from the ARIT (Bryk 2021)

Figure 3.3

Logic Model for the Study



The logic model's plan, do, act, and reflect phases provided a blueprint for how the study engaged the participants to build and sustain a culture of instruction. It provided a roadmap for going through each iteration of the cycles, which ultimately ended with a reflection to inform the next steps to ensure that the team was building an instructional culture.

Theory of Change

Marks & Printy (2003) suggested the concept of instructional leadership and how the behaviors and actions of leaders in the building can transform instruction, thus leading to a solid instructional culture. This study aimed to examine the behaviors and actions of the administrative leadership to build and sustain a culture of instruction. The Action Research Design Team (ARDT) cycled through a change cycle by devoting time to gathering data by observing instruction and identifying gaps, which led to providing professional development around instructional strategies and plans for implementing those strategies to build a culture of instruction at Pursuit of Excellence High School (PEHS).

The theory of change aligned with the purpose of the study and the primary research questions. The theory positioned the behaviors and actions of the administrative team on increasing the number of instructional strategies, professionally developing the leadership team on how to implement those strategies, and creating structures that allow for continuous feedback to allow for constant growth of the use of the strategy (Jones, 2009).

The Case

The theory of instructional leadership helped guide this study as the administrative team worked with core content teachers to build and sustain a culture of instruction. The ARDT valued building and maintaining an instructional culture because of inconsistencies in instructional practices at PEHS. In the school, which was a charter school, the qualifications of

educators do not always compare to those at a typical public high school. The state where the study took place issued waivers to charter schools for hiring teachers without certification in their content. Kilag et al. (2022) contended that the charter school setting represents an exclusive context that may contrast with public schools regarding resources, management, and accountability. Although teachers possessed content knowledge, they needed pedagogy. Therefore, there was limited consistency when it came to implementing instructional strategies. This concern assisted the ARDT in working with the leadership team to build instructional strategies for an instructional culture. The team used existing systems to create and develop instructional strategies, while the theory of change focused on the behaviors and actions of those on the administrative team and their impact on the larger leadership team in developing a culture of instruction. Research on instructional leadership has highlighted the significance of improving teacher performance and student outcomes (Kilag & Sasan, 2023).

A case study is considered a contemporary phenomenon in a real-life context, wherein the boundaries between the context and the phenomenon are not obvious (Yin, 1981). The purpose of a case study is to redefine a notion by identifying its range of legitimacy and its contexts of use (Dumez, 2011a). The research was captured as a case of the behaviors and actions of the administrative team as they nurtured a culture of instruction by professionally developing the leadership team to employ instructional strategies at PEHS.

Investigating and analyzing the actions and behaviors of the administrative and leadership teams was needed to understand what was necessary for the PEHS to build and sustain a culture of instruction. The powerful description of case studies allows for an in-depth analysis that can build on the intricacies of the distinctive social experience in the study's particular context (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019).

Action Research Design Team

Action research is a systematic investigative research method that can help improve aspects of educational practice (Hand et al.,1996). The ARDT comprised PEHS personnel, including the primary researcher, assistant principals, and two instructional coaches. The primary researcher served as the PEHS principal and expressed interest in building a school with a culture that represented a robust instructional program. The assistant principals, Mrs. Knoll and Mr. Gore served on the ARDT because they, along with the principal, were instructional leaders in the building.

Mrs. Glare and Ms. Greate, instructional coaches, also served as ARDT members. Ms. Greate was previously a PEHS English Teacher before becoming an instructional coach serving the English and Social Studies departments. Mrs. Glare, who came to PEHS in 2020, served many years as a math teacher, department chair, and, during this study, an instructional coach. As instructional coaches, Ms. Greate and Mrs. Glare, the PEHS principal, tasked them with developing teaching pedagogy by implementing and observing instructional strategies in the classroom. Table 3.1 lists the team members, their primary roles, and their teaching experience.

Table 3.1

Action Research Design Team

Team Member	Primary Role in Pursuit of Excellence High School	Teaching Experience
Primary Researcher	Principal, PEHS	Leads and conducts all research with the Action Research Design Team. Brings over 25 years of classroom and leadership experience.

Team Member	Primary Role in Pursuit of Excellence High School	Teaching Experience
Mr. Gore	Assistant Principal, PEHS	Provides over 10 years of classroom and leadership experience. He also serves as lead over the science and social studies departments.
Mrs. Knoll	Assistant Principal, PEHS	Provides over 10 years of classroom and leadership experience. Mrs. Knoll has also served as a high school counselor. She also serves as lead over the math and English departments.
Mrs. Glare	Instructional Coach, PEHS	Provides over 10 years of classroom and instructional coach experience. Mrs. Glare is also an instructional coach for the math and science departments.
Ms. Greate	Instructional Coach, PEHS	Provides over 10 years of classroom and instructional coach experience. Ms. Green is also an instructional coach for the English and social studies department.

The research chose the ARDT based on their administrative team roles, collective instructional experiences, and tiered roles in the school. During the first monthly meeting, the ARDT participated in a preliminary orientation to discuss specifics, such as the background of the study, the action research process, the purpose of the study, the research questions, and their roles as ARDT members. The ARDT worked to identify the behaviors and actions of the administrative and leadership teams that impacted building and sustaining a culture of instruction. The researcher and the ARDT worked with the action research participants, the Action Implementation Team.

Action Research Implementation Team

The implementation team included the members of the PEHS Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID) site team and leadership team members who taught core content subjects. AVID is a program that provides many instructional strategies for students and teachers and PEHS used this program to implement a school-wide note-taking strategy, which promoted consistency in practice within the school.

The AVID site team consisted of educators from each core content area. They received professional development and then re-delivered it to their content area. Additionally, they served as the model teachers for implementing the AVID instructional strategy. The AVID site team determined the instructional plan for the research study. The primary purpose of forming the research team in this manner is to leverage the implementation of a research-based AVID strategy in conjunction with building a culture of instruction. Table 3.2 lists the members of the action research implementation team.

Table 3.2

Action Research Implementation Team

Pseudonym Name	Current Position	Role in the study
Mr. Thorpe	11th Grade Literature Leadership Team	Veteran teacher with 10 years of teaching high school English courses
Ms. Jones	11th Grade US history Leadership Team	Veteran teacher with over 15 years of teaching Social Studies and English Language Arts
Ms. Anthony	Chemistry and Physics Leadership Team	Novice teacher with five years of teaching Chemistry and Physics
Ms. Jordan	Algebra 1 Leadership Team	Novice teacher with three years of teaching Algebra 1

Pseudonym Name	Current Position	Role in the study
Mr. Anderson	Spanish Leadership Team	Novice teacher with five years of teaching Spanish 1-3 and Native Speaker
Mr. Whales	Intro to Business Tech Leadership Team	Novice teacher with five years of teaching Intro to Business Tech and Computer Science
Ms. O'Neil	AVID Teacher	Novice teacher with five years of teaching Intro to Business Tech and one year of AVID

Timeline

The research design team met in December to discuss the purpose and action of the research process. The researcher presented the research questions, and the team collaborated on a timeline to complete the research cycles. The design team also developed a system to institute the instructional strategy, measure the implementation level, and provide interventions over the three research cycles.

After each cycle, the ARDT evaluated the application and barriers to implementing the instructional strategy. This information provided relevant data on implementing the strategy and its complications. The ARDT designed each intervention with the intention of contributing to the professional development of the implementation team. The interventions will include job-embedded professional development sessions to support the implementation of the strategy.

The action research design team selected interventions that aligned with the principles of the theoretical framework. The interventions designed by the ARDT guided the data triangulation process. The action research team will follow the projected timeline for the three implementation phases as outlined in Table 3.3.

Table 3.3

Action Research Timeline

Action research phase	Activity	Timeline
	Research Cycle 1	
Plan	The design team planned for PL for the AVID site team around focused note-taking.	December 2023 – January 2024
Do	The design team conducted a focus group and professional learning with the AVID site team and observed implementation.	December 2023 – January 2024
Act	The implementation team implemented the strategy in the classroom. The design team observed and provided feedback on implementation, conducted group feedback sessions, and conducted interviews to gather data points on implementation.	December 2023 – January 2024
Reflect	The design team reviewed feedback and observation notes and noted implementation.	December 2023 – January 2024
	Research Cycle 2	
Plan	The design team identified educator needs based on the implementation of the strategy and designed the appropriate PL.	January – February 2024
Do	The design team facilitated a PL to the implementation team. The implementation team transferred the knowledge into their teaching practice. The design team conducted classroom observations and provided coaching and feedback.	January – February 2024

Action research phase	Activity	Timeline
Act	The design team reviewed feedback and observation notes and noted implementation.	January – February 2024
Reflect	The researcher compiled and coded focus group and individual interview feedback.	January – February 2024
	Research Cycle 3	
Plan	The researcher presented data to the design team and created intervention activities.	February – March 2024
Do	The design team facilitated a PL to the implementation team. The implementation team transferred the knowledge into their teaching practice. The design team conducted classroom observations and provided coaching and feedback.	February – March 2024
Act	The researcher conducted a final round of focus groups and feedback sessions.	February – March 2024
Reflect	The researcher compiled and coded all relevant data points	February – March 2024

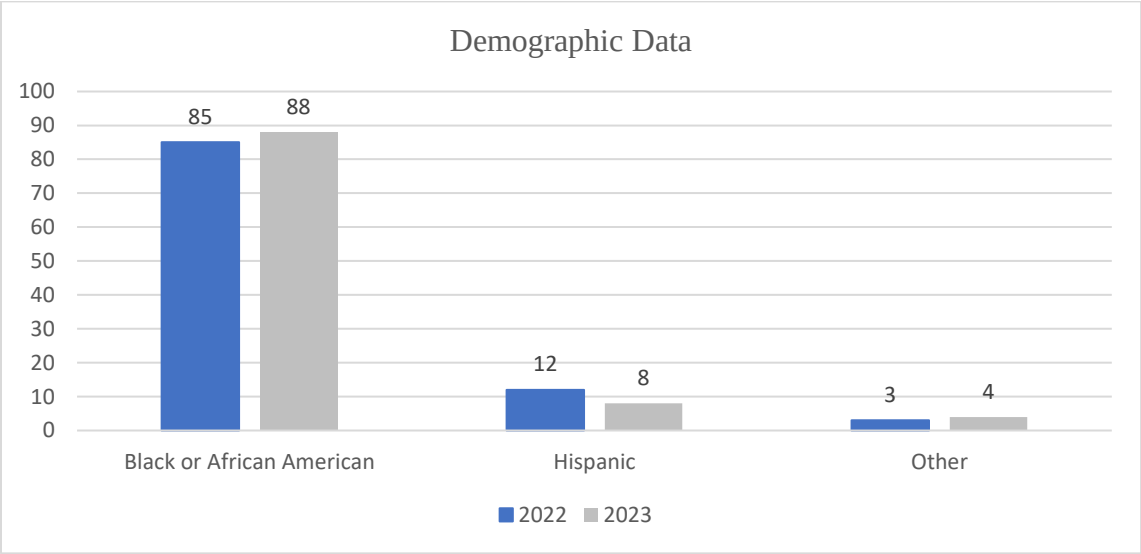
Context of the Study

Pursuit of Excellence High School (PEHS) is a charter school located in the southern portion of the second-largest county in the state, serving students in grades 9-12. USA News and World Report once ranked the school as one of the top 10 charter schools in the state where this study happened. PEHS enrolled students from five public high schools within a twenty-mile radius of one another. PEHS used a lottery system in which students applied and were admitted based on their grade level capacity instead of being vetted by academics, discipline, or attendance. Figure 3.4 depicts the PEHS demographics for the 2021-2022 and 2022-2023 school

years. Predominantly, African American and Hispanic students made up the PEHS student population.

Figure 3.4

PEHS Demographic Data



African American students comprised 85% and 88% of the population for 2022 and 2023, respectively. Hispanic students represented 12% and 8% of the population for the 2022 and 2023 school years, respectively. The school served communities of low socioeconomic status and received additional federal funding as a Title 1 school.

Student Body Characteristics

At the time of this study, PEHS accepted students from all over the county as long as they resided within the county. As a result, the PEHS demographics were similar to the zoned public schools the students would attend if they did not attend PEHS. Those schools in the surrounding area were all predominantly African American and served communities of low socioeconomic status. Although most students who attended PEHS resided in the south portion of the county, a few students who lived on the North side attended PEHS.

PEHS offered a myriad of extracurricular activities, including sports and academic clubs. Despite the school not having a practice football field or a gym, PEHS offered football, baseball, girls' and boys' basketball, and boys' and girls' soccer. The football team served as a recruiting outlet, winning a 2017 state championship, and making the annual playoffs. PEHS also had academic clubs such as BETA, National Honor Society, math, art, Student Government Association, anime and debate, and a drum line, to name a few.

PEHS students enrolled with various academic needs. The Special Education Department served approximately 13% of the student population diagnosed with a learning disability. Five percent of the student body received special accommodations for named disabilities that fell under the 504 of the Rehabilitation Act. Lastly, students served in the ESOL (English Speakers of Other Languages) represented less than one percent of the population.

Dual Enrollment and CTAE Program Offerings

During the early years of PEHS, the school focused on preparing students for careers upon graduation as a career pathway school. However, the school shifted to a college preparatory focus over the years. PEHS offered dual enrollment opportunities for grades 10 through 12. PEHS had approximately eight percent of students in the 10th grade participating, 59% in the 11th grade, and 33% in the 12th grade. PEHS partnered with three local colleges that participated in Dual Enrollment. Dual enrollment allows students to earn high school and college credits in the same class. Students can also earn an associate degree in high school through the Dual Enrollment program.

In addition to the dual enrollment program at PEHS, PEHS also offers career, technical, and agriculture education (CTAE) course pathways. PEHS offers the following pathways:

- Entrepreneurship

- Business Technology
- Web/Digital Design
- Computer Science
- Audio/Film
- Cyber Security

Students also have the opportunity to take CTAE courses via Dual Enrollment.

Academic Achievement

PEHS worked to provide best practices for first-time instruction and support mechanisms to undergird the academic deficiencies of PEHS students. The school offered Algebra and English Language Arts support classes, Advanced Placement (AP), and honors courses. Additionally, the school provided extended-day online courses for students who need additional classes to meet graduation requirements and an extended day and Saturday school for students needing acceleration and remediation. The state Department of Education (DOE) required administering End-of-Course (EOC) exams for Algebra 1, Biology, United States History, and 11th-grade Literature.

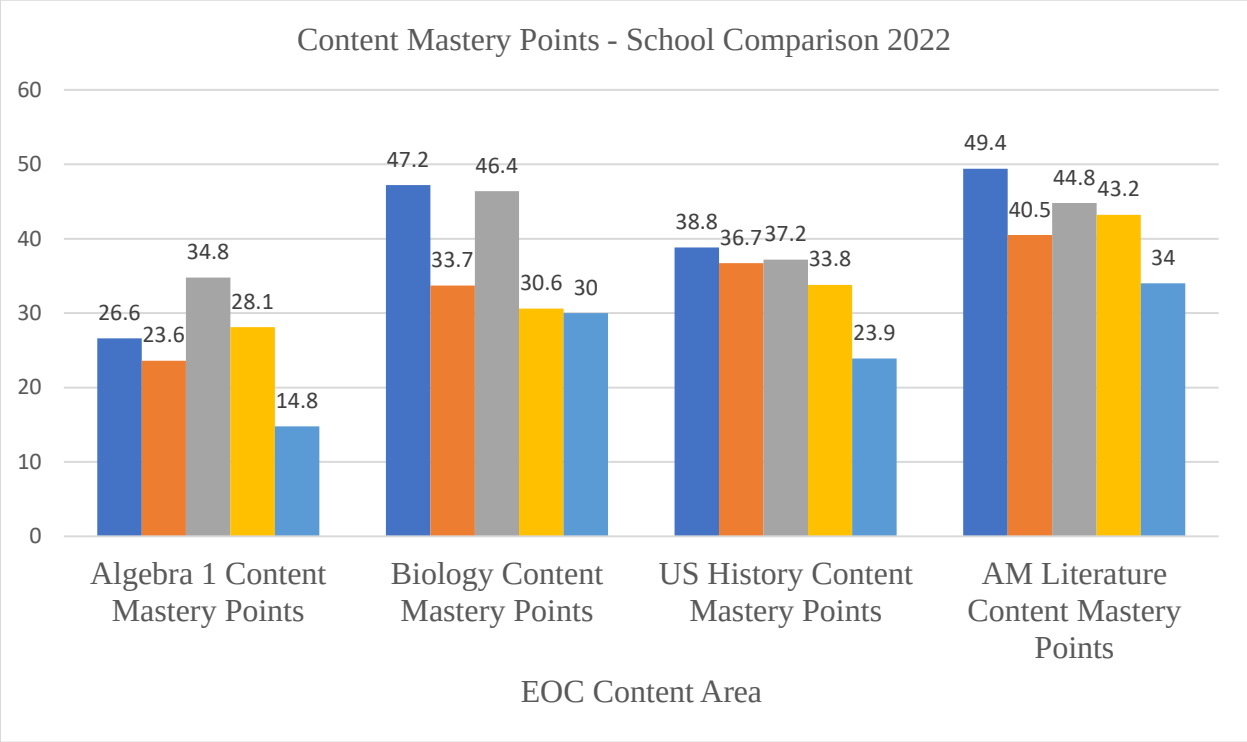
The DOE provided schools with a content mastery score to use as a guide to establish how well students perform academically. The state derived the mastery score by grouping student scores by descriptors such as beginning, developing, proficient, and distinguished, indicating content mastery level. The state weighted each descriptor from zero to 1.5: beginning level - 0, developing - .5 points, proficient - 1, and distinguished - 1.5. The overall score for the four performance levels represented the content mastery score for the school. As a result of COVID-19, the state suspended the EOC exams for 2020 and 2021. Therefore, the researcher determined

that comparing the scores from previous years and using the scores from the school year 2022 as a new baseline was inappropriate.

PEHS traditionally compared EOC scores to the scores of surrounding zoned high schools. PEHS outscored all surrounding public schools. Students participate in every tested subject except for Algebra 1. Figure 3.5 describes the content mastery points of PEHS, highlighted in blue, compared to the surrounding schools.

Figure 3.5

Content Mastery Score Comparison by Schools



As noted in Figure 3.5, in Biology, US History, and American (AM) literature, PEHS performed higher in each core content apart from Algebra 1. However, when compared to the district, PEHS underperforms in all core content areas.

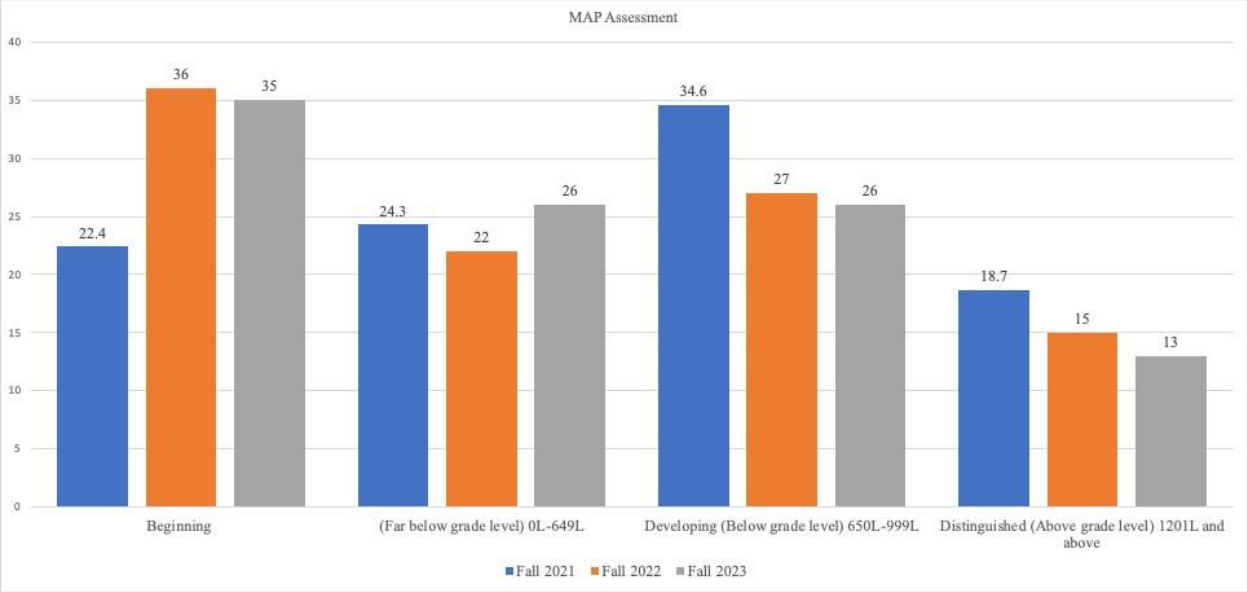
PEHS increased its overall College and Career Ready Performance Index (CCRPI) scores from 67.9 in 2018 to 74.2 in 2019. The CCRPI score included content mastery, progress, gap

closing, readiness scores, and graduation rates. The state DOE did not calculate CCRPI scores for 2020-2022 due to COVID-19.

At PEHS, there is a strong focus on both math and English Language Arts Literacy. Students engage in the Measuring Academic Progress (MAP) assessment screener for English Language Arts three times a year. The MAP assessment measures student reading and reading comprehension and connects the reading and comprehension level to their grade level through Lexile scores. Figure 3.6 describes how PEHS students scored on the MAP assessment.

Figure 3.6

MAP Assessment Comparison 2021-2023

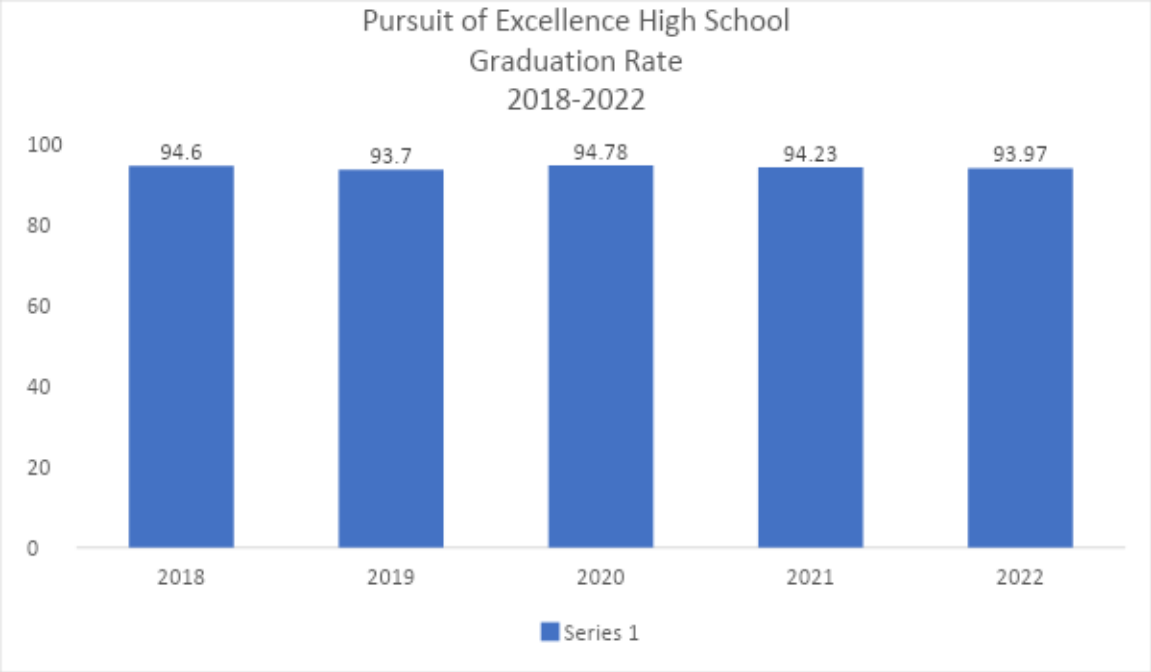


Throughout 2021-2023, the percentage of students reading at the beginning level increased while the percentage of students reading at the distinguished level decreased. This trend would suggest that more students are reading below grade level over the time indicated. At PEHS, over 50% of students read below grade level at each grade level, as measured by the MAP assessment. As a result, PEHS has incorporated support classes for selected 9th and 10th-grade students in English Language Arts.

Lastly, graduation rates are a focus at PEHS. The state and federal DOE determined graduation rates by the number of students entering the 9th-grade level as a cohort, with four years to graduate from high school. The state DOE removes students who transfer and enroll in another academic program from the previous cohort at the last school. However, students who drop out remain in the cohort, and the state DOE considers them non-graduates, thus lowering the graduation rate. Figure 3.7 provides the graduation rates for PEHS from 2018-2022.

Figure 3.7

Graduation Rate: Pursuit of Excellence High School



Staff Characteristics

The next series of figures provides PEHS staff characteristics, including teacher experience and education levels. Figure 3.8 demonstrates the teacher experience of PEHS staff, which included 41 teachers, with over half having up to seven years of experience, while four

have zero to three years, seven have eight to 10 years, and 12 have over 11 years of experience.

Figure 3.8

Teaching Experience at PEHS

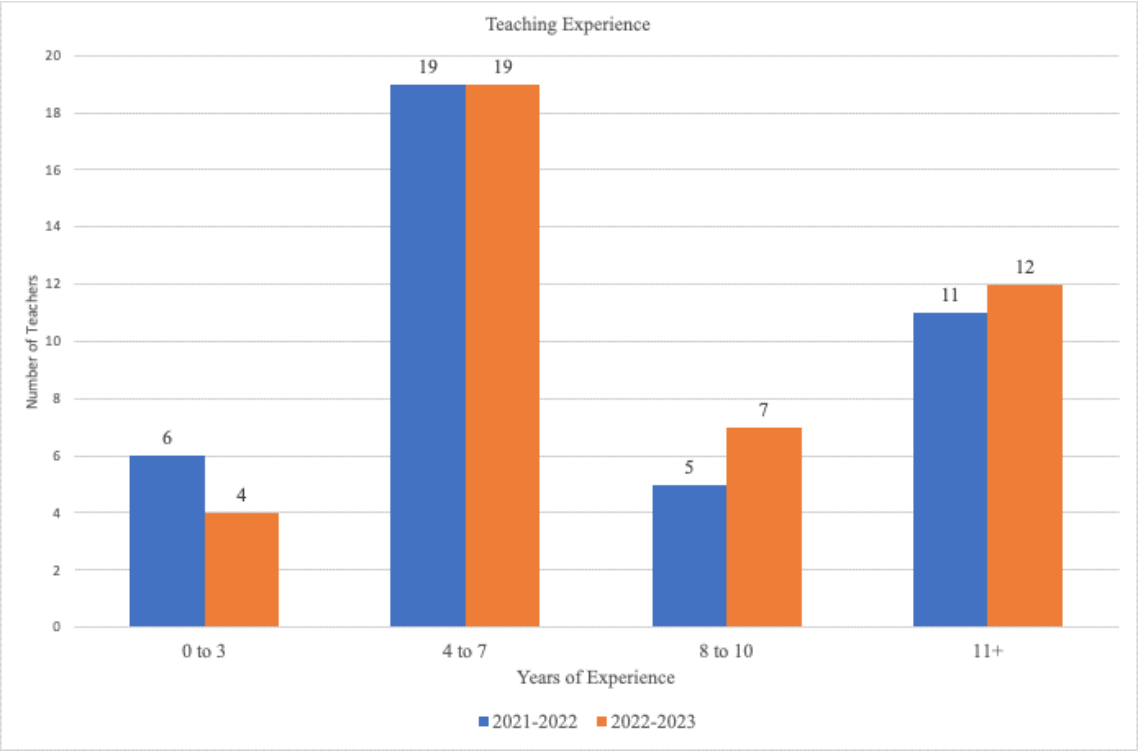
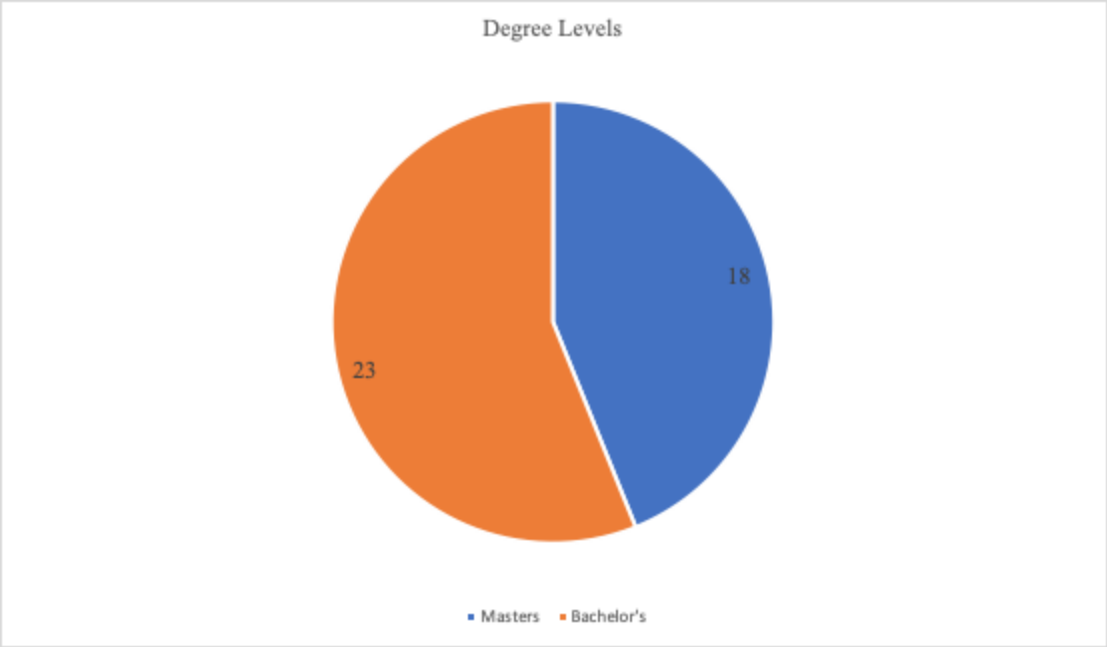


Figure 3.9 describes the education level of PEHS teachers as 23 have master's degrees, and 18 have bachelor's.

Figure 3.9

Teacher Degree Levels at PEHS



Lastly, of the 41 teachers at PEHS, 22 did not possess teaching certificates in 2021-2022, which, according to state DOE guidelines, indicated that they were not highly qualified. As a result of being a charter school, PEHS had the autonomy to issue waivers that allowed non-certified teachers the ability to teach at PEHS. This autonomy impacted the instruction culture because the hired educators did not have collective exposure to instructional best practices. The PEHS administrative team could not assume that the teachers possessed exposure and understanding of the best teaching practices in their repertoire. Therefore, creating a consistent and sustainable culture of instruction was significant to the administrative team.

The school also employed two assistant principals who had not followed the traditional path toward leadership. One of the assistant principals had a background in counseling, and the other had a background in physical education. They were both certified to serve as assistant principals but had not followed the traditional path of serving as instructional leads before

assuming the role of assistant principal. As a result of this context, the two instructional coaches on staff assumed most of the PEHS instructional leadership responsibilities. PEHS had an instructional coach who led the science and math departments, while the other instructional coach led the English Language Arts and Social Studies. The administrative team, including the principal, assistant principals, and instructional coaches, worked with the larger leadership team, including department chairs, counselors, and special education lead teachers, who were ultimately responsible for the entire instructional program.

Impact of COVID

As with all schools in the local school district, the impact of COVID-19 burdened PEHS, causing the school to shift to virtual learning from March 16, 2020, until August 2021. While some schools reopened earlier with a hybrid model, PEHS remained fully closed until the 2021-2022 school year. As a charter school, PEHS did not have the same resources from the local school district as its public counterparts. For example, the school did not have a full-time nurse or access to district-level support such as cluster nurses or district guidance regarding closure. PEHS held its parent meetings and tracked its infection data within the schools and the communities served. PEHS developed its mechanisms for reporting infections to parents and thresholds to initiate closure.

Lastly, the school faced re-acclimating students to return to school with their peers socially. The school dealt with many inconsistencies in social issues that did not exist before the COVID-19 closure. Students experienced a loss of learning and socialization.

Data Sources

The infrequency of implementing instructional strategies at Pursuit of Excellence High School created an urgency to create a culture that reflected instruction. The purpose of the study

was to examine the behaviors and actions of the administrative team as they worked to grow the capacity of the leadership team to improve the culture of instruction at PEHS.

Participants

At the time of the study, the ARDT and ADIT participants served as members of the overall PEHS leadership team, which included department chairs of each academic content area. The 2023-2024 school year served as the first complete year of this particular leadership team. Teacher participation on the leadership team required an annual application and participation in interviews with the administrative team. The selection criteria for the leadership team included how effective the educator was at classroom instruction. This criterion poised the study participants to build and sustain a culture of instruction at PEHS.

Selection Criteria

Membership in the PEHS leadership team was a coveted position. Teachers applied, and then the principal, assistant principals, and instructional coaches upon review of the interview and a review of their performance in the classroom using classroom observation data, TKES, and performance and leadership characteristics observed in professional learning communities. For this study, the researcher decided to invite members of the school leadership to participate as they already worked closely with instructional programming. The school leadership expected that leadership team members serve as the exemplars of instruction and create model classrooms.

Data Collection Methods

The researcher employed a qualitative data collection and analysis approach for this study. Qualitative research addresses the question of what (Bloomberg & Volpe 2019).

Qualitative research promotes a thorough understanding of a social setting from the perspective of the research participants (Bloomberg & Volpe 2019).

Data collection for this study considered a myriad of qualitative methods to include:

1. Individual interviews with the department chairs of core content teachers and the researcher throughout each interval of the research process
2. Focus group discussion facilitated by the action research team during cycles 2 and 3 to gather feedback and gain understanding regarding the progress and implementation of the instructional strategies.
3. Classroom observations conducted by the administrative team.
4. Researcher observation notes based on meetings, classroom observations, and professional development sessions during the research team meetings.
5. Records involving teaching artifacts and additional documentation regarding the aim of the study that served to substantiate any other relevant data.

The researcher considered qualitatively produced data from multiple data collection methods to understand patterns and identify themes.

Interviews

The researcher employed interviews with the study participants to understand how they described the impact of the administrative team on their instructional practices to build and sustain a culture of instruction. A significant benefit of collecting data through interviews is that they can obtain personal viewpoints of an event or experience (Marshall & Rossman, 2015). The researcher provided open-ended questions for the participants to offer their full perspectives. Table 3.4 illuminates a sample of the interview questions.

Table 3.4

Interview Question Sample

Research Question	Interview Questions
Q1: How can school leaders' actions and behaviors create a culture of instruction as they progress throughout the year in one urban, high-needs high school?	How do you describe a culture of instruction? What do you see as challenges for leaders in creating a culture of instruction? What barriers exist as they relate to the behaviors and actions of school leaders?
Q3: How does the action research team articulate the impact of the design and implementation of a culture of instruction for teacher leaders in one urban, high-needs high school?	How can a culture of instruction be sustained? What would be the advantages and or disadvantages of a culture of instruction? How can a culture of instruction be supported by the leaders in the building?

Interviewing is the most suitable data collection when aiming to appreciate the experiences of others and the implications they make of those experiences (Seidmen, 2006). The researcher selected interviews as a data collection method because they provide the opportunity to gather qualitative data that can be transparent and get to the heart of identifying patterns and themes.

Focus Groups

The research team encompassed school and teacher leaders whose opinions and expertise were vital to creating a culture of instruction. The researcher used focus groups as a data collection method to gain a greater perspective from the research team. The focus group collection method supported intentionality on a single theme. Krueger and Casey (2015) defined

focus groups as a discussion around a single topic. Bloomberg and Volpe (2016) state that the goal of a focus group is to create a truthful conversation around a selected topic that fosters a full range of opinions.

Observation Notes

The researcher collected data through observation notes by observing the professional development of instructional strategies and implementation of the instructional practices. Observation notes allowed the researcher to obtain a direct account instead of relying on the account of someone else (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019). Researchers may obtain observation notes in four ways (Glanz, 2014):

- As a participant
- As an observer-participant
- As a participant-observer
- As an observer

In this instance, the researcher served as an observer without participating (Glanz, 2014).

Researcher's Journal

The researcher's journal contained notes and reflections pertinent to the study. Journaling allows the researcher to have a reflective stance (Miles & Huberman, 1994) that enables the researcher to record self-insights, speculations, questions, and interpretations (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019). This process allowed the researcher to use the journal to script thoughts and ideas and use this data collection model in conjunction with interviews and focus groups to identify patterns and themes.

Artifacts

The researcher gathered relevant documents that provided insight and helped answer the research questions throughout the study. The documents included existing and new information that the researcher analyzed and found helpful to the general purpose of the study. The artifacts also included items from the interventions that the ARDT created to aid the implementation team in meeting real-time needs.

Interventions

An intervention is a particular instructional exercise that a researcher implements to investigate its effect on the actions or accomplishments of an individual or group (Glanz, 2014). Researchers may use several interventions to gather the needed data for action research projects. Examples of interventions are behavioral management strategies, teaching methods, and instructional technology (Glanz, 2014). The researcher and the design team determined the most meaningful interventions for this qualitative study.

The purpose of the study was to examine the behaviors and actions of the PEHS administrative team as they worked to grow the capacity of the leadership team to improve the culture of instruction. Therefore, the ARDT created targeted treatments to improve the instruction culture through the professional development and implementation of an instructional strategy used by the implementation team. The design team implemented and analyzed these processes.

Marks and Printy (2003) shared that instructional leadership in an inclusive theory is consistent with capable and empowered teachers. While there are several models for instructional improvement, shared instructional leadership is paramount for this particular action research project. Blase & Blase (2000) stated that principals and teachers discuss changes rather

than directives or critiques and work together as a community to serve students. Two established instructional leadership models prevail over others (Petrovic & Vracar, 2019). Hallinger and Murphy (1985) provided the framework of one of those models, which consists of three dimensions: defining a school's mission, managing the curriculum, and developing a learning culture. This action research sought to study the learning culture.

The ARDT identified instructional practice assessment, identification of behaviors and actions of administrators and professional development, implementation of instructional strategy, and reflection as the treatments for the study. They used the plan, do, act, reflect model to guide the primary intervention.

Instructional Practice Assessment

The ARDT expressed concern about the use of consistent instructional practices across PEHS. Therefore, the collaborative discussions amongst the implementation team determined the immediate instructional practice the team should consider. Once the design team determined the instructional practice, the team established implementation timelines and a method for measuring the effectiveness of implementation.

Professional Development and Action and Behaviors

To ensure consistency of practice and a shared understanding of the strategy, the design team planned and delivered professional development to the implementation team. The design team delivered professional development while identifying what actions and behaviors would yield the most practical knowledge transfer. The actions and behaviors also extended beyond professional development, including observations and feedback sessions.

Implementation of Strategy

The design team conducted classroom observations at different points of the strategy to scaffold learning. The team observed the strategy implementation stages at the beginning, middle, and end to determine the success of the strategy implementation. This process allowed for chunking the implementation of the strategy and targeted feedback sessions with the implementation team.

Refine, Reflect, and Repeat

After each cycle, the design team collaborated to discuss the entire process with the intention of refinement. In a group setting, the implementation team identified highlights and areas they needed to continue in the next cycle. The ARDT incorporated time into the day to provide opportunities to build instructional practice. Table 3.5 reflects the interventions for the study.

Table 3.5

Interventions for the Study

Plan, Do, Act Reflect Framework	Intervention Activities	Target Groups	Frequency of Interventions
Identification of Strategy	Collaboration	Course Content Teachers	Weekly
Professional Development	Professional Learning Community	Course Content Teachers	Monthly
Implementation of Strategy	Classroom Instruction	Course Content Teachers	Weekly
Reflect and Refine	Professional Learning Community	Course Content Teachers	Monthly

Data Analysis Methods

Data analysis is viewing and organizing data to identify patterns and themes. Data must be viewed holistically to identify tendencies and arising patterns (Glanz, 2014). Unlike quantitative procedures, most groupings or patterns emerge from the data instead of being imposed on the data before data collection (McMillian & Schumacher, 2001). Case studies and ethnographic research involve detailed descriptions of the setting or individuals, followed by an investigation of the data to identify themes, relationships, or issues (Stake, 1995 & Wolcott, 1994).

The data generated through qualitative means can be large and very intimidating when attempting to analyze (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019). Once the researcher collects data, managing, organizing, and making sense of all the pieces accumulated is necessary (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019). Qualitative analysis is an imaginative and ongoing process that commands thoughtful convictions about what is substantial and significant in the data (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019).

Coding

Coding is noting what is of interest or consequence, labeling different sections of the data, and categorizing them to organize the information included in the data (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019). Coding reduces data by using symbols or numbers (Richards, 2022). Although coding is a way of organizing the data, researchers can use it for more. According to Saldana (2011), coding can be a way to bring data points together so that the researcher can view them systematically and develop their thinking around a specific topic. Bazeley (2012) also contends that coding is not simply a data-reductive process but intended to stimulate analysis by accessing evidence to test assumptions and conclusions.

Analysis of the data

According to Glanz (2014), analyzing data aims to discover relationships, ideas, explanations, and understanding. The author articulates that organizing the data, generating categories, and testing emergent hypotheses are methods to achieve that goal (Glanz, 2014). The use of various data collection instruments and the comparison of emerging themes must be apparent as they contribute to the credibility of the analysis (Glanz, 2014).

Reliability, Validity, and Generalizability

Action research requires an organized, shared, and democratic orientation toward inquiry that looks for real solutions to complex problems that people confront in their communities or organizations (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; McNiff, 2017; Mertler, 2019; Stringer, 2013). Bloomberg and Volpe (2019) described action research as encompassing "a set of consciously collaborative and democratic strategies for generating knowledge and designing action in which trained experts in social research and other stakeholders work together" (p. 52). The criteria for evaluating qualitative research are different than those for quantitative research. The difference is that qualitative research emphasizes how well the researcher has provided proof that their description and analysis represent the truth of the situation and the persons studied (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019).

As it relates to qualitative research, the idea of trustworthiness connects to the efforts of the researcher to address the more traditional quantitative issues of validity and reliability (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019). Lincoln and Guba (1985) made the original case for trustworthiness in qualitative research to reassure the reader that a study was of significance and value. Connected to this reassurance, Lincoln and Guba (1985)outlined criteria for evaluating trustworthiness, including credibility, dependability, and transferability.

The researcher employed various data collection methods to develop a high level of trustworthiness. These strategies included:

- Interviews
- Journaling
- Classroom observations
- Feedback sessions
- Professional development surveys

Table 3.6 shows the triangulation of these data points.

Table 3.6

Data Triangulation

Research Question	Data Collection	Data Analysis	Timeline
RQ1 How can school leaders' actions and behaviors create a culture of instruction as they progress throughout the year in one urban, high-needs high school?	Focus Groups	Coding/Analysis of Themes	January - May 2024
	Researcher Journal Notes	Researcher Reflection	January - May 2024
	Participant Observations	Coding	January - May 2024
RQ2 How do teachers describe the impact of school leader's behaviors and actions to positively affect their teaching practices to create a culture of instruction in one urban, high-needs high school?	Focus Groups	Coding/Analysis of Themes	January - May 2024
	Researcher Journal Notes	Researcher Reflection	January - May 2024
	Participant Observations	Coding	January - May 2024
RQ3 How does the action research team articulate the impact	Focus Groups	Coding/Analysis of Themes	January - May 2024

Research Question	Data Collection	Data Analysis	Timeline
of the design and implementation of a culture of instruction for teacher leaders in one urban, high-needs high school?	Researcher Journal Notes	Researcher Reflection	January - May 2024
	Participant Observations	Coding	January - May 2024

Action research is a practice that was developed by practitioners so that they may improve their practice (Corey, 1953). To that end, action research uses many methodologies and approaches, which can lead to a mindset for school improvement, enhanced decision-making, promoting self-reflection, creating a positive school climate, and empowering those who participate in the process (Glanz, 2014). Although researchers perceive action research as a one-shot solution to school change, action research is a more reasonably feasible tool practitioners use to improve schools (Sagor, 1997). This study also sought to provide a thick description when analyzing the data. Glanz (2014) described a thick description of the data as being intensive and observed daily over an expanded period.

Limitations

The findings of this research study included data collected from one urban school in the southeastern region of the United States. Consequently, the data may not transfer to other schools in the state or school districts throughout the United States. The selection of the participants, including two assistant principals, two instructional coaches, and six teachers, was designed to include a comprehensive cross-section of the school. A larger sample size may have provided a more extensive data set to increase the transferability of the research findings.

Chapter Summary

Chapter 3 described the data collection and analysis methods used in this action research study. The preferred qualitative method for this study was action research because of its iterative focus on action and reflection. The administrative team and instructional coaches worked together to identify problems, create solutions, and reflect on their work. The researcher used interviews, classroom observation data, focus groups, and the researcher's reflection notes as data points.

The researcher used the leadership team interviews to capture their perspectives on the culture of instruction and what actions and behaviors of the administrative team could support their implementation of instructional strategies. The purpose of the focus group was to gather the perspectives of the administrative team on how they could help the professional development and implementation of the instructional strategy. The researcher used a journal to capture the continuous data analysis throughout the study. The researcher collected, coded, and analyzed the data for themes and patterns.

The next chapter of this dissertation presents and describes the detailed case at PEHS within the context of the leadership team for implementing the instructional strategy.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS FROM THE ACTION RESEARCH CASE

The purpose of the study was to examine the behaviors and actions of the administrative team as they work to grow the capacity of the leadership team in order to improve the culture of instruction at HCCA. To examine the research questions, the researcher worked with an action research team to study the impact of administrators working in collaboration with the leadership team to sustain a culture of instruction.

To address the purpose of this action research study, the following questions guided this inquiry:

1. How can school leaders' actions and behaviors create a culture of instruction as they progress throughout the year in one urban, high-needs high school?
2. How do teachers describe the impact of school leader's behaviors and actions to positively affect their teaching practices to create a culture of instruction in one urban, high-needs high school?
3. How does the action research team articulate the impact of the design and implementation of a culture of instruction for teacher leaders in one urban, high-needs high school?

The Context

The action research case study occurred in PEHS, a college preparatory, independent charter high school founded in 2009 and approved by and operating within the school system in the southeastern United States. PEHS was one of the first five career academies to receive a state

Career Academy Grant initiative through the Lieutenant Governor's Office in coordination with the Technical College System of Georgia. PEHS is the first LEED-certified public school facility within the district and the state.

During the study, 41 educators served 722 PEHS students. PEHS consistently evolved to meet community needs. For instance, parents and students continually asked for more post-secondary options for students, which increased the dual enrollment annual numbers. While dual enrollment is not unique in the state, the program underrepresents specific student demographics, such as the primarily African American students of low socio-economic status that PEHS serves. Table 4.1 outlines the twenty-three units required for graduation.

Table 4.1

Graduation Requirements

Content	Credits
English	4
Math	4
Science	4
Social Studies	3
World Languages/Fine Arts	3
Electives	4
Health/P.E.	1

Through a partnership with a local Technical College, PEHS students were able to enroll in one or more of the following dual enrollment curriculum areas:

1. Auto Technology (Students can qualify for Automotive Service Excellence (ASE) Certification)
2. Avionics Technician
3. Basic Dental Assisting
4. Criminal Justice

5. Technology
6. Patient Care Assisting

As the partnership grew with the technical college and the community demanded more college opportunities, PEHS expanded its collaboration to include an additional college. At the time of this study, students could access expanded college programs through transportation at no cost. These partnerships contributed to PEHS having the highest percentage of students taking dual enrollment as measured on the 2017 CCRPI compared to similar schools in the state.

Leadership Structure

A governance board comprising a foundation board, community representatives, and parent representatives operated PEHS. At the school level, the administrative team consisted of one principal, two assistant principals, two instructional coaches, and seven department chairs. The current principal had over ten years of leadership experience. Of the two assistant principals, one had one year of experience in his previous role as a counselor of 10 years, all at PEHS. The other assistant principal had over ten years of leadership experience. The two instructional coaches (IC) previously served as an English language arts (ELA) teacher and a Math teacher. One was the IC for math, science, health, and physical education, while the other served as ELA, social studies, world language, and Career technical agriculture.

Academic Staff

Forty-one core content and elective teachers served 722 PEHS students during the study. Figure 4.1 captures the makeup of the staff experience. As indicated in the figure, nineteen staff members had four to seven years of experience, with the next largest conglomerate of teachers at 11 or more years.

Figure 4.1

Teaching experience

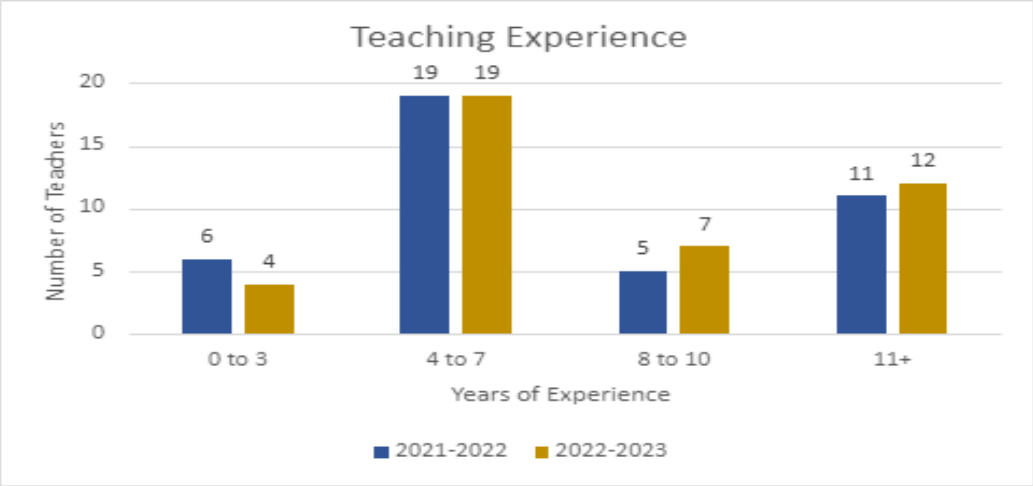
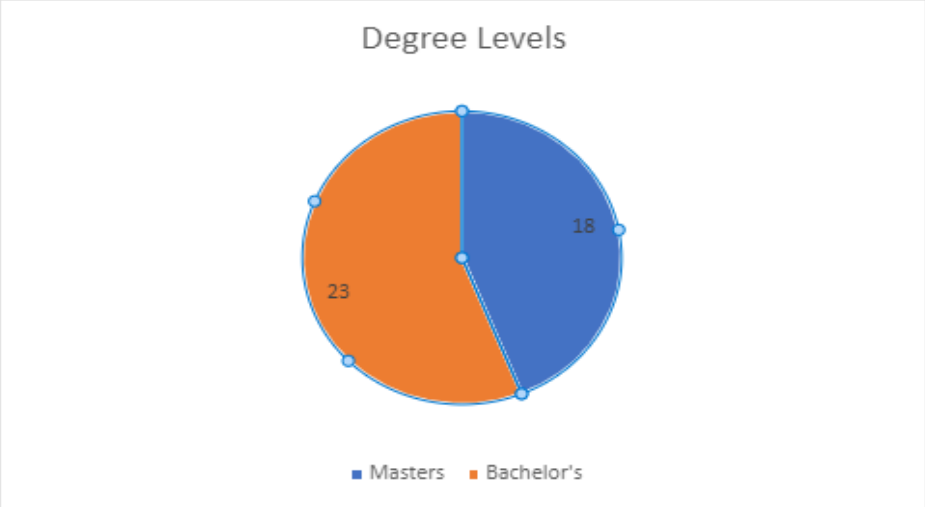


Figure 4.2 shows the number of teachers with bachelor's and master's degrees. Of the 41 PEHS teachers, 18 have master's degrees.

Figure 4.2

Degree Levels



Student Population

The student population is ever-changing as it operates by a lottery system. In the 2021-2022, the enrollment for PEHS was 706. For the upcoming 2022-2023 school year, the allotment was 729. Table 4.1 outlines the student population demographics for 2020-2023.

Table 4.1

Ethnicity by Grade Level

	Grade	Hispanic/ Latino	American Indian or Alaska Native	Asian	Black or African American	White	Two or more races	Total Number of Students
	09	29	0	0	205	4	5	243
	10	22	0	0	149	3	2	176
2020-2021	11	13	0	1	119	1	1	135
	12	0	0	0	3	0	0	3
	Total	64	0	1	476	8	8	557
	9	23	0	0	144	2	6	175
	10	26	0	0	194	3	3	226
2021-2022	11	20	0	0	140	2	1	163
	12	15	0	1	123	1	2	142
	Total	84	0	1	601	8	12	706
	09	34	0	2	166	1	6	209
	10	25	1	0	166	2	6	200
2022-2023	11	15	0	0	147	0	2	164
	12	15	0	0	138	2	1	156
	Total	89	1	2	617	5	15	729

When reviewing the student population, the percentage of students eligible for free or reduced lunch increased from 62% to 75%. Of all the demographics, this one showed the most significant difference.

Culture

The student behavioral climate and culture of PEHS had few incidents that required disciplinary action. Compared to the schools the students would attend, this is an attractive aspect of the school. Table 4.2 shows the number of disciplinary infractions. In the school year 2019-2020, there were only 10 incidents with a suspension percentage of 1.7. The incidents resulting in expulsion followed the school district code of discipline, which included mandatory expulsion for drug paraphernalia. Table 4.2 outlines the disciplinary incidents at PEHS and the consequences for the 2018-2022 school year.

Table 4.2

Disciplinary Infractions

School Year	Enrollment	Students with Incidents	In School Suspension	Out of School Suspension	Expulsion
2018-2019	574	22	0%	3.80%	0%
2019-2020	601	10	0%	1.70%	0.30%
2020-2021	557	0	0%	0%	0%
2021-2022	706	52	8%	20%	1%
2022-2023	729	8	20%	10%	0%

Problem Framing in the Context

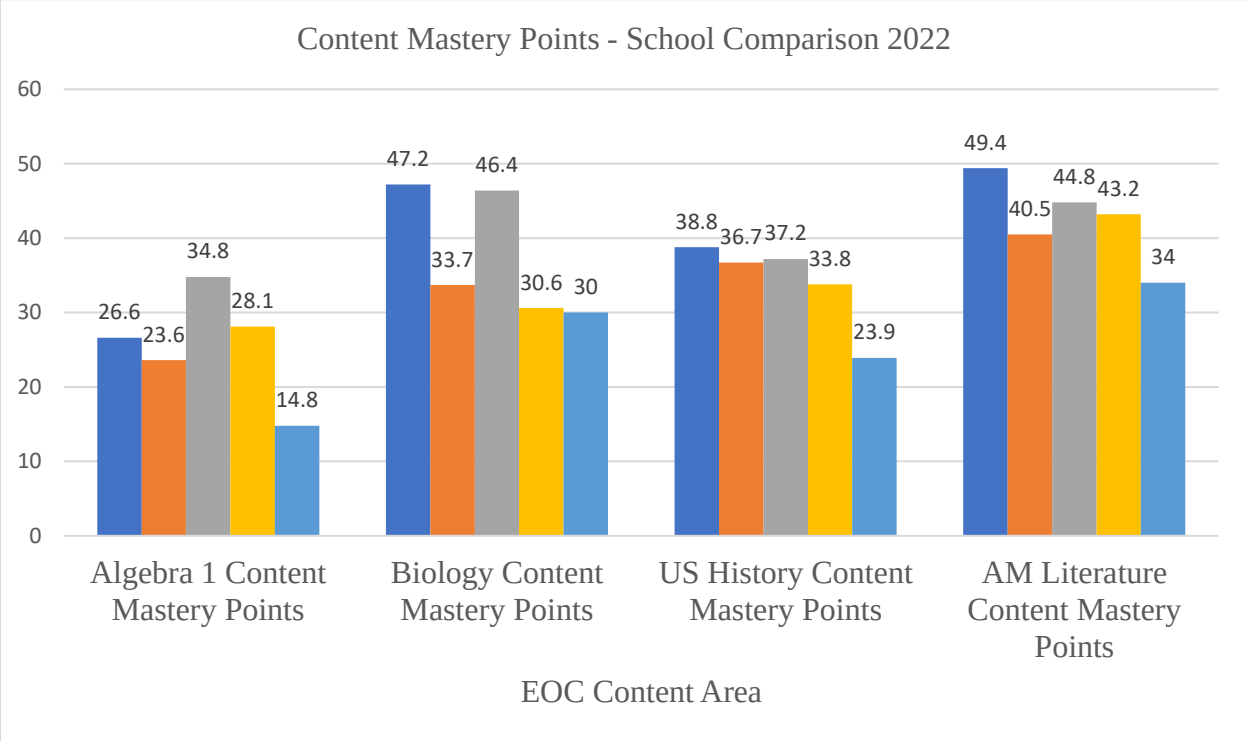
At the time of this action research case study, PEHS, compared to high schools in the surrounding area that students would attend if the charter did not exist, was still dealing with challenges presented due to the COVID-19 pandemic. PEHS acknowledged those challenges to student learning, as well as the inconsistent instructional practices of educators. The College and Career Ready Performance Index (CCRPI) scores that indicate schools' performance on various data points reflected these challenges. One such data point is the content mastery score, which measures student performance on the following exams:

- Biology
- Algebra
- United States History
- 11th-grade Literature

In the context of PEHS, the school typically compares its scores to the surrounding schools that students would attend. PEHS outscored all surrounding public schools. PEHS students would participate in every tested subject except for Algebra 1. Figure 4.1 describes the content mastery points of PEHS, highlighted in blue, compared to the surrounding schools.

Figure 4.1

Content Mastery Score Comparison by Schools

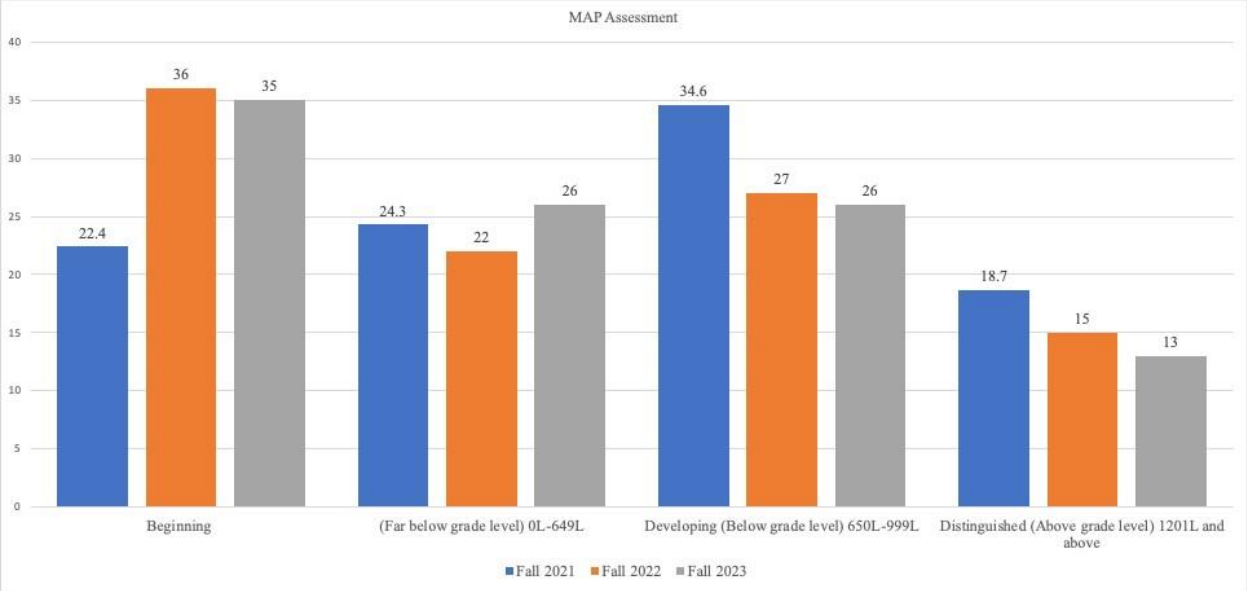


As noted in Figure 4.1, PEHS outperformed neighboring schools in Biology, US History, and American (AM) literature and trailed in Algebra. However, PEHS lags in all core content areas compared to the district.

PEHS had a strong focus on math and English Language Arts Literacy. The school leaders used the Measuring Academic Progress (MAP) screener assessment to measure English Language Arts students in grades 9-12 three times a year. The MAP assessment is a measure of Lexile scores in English Language Arts. The Lexile score produced by the MAP measured reading and reading comprehension. PEHS used this data to determine reading levels and used the information to differentiate instruction related to the text read in class. Figure 4.2 presents a visual of student MAP scores.

Figure 4.2

MAP Assessment Comparison 2021-2023



Throughout 2021-2023, the percentage of students reading at the beginning level increased while the percentage of students reading at the distinguished level decreased. This trend suggested that more students are reading below grade level over the time indicated. At PEHS, over 50% of students read below grade level at each grade level, as measured by the MAP assessment. As a result, PEHS incorporated support classes for select 9th and 10th-grade students in English Language Arts.

Staff Characteristics

The PEHS charter includes issuing waivers to offer contracts to non-certified teachers. Although the school encouraged and even provided financial support for teachers to obtain certifications, it is not a requirement of employment. Teachers also receive a $3,000 stipend for having a teaching certification. Of the 41 teachers at PEHS, 22 did not possess teaching certificates in 2021-2022, and of 42 teachers in 2022-2023, 24 did not. The state designates these teachers without a teaching certificate as “Not highly qualified.” The impact of this relates to an

instructional culture in that the educators at PEHS do not come with collective exposure to instructional best practices. The PEHS administrative team could assume that teachers had prior exposure and understanding of best practices in their repertoire. Therefore, creating a consistent and sustainable culture of instruction was significant to the administrative team.

The school employed two assistant principals who had not followed the traditional path of serving as instructional leads before assuming the role of assistant principal. One of the assistant principals had a background in counseling, and the other had a background in physical education. Although it is not unconventional for a teacher to progress to an assistant principal, ascending to instructional leadership without classroom experience poses a challenge. Additionally, before assuming the leadership role, the counselor had limited experience in instructional leadership.

As a result of the limited instructional experiences of the assistant principals, the two instructional coaches assumed most of the instructional leadership responsibilities. PEHS had an instructional coach who led the science, math, physical education, and art departments. In contrast, the other instructional coach leads the English Language Arts, Social Studies, World Languages, and Career and Technology departments. The administrative team, including the principal, assistant principals, and instructional coaches, worked with the larger leadership team, including department chairs, counselors, and special education lead teachers, who are ultimately responsible for the entire instructional program.

Description of the Context

During this action research study, PEHS began implementing Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID), a national program that provided students and teachers with instructional strategies to enhance academic achievement. PEHS started the implementation of

AVID with two student cohorts at the 9th and 10th grade levels. Full implementation of AVID will include a cohort of students at each grade level. The AVID classes are taught during the day by an assigned educator. Once the school leaders select AVID students, they have the class each year through their senior year. The program designed the curriculum to teach students academic strategies to use in their daily class schedule. The AVID teacher also served as the AVID site leader, managing grades and transferring knowledge related to using the strategy they learned in the AVID class.

In addition to the grade level cohorts, PEHS worked with the leadership team to implement an instructional strategy for each leadership team member. Due to the amount of non-certified teachers at PEHS, the team found inconsistencies within the instructional programming. Some teachers demonstrated sound instruction, and some were not as adept at implementing strategies that foster sound instruction. Marzano et al. (2005) outlined a link between culture, leadership, and student improvement and ultimately concluded that leader behaviors are directly related to establishing a strong school culture.

The purpose of the study was to examine the behaviors and actions of the administrative team as they worked to grow the capacity of the leadership team to improve the culture of instruction at PEHS. The administrative team is also composed of leaders who have not followed a traditional trajectory into instructional leadership. Although the paths are non-traditional, the principal still expected that leadership would include instructional leadership. Therefore, a need at PEHS existed to instill a culture of instruction and examine how the administrative team can help the leadership team instill that culture. In this study, the process sought to address a problem in the literature. Schools with low to moderate academic achievement usually struggle with consistently implementing research-based instructional strategies. Based on the identification

that this was an issue worthy of intervention, the researcher assembled a team to identify and implement an instructional strategy at PEHS.

Action Research Cycle 1

The first cycle of this action research study began with an initial meeting with the ARDT. Although the design team met frequently and had an excellent working relationship, the pressure to get the research right and communicate the study overview and the literature supporting the design team caused some initial anxiety.

The design team met and began reviewing key literature components and the data supporting the problem of practice. The team was very engaged and, throughout the process, became excited to start the cycles. During the meeting, the researcher provided the design team with the purpose of the study and the research questions. The team used this information to create a pre-assessment to gain feedback from the implementation team and create the first professional learning activity. The team used a Google Doc to capture the draft pre-assessment questions. Each team member was assigned a color with which to write their questions. The team then reconvened to review and select the questions they thought would provide the most insight into developing a professional learning session.

The design team then held a virtual meeting with the implementation team to review the purpose of the study, the research questions, and a review of the literature to gain a complete understanding of the what and the why of the study. After that, the team shared each pre-assessment question individually and began a conversation around those questions. They gained valuable perspectives on their ideas of a culture of instruction, what they expected from administrators to build that culture, and best practices for professional learning that ultimately lead to knowledge transfer.

During the meeting, the implementation team asked if they could provide collective feedback to remove any feelings of individualism. They did not want to feel that participating in the study would result in any individual attention toward implementing the strategy. Therefore, the design team held the feedback sessions in group sessions instead of meeting with implementation team members individually. With this information, the design team collaboratively created professional learning for the implementation team.

The design team delivered professional learning covering focused note-taking as the instructional strategy selected for the study. The learning capsulated the first two steps of focused note-taking, which included note-taking styles in step one and strategies for reviewing the notes after taking them in step two. In addition to the training, the implementation team had a note-taking composition notebook like the students. This way, the implementation team can experience the strategy as the students do, which is an effective experiential tool.

The design team visited classrooms over the next two weeks to observe the note-taking strategy. After those observations, the team held group feedback sessions via Zoom to gather input from the teachers and data for the upcoming professional learning. In addition to the feedback sessions, the researcher interviewed selected implementation team members. Lastly, the design team developed a questionnaire and disseminated it to the implementation team via Google Docs. The questionnaire included multiple-choice and open-ended questions. Through the review of the data collected, the design team constructed the next professional learning session to begin cycle two.

Cycle 1 Intervention

Classroom observation data and discussions with design team members led to the initial problem. The design team split into two teams and visited eight classrooms. Team one consisted

of the researcher and Mrs. Greate. Team two consisted of Mrs. Knoll, Mr. Gore, and Mrs. Glare. The protocol included a thirty-minute or less visit focused on student note-taking observations. The design team provided the implementation team members with a window of time for the observations to occur.

Although exposed to the first two stages of focused notetaking, the design team did not observe the implementation team members implement both stages with the same level of fidelity. During classroom visits, teachers used a variety of different note-taking styles. For example, Ms. Anthony had her class access and review a PowerPoint through Google Drive while independently taking notes using a two-column note-taking style. On one side of the paper, students were to provide a title for the slide and, to the right of that, describe pertinent information from the slide. Ms. Anthony directed the students to complete this task for each slide before receiving whole group instruction. Once instruction began, the students could add to their notes. When asked by the teacher if they were familiar with the two-column style of taking notes, the students responded no. Based on that response, the teacher took time to teach two-column note-taking.

Mr. Whales allowed his students to use their notebooks to take notes independently. As a result, all students had notes in their notebooks however they saw fit. Some students had more copious notes than others, but all students had completed some level of note-taking. Nevertheless, the intentionality was not the same around the notes style that other implementation team members observed. The design team only observed Mr. Whales' class being allowed to take notes as they saw fit.

Ms. Jones scripted notes for the students and uploaded the notes to Google Drive. She stated that she wanted to ensure that all students start from the same baseline of notes. She then

printed out a note-taking template for students to take notes during the lesson, allowing them to write notes in their own words. Ms. Jones allowed students to staple the notes in their notebooks so they were in one place.

Cycle 1 Interviews

During the pre-assessment discussion, the implementation team suggested a combined feedback session instead of the typical feedback to each teacher. Although the design team conducted classroom observations with all implementation team members, the researcher conducted Cycle 1 interviews with three implementation team members. For each cycle, the researcher interviewed three different members. Because the interviews happened at the same time as the feedback session, the design team selected three implementation team members to participate. The research led the interviews; however, all design team members attended. Mr. Thorpe, Ms. Anthony, and Mr. Anderson participated in the feedback session and interview after the classroom observations for Cycle 1. The design team conducted two-part feedback sessions that lasted about 45 minutes. They focused the first part on clarifying observations with each teacher. They allowed teachers to add to the conversation while other teachers asked any questions about the discussion. This process provided an opportunity to have a robust collaborative feedback session. After the feedback session, the design team asked the implementation team members questions about the action research study. The interview questions can be found in Appendix A.

During this interview, which consisted of three teachers, understanding different note-taking styles emerged as a barrier. Although the design team exposed the teachers to note-taking styles during professional development, they indicated that they reverted to the style they felt most comfortable with instead of using the styles presented in professional learning.

Additionally, this interview session highlighted that the teachers may benefit from more modeling of the note-taking style to transfer knowledge. The teachers wanted a more hands-on experience with professional learning instead of just being exposed to note-taking styles.

In addition to requiring the students to take notes, the next step was to allow the students to process the notes. This design team presented the step in Cycle one of professional learning. However, during the interview portion, the teachers communicated that this portion of the notetaking was problematic during that learning. Although students were taking notes, allowing them to review and internalize them was a barrier to implementing the focused note-taking process. A lack of understanding of what that process should look like partly fueled the barrier. Lastly, the design team reviewed the questionnaire responses that all implementation team members completed to aid in developing Cycle two professional learning.

Action Research Cycle 2

Cycle two began with a meeting with the design team to construct a professional learning plan. The design team reviewed notes from the classroom observations, listened to the feedback sessions, and received feedback from the interviews to gain insight into how the research study was progressing and to plan the next professional learning session. The two emerging areas of concern included consistent note-taking formats and processing notes once the students have taken them. The areas of concern developed from the classroom observations analysis in Cycle one and data collected from the feedback and interview session also from Cycle one. The implementation team required the design team to demonstrate more hands-on modeling instead of exposure to note-taking formats. Considering all data points, the design team collaboratively designed the professional learning with the implementation team. The teams constructed the professional learning to address and provide a more interactive session wherein teachers had

more time to develop a strategy for implementing note-taking formats. Also, the design team planned to deliver how to take real-time notes and teach students how to process them.

The design team identified barriers that needed developing and areas of success to continue building upon. The design team discussed that although teachers had the students take notes, there was no uniformity in the note-taking style. Teachers were having students take notes in formats that were the most comfortable for them. Therefore, the design team created a professional learning that incorporated a specific type of research-based note-taking strategy: Thinking Maps.

The design team delivered the professional learning series on Thinking Maps, which began Cycle 2. Thinking Maps was an umbrella term incorporating eight thinking map styles that employ a map-type format. The design team exposed the implementation team to each type of thinking map and gave examples of integrating them into their instruction. The design team provided content-specific examples since the implementation team comprised leaders from different content areas. The implementation team attempted to adapt the note-taking format to their content area during the professional learning. Although the design team did not explicitly demonstrate during professional learning, the team tried to adjust the format to their content area. This process allowed the implementation team to experience constructing the Thinking Maps as their students would experience it.

Once the design team introduced the note-taking format, they used examples of notes to learn how to process them. This part was integral to the learning as it allowed the students to internalize the notes they had just taken. The design team allowed the implementation team to practice processing the notes received in the first part of the training. The implementation team was then allowed to ask questions and seek any clarity needed for implementation.

Over the next two weeks, the design team observed implementation team members specifically to see the thinking map application and if the teachers allowed students to process the notes. The design team operated in two separate teams to observe the eight classrooms. The visits lasted from 30 – 45 minutes over two weeks.

Each teacher attempted to have students use Thinking Maps. However, only one of the eight teachers had students process the notes. During the classroom visits, Ms. Anthony tried to have the students process the notes. The other seven teachers attempted to implement the thinking maps only. The design team observed the English teacher using a Thinking Map to help students organize their thoughts for writing an argumentative essay. The business education teacher used a bubble map to help students build resumes. The Algebra teacher had students capture essential information in word problems by constructing a bubble map.

Once the design team completed the observations, feedback and interviews with selected participants followed. The researcher and the design team members facilitated the feedback and interview session. This team designed the session to give teachers feedback on their specific classroom observations and allowed teachers to describe their perspectives on the observation. Ms. Anthony, Mr. Thorpe, and Mr. Anderson participated in the input and interview session. After feedback, they transitioned into the interview portion. Implementation members answered questions about the overall research questions and how the research study was progressing. The researcher provided a digital questionnaire to all implementation team participants following the feedback and interview. In preparation for Cycle 3, the design team convened to review the collected data and design and deliver the subsequent professional learning.

Cycle 2 Intervention

The classroom observations and feedback session provided growth areas and highlights. The design team visited the eight teachers either in the act of having students take notes or had evidence of note-taking. Ms. Jones used two Thinking Map formats in the same class period. The initial map used was the bubble map, and as the lesson grew rigorously, so did the type of Thinking Map. Secondary to the bubble map, Ms. Jones incorporated a flow map. Mr. Anderson used a two-column note-taking style and communicated that he was still grappling with incorporating Thinking Maps. Mr. Whales, who allowed his students to take notes as they saw fit, indicated he was working on a plan to have them put their notes into a Thinking Map. Ms. Anthony, who provided her students with a PowerPoint in their Google Classroom, reviewed it with her students so they could add to the notes previously taken. In terms of shared norms and values, it was evident that the implementation team became far more consistent in requiring students to take notes, and they all believed in the benefits of note-taking.

However, the implementation team struggled to transfer knowledge from professional learning consistently. The implementation team had the students take notes but did not use the Thinking Map consistently. Additionally, only one of the implementation team members moved to step two of the note-taking process. Ms. Anthony had the students process the notes previously taken while she was reviewing them. This process proved cumbersome for the students as they tried to listen to her instructions while concurrently processing the notes.

Cycle 2 Interviews

The researcher and design team conducted Cycle 2 interviews after classroom observations from the second professional learning session with Mr. Thorpe, Ms. O'Neil, and Ms. Jordan. The interview happened over Zoom, and the team shared the questions with the

implementation team so that they could see them during the interview. Each member was allowed to respond to the question. If all did not respond, the researcher would ask the member who did not respond if they had anything to add. The researcher recorded the interview session and the feedback portion to allow the design team to listen to the answers and identify themes.

The data from the observations and interviews suggested that the teachers had students take notes; however, this was inconsistent with the strategies outlined in the professional learning session. The educators highlighted the growth in their intentionality of having students take notes. Ms. O'Neil commented that her students automatically took out their notebooks to take notes without prompting, which was new for her. Ms. Jordan commented on how her students are doing much better in retaining information due to allowing students to process their notes. All interview participants provided positive feedback about their growth in their application of focused note-taking and its impact on their instructional culture.

The participants also articulated several barriers. Mr. Thorpe struggled to use different note-taking formats for his content, English Language Arts. He also communicated that he thought he had correctly learned a note-taking process by listening to the other implementation team members in the feedback session. However, he was unsure of how he arrived there and shared that this may have happened without realizing that he had done something correctly. Mr. Whales stated that he is so connected to his way of teaching and note-taking process that it is difficult for him to adjust to something new. He is working hard at trying a new way for students to take notes, but it was a heavy lift for him.

The opportunity was also a barrier in the second part of the notetaking process, which was how to process the notes. When observing Ms. O'Neil, she provided an independent opportunity for students to process their notes, but only a few participated. Ms. Anthony

provided instructions to guide the students through processing the notes but found that students disengaged from the process. In hindsight, she communicated that she should have had the students complete the strategy of processing the notes independently and not through a guided session.

The behaviors and actions of the administrative team consistently echoed throughout the interview. Specifically, Modeling was a significant component. The implementation team wanted the design team to model more within professional learning and in the classroom instead of simply teaching what the strategy entailed. The team articulated practice consistency as the second barrier. A key point they raised was that the more consistent the administration team provided learning and feedback, the more confident they felt in implementing. Lastly, the team highlighted coaching. Some of the implementation team enjoyed hearing about Grows and Glows from their colleagues. However, others desired specific coaching about what they could do differently or better. This type of feedback requires administrators to be knowledgeable about the strategy and multiple ways of implementation. Ms. O'Neil stated, "There is a difference between note-taking and copying what's on the board, and that needed to be taught explicitly."

Action Research Cycle 3

Action research cycle 3 began with the design team convening to review the data from the classroom observations, interviews, feedback sessions, and questionnaires. The design team discussed notes from classroom observations, listened to the interview and feedback session recording, and reviewed and discussed questionnaire responses. Based on those data points, the team decided that the implementation team needed additional training regarding note-taking and notes processing. Teachers demonstrated growth in their consistency in having students take notes. Although the design team did observe that teachers were still having issues connecting the

note-taking format to their content, the design team noted during the debriefs and interviews that teachers improved. This team made the deduction around the lack of processing notes due to the limited opportunities observed during classroom observations and feedback responses that illuded to not having enough time or limited knowledge of the process strategy to implement.

Therefore, the design team created professional learning to model how the implementation team should incorporate the Thinking Map format into their content area and processing. Professional learning included teachers bringing a familiar lesson plan to the professional learning session. The design team modeled for the implementation team, using an actual lesson plan and how to use a Thinking Map format for specific content. Although the modeling did not include all content areas, it connected the note-taking format to specific content. Next, the design team modeled a system to process the notes once the implementation team had actual notes linked to the Thinking Map format. After classroom observations, the implementation team participated in a feedback session and an interview. Lastly, the implementation team participated in a final virtual focus group session.

Over the next two weeks, the design team visited eight classrooms to observe note-taking and note-processing. Design team members spent approximately 30 to 45 minutes in classrooms to observe note-taking and if students had the opportunity to process their notes. The design team remained in the same two teams for the observations. The design team members reviewed student notebooks and questioned students about the processing procedures. Although this was the last cycle in the process, and there was no additional learning session, the design team met to discuss notes after the observation.

Cycle 3 Intervention

After the design team delivered the final professional learning, emphasizing how Thinking Maps directly connected to the specific contents and processing, there was more evidence that the participants implemented note-taking in the classroom. Mr. Anderson used the bubble map to assist students with verb conjugation in Spanish. Students conjugated several verbs using the bubble map, and Mr. Anderson found that it was helpful to the students as a way to organize the content. However, the students could not process their notes within the same period.

Mr. Thorpe used a brace map for the students to outline their thoughts before creating a 2-paragraph response to a prompt on the board. The teacher began by teaching the students how to use the brace map to become familiar with it in real-world situations. Once the students were familiar with the map and its intended use, the class used it for the prompt. Although Mr. Thorpe found the map useful, he indicated that time management needed consideration. Although he intended to allow students to review their writing for the processing piece, time management was an issue because he did not effectively plan the time to teach students how to use the format. He allowed the processing to occur in the next class; however, processing should happen the same day the students take notes.

Ms. Jordan used a double bubble map to compare real and imaginary numbers. As she was teaching, she recognized two barriers. The first barrier was that she did not teach students how to use the double bubble map effectively, so students found it cumbersome to listen to instructions and use the bubble map. Secondarily, the content was too new, and Ms. Jordan would have been more effective in breaking the lesson into two parts. Ms. Jordan stated, “I used

the map format to teach real numbers independently and imaginary numbers independently, and then I moved to a more rigorous discussion about comparing."

Final Interviews

The implementation team met the final interviews with mixed emotions, which surprised the researcher. All implementation team members participated in the final feedback and interview session. This session focused on final thoughts and how the design and implementation of the study impacted their growth. The researcher interviewed via Zoom, which lasted approximately 45 minutes. The researcher and the design team thought the end of the study would be a relief; however, the opinions expressed were that they enjoyed being poured into and felt special to be a part of the study. All implementation team members expressed an overall feeling of growth and greater confidence in effectively implementing the AVID Focused Note-Taking strategy. They wanted to highlight the effectively implemented strategy instead of hoping no one observed their attempt at implementation. This interview session became more of a summation of the entire process than teachers articulating specifics about instructional strategies.

The team discussed how the professional learning sessions became more engaging and how they left with tangible ways to implement the strategy. They highlighted how the design team adapted throughout the study to meet the needs of the educators better. They could see how the design team created modeling and specificity of the learning series to meet their needs. Although not a part of the study, the participants referenced word differentiation, as they felt the learning impacted their individual growth and the collective growth of the whole group.

The team expressed a challenge in not moving through the strategy steps as quickly as intended. The second step in the format, the processing of the notes, was in the learning series but was not actualized in the classroom as thought. Although the step presented a challenge, it

was more of a growth opportunity around the pace and cadence of professional learning. Slow and steady equates to effective implementation.

Focus Group

The ARDT met often, both formally and informally. The team held formal meetings after the classroom observations of each cycle, with a specific focus on reviewing the data related to the cycle and planning professional learning. The design team met informally to discuss how the professional learning went, what they may have noticed in classroom observations, and how to improve the learning. From the researcher's perspective, this study informed how school leaders should guide future work.

After completing all cycles, the Action Research Design Team (ARDT) participated in a focus group. The purpose was to provide an opportunity for self-reflection on the study, the role of the team in the study, address the challenges and success that arose from the implementation of the study, and how this process will guide future work. All members attended the final face-to-face meeting, which lasted approximately an hour.

The ARDT recognized the impact of consistently executing focused note-taking to build and sustain a culture of instruction. Mrs. Greate highlighted the "importance of making professional learning not just an overview of the strategy but connecting it to specific contents." Mrs. Glare undergirded the importance of modeling for teachers to make the learning experiential.

The ARDT team also recognized and acknowledged barriers to implementation. For example, the ARDT needed to fully understand the type of instructional strategy and how to implement it in preparation for professional learning. After the design team delivered the first professional learning, the implementation team provided feedback that asked for modeling and a

connection to the content. The ARDT team discovered they needed to improve the note-taking format and identify a more effective delivery method. Additionally, they needed to become more adept at making Thinking Maps relevant to all content areas. The ARDT team also needed to calibrate the classroom observations for more consistent observations. Although calibrating was not a new phenomenon, calibrating a new instructional strategy required discussing observations to determine effectiveness.

Lastly, the researcher found that because of this study, it was evident that instructional leadership matters in terms of building capacity in educators and ensuring that leaders develop teachers effectively enough to put it into action. After the first professional learning in Cycle one, the design team thought they would see the strategy effectively implemented due to the high energy and positivity from the participants. However, that was not the case. The ARDT team needed to reflect and adjust to realizing that one professional learning was insufficient. The ARDT team left with a realization that modeling, consistency, and relevant feedback led to practical implementation.

Chapter Summary

The study sought to address the need to build and sustain a culture of instruction by implementing an AVID instructional strategy for focused note-taking. The implementation team participated in professional learning sessions on focused note-taking. As a result of classroom observations and feedback sessions, the ARDT gathered data to identify gaps and barriers and responded with professional development sessions. The ARDT designed three action research cycles for the study.

The researcher presented findings in this chapter by assembling several data sources, including professional learning, classroom observations, feedback sessions, and interviews. Each

cycle ended with a questionnaire administered to all participants. The information gathered provided a clear vision of a culture of instruction. The researcher and design team constantly evaluated and coded data to determine findings, which led to developing the occurring themes. The thematic findings are addressed in the following chapter and connect to the purpose of the study, the questions that guided the research, and the theoretical framework.

CHAPTER 5

THE FINDINGS

The purpose of the study was to examine the behaviors and actions of the administrative team as they worked to grow the leadership team's capacity to improve the culture of instruction at PEHS. The study sought to examine the behaviors and actions of the administrative team, comprised of the principal, assistant principals, and instructional coaches, and their impact on the instructional culture. Specifically, perspectives were sought from the leadership team and what the team was doing to instill a culture of instruction at the classroom level.

The researcher approached this study with the following questions: Can the behavior and actions of the leadership team improve the instructional culture at PEHS? What lessons can be learned from action research to improve the culture of instruction? These questions helped to frame the overall research questions to guide the purpose of the study.

To address the purpose of this actions research study, the following questions guided this inquiry:

1. How can school leader's actions and behaviors create a culture of instruction as they progress throughout the year in one urban, high-needs high school?
2. How do teachers describe the impact of school leaders' behaviors and actions to positively affect their teaching practices to create a culture of instruction in one urban, high-needs high school?

3. How does the action research team articulate the impact of the design and implementation of a culture of instruction for teacher leaders in one urban, high-needs high school?

This chapter includes findings from multiple data sources to answer the research questions that guided the study. The researcher connected the themes and evaluations to all study aspects, including the purpose, the questions that guided the research, and the theoretical and logic models.

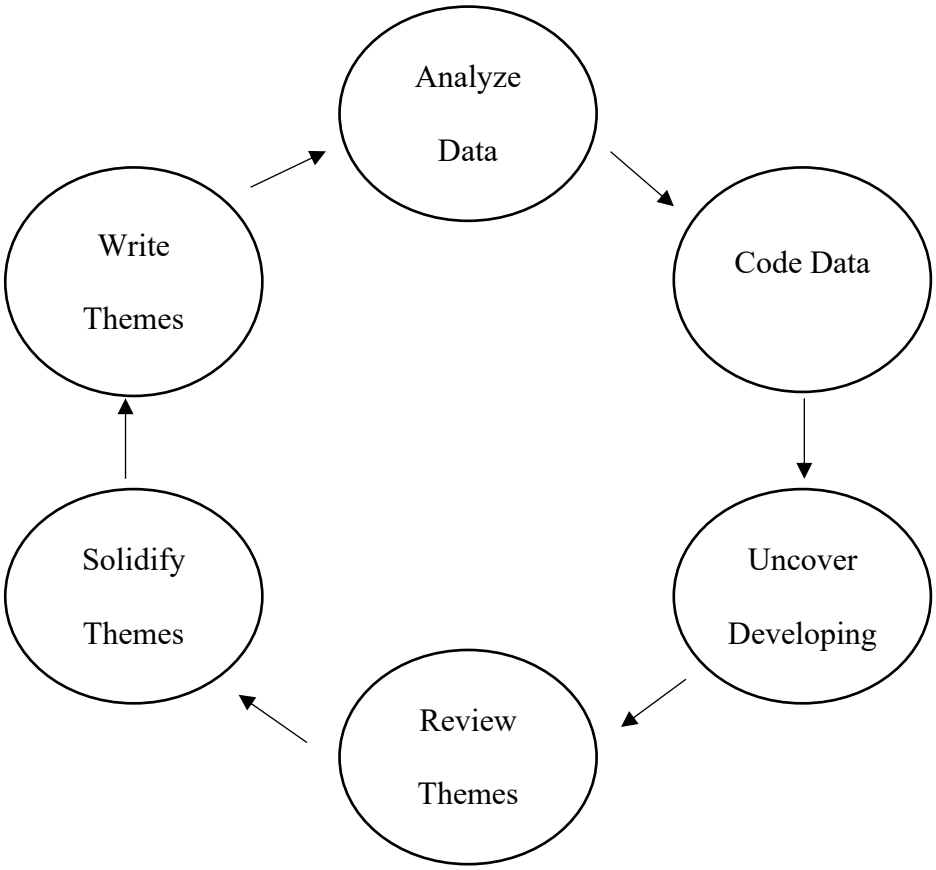
Chapter 4 described the action research cycles and the data collected in detail. The research cycles occurred during the 2023-2024 Spring semester at Pursuit of Excellence High School. The action research examined school leaders as they worked to build and sustain an instruction culture by implementing the AVID focused note-taking instructional strategy. The research study consisted of three action research cycles. The researcher and design team gathered data through classroom observations, interviews, questionnaires, focus groups, and the researcher's journal.

The researcher grounded the study in the theoretical framework of transformational leadership. Transformational leadership situated leaders and department chairs as a group of leaders working collaboratively to build and sustain a culture of instruction. The design team designed and delivered a series of interventions for the implementation team through professional learning and classroom observations, thus employing a logic model aligned with the theoretical framework.

The researcher analyzed the data gathered during the study in six steps. Figure 5.1. outlines those steps. The steps began with an initial data analysis, uncovering themes, and finally, writing the themes connected to each research question.

Figure 5.1

Six Steps to Identifying Themes



The researcher acquired the qualitative data through semi-structured interviews with the implementation team, questionnaires for the implementation team, classroom observation notes from the design team, and journal notes from the researcher. The researcher analyzed and organized those data pieces to begin the coding process. To start the process, the design team read through all the observation notes, professional learning notes and presentations, questionnaires, and researcher notes. Additionally, the researcher listened to interviews and feedback sessions multiple times to scribe notes and connect recurring themes to other data points.

Coding methods are processes that allow for classifying data and exposing themes in a way that can be associated with the purpose of the study (Williams & Moser, 2019). The researcher used a systematic coding process to develop themes to undergird the purpose of the study and research questions. After each cycle, the design team repeatedly listened to the recording of the implementation team interviews to connect recurring ideas with professional learning notes, classroom observation notes, and researcher journal notes. The design team collaboratively read through professional learning notes, classroom observation notes, and the researcher's journal notes to identify consistencies within the data. The design team also looked for areas of success to build upon and identify barriers to address. The team used coding for common ideas consistent throughout multiple data points. The researcher then compared the interviews to all other data points. Throughout this process, themes emerged from each cycle and solidified after the study.

The researcher employed an inductive approach to identifying themes throughout the data analysis process. As described (Willams & Moser, 2019), While deductive research concentrates on casualty and examination of theory, inductive research aims on generating theory from accumulated data. The researcher used inductive coding to identify patterns and establish recurring themes throughout the study to address the three research questions. The researcher coagulated themes that emphasized the study’s key findings by using participant responses from the three interview sessions, questionnaires, and a final focus group, along with observation notes from professional learning sessions and classroom observations.

The design team uncovered, reviewed, and identified themes through these steps. As a result of the analysis of the data, eight themes emerged from this research study:

1. Modeling

2. Consistency
3. Feedback
4. Collaboration
5. Confidence
6. Development
7. Shared Values
8. Connection to Content

The findings of this study highlight the purpose of this action research study, which was to identify the behaviors and actions of administrators in building a culture of instruction. The study focused on administrators and the leadership team to learn and implement a research-based instructional strategy called focused note-taking. Chapter 4 identified the outcomes for each action research cycle. The researcher analyzed the outcomes by coding data from the information collected. The researcher then tallied and analyzed data collaboratively with the design team. Themes related to the action research questions emerged through this analysis. Table 5.1 summarizes the overall themes aligned with the research questions.

Table 5.1

Summary of Themes Connected to Research Questions

Research Question	Themes
Q1: How can school leaders' actions and behaviors create a culture of instruction as they progress throughout the year in one urban, high-needs high school?	Theme 1: Modeling the Learning Theme 2: Consistency of Observations Theme 3: Accuracy and Type of Feedback
Q2: How do teachers describe the impact of school leaders' behaviors and actions to positively affect their teaching practices to create a culture of instruction in one urban, high-needs high school?	Theme 1: Collaboration and Support Theme 2: Confidence to Implement

Research Question	Themes
Q3: How does the action research team articulate the impact of the design and implementation of a culture of instruction for teacher leaders in one urban, high-needs high school?	Theme 1: Development of Leaders Theme 2: Shared Values Theme 3: Connection to Content

The next section of Chapter 5 investigated the affiliation between each theme and the research questions that guided this action research study.

Data Collection Linked to the Research Questions

Research Question 1: Actions and Behaviors of Administrators

The initial research question served as the guiding light for this study. How can school leaders' actions and behaviors create a culture of instruction as they progress throughout the year in one urban, high-needs high school? The data clearly showed how influential the behaviors and actions of school leaders impact instruction. The researcher found the following three emergent themes when analyzing the data:

1. Modeling the learning
2. Consistency of Practice
3. Effectiveness of Feedback

Theme 1: Modeling the Learning

Initially, the researcher held meetings with the design and implementation teams. In both meetings, the team discussed an instructional culture and what it would look like at PEHS. They reviewed the literature collaboratively to create a sense of shared responsibility, norms, and values. The first research question asked about the behaviors and actions of leaders in creating a culture of instruction. When the researcher asked the implementation team about the behaviors and actions of administrators in a focus group setting, Mr. Thorpe commented, *"We need to see*

modeled what should be done in our classes as opposed to listening to what should be happening. That is the disconnect." He communicated that just watching someone deliver professional learning, although engaging, was not enough. Mr. Anderson pointed out during professional learning in Cycle 2 that it made more sense when they could see the strategy being done with actual standards or embedded in a lesson plan. He further stated, *"When we see leaders actually doing a real lesson as opposed to an overview, we can envision it in our classrooms."* Ms. Anthony, in a focus group, said, *"Most administrators do not know my content, so the professional learning is always in theory. I appreciate that leaders take the time to learn my content and can model strategies for me directly."*

Responses in focus groups and interviews indicated that modeling how to implement the strategy was an essential aspect of administrative behavior necessary to create a culture of instruction.

Theme 2: Consistency of Practice

All implementation team members indicated in the questionnaire post Cycle 1 that they were satisfied with the level of professional learning; however, there was some variation in their level of comfort in implementing the strategy. In Cycle 2, the design team focused on one style of focused note-taking, the Thinking Map strategy, and the comfort level of the design team increased. However, Mr. Thorpe, Ms. Anthony, and Mr. Anderson raised concerns about connecting the strategy to their content. The design team developed the third professional learning cycle to connect the note-taking format to its specific contents. Mr. Thorpe offered this explanation in our final focus group:

> *The way we worked through all of our concerns in such a timely manner was impactful. There was not a long period of time of deviation from the teaching of focused note-taking.*

> *This consistency did not allow for us to go back into our classrooms and do what we wanted to do or not try the strategy at all.*

Mr. Anderson echoed that thought by stating in question seven of the questionnaire that the design team was focused on providing professional learning, coming into the classroom, and providing feedback. The entire study was very consistent. He expressed that everything planned happened. The implementation team noted consistency in practice and administrative behavior throughout the study.

Theme 3: Effectiveness of Feedback

Before the beginning of the study, the design team held a pre-assessment meeting in which they asked the implementation team questions to help plan the initial professional learning and provide an overview of the scope of the study. To create a safe environment and ensure trustworthiness within the study, the design team asked participants how they would like to receive feedback. Ms. Jones responded, *"The feedback should be in a group format. This way, it won't feel like feedback that way we normally get it, and we can learn from our colleagues."* The design team selected three implementation team members for each cycle to collect feedback. The design team began each interview by reviewing what they saw in the classroom and allowed for a response to validate if their assessment was accurate. Ms. O'Neil responded with the following:

> *I like that you allow us the opportunity to respond to what you saw during the visit. To be honest, during feedback sessions, sometimes what you all say you observed is only part of the class. This allows us to say yes, that was accurate, or what I was trying to do was something different.*

During his feedback session, Mr. Thorpe commented, *"I thought I didn't know what I was doing, but in listening to everyone else, I am not that far off. I am glad I got to hear what everyone else*

did." The participant suggested that feedback from the design team was vital to their growth and ability to implement the strategy. For administrators, this action was essential in building capacity in the implementation team, ultimately leading to knowledge transfer.

Research Questions 2: Teacher's description of impact of Administrators

The researcher used qualitative measurements to determine how teachers portrayed the impact administrators had on their teaching practices. These included classroom observation feedback sessions, interviews, and questionnaires after each professional learning. Before beginning the study, the design and implementation teams participated in pre-study focus groups to provide an overview of the study and research design.

The researcher and design team analyzed transcripts from pre-, interim, and post-study focus group interviews in conjunction with the results from the feedback sessions and interviews to connect all data points. During this process, three themes emerged that provided insight into the impact of administrators on instructional practices. The themes were as follows:

1. Ability to implement strategy (confidence)
2. Efficacy and Innovation Autonomy
3. Collaboration and Support

Theme 1 – Ability to Implement Strategy

Implementation team members participated in a multiple-choice and free-response questionnaire during the study. The questionnaire asked participants to respond to a series of items using a 5-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = neutral, 4 = agree, 5 = strongly agree). The designed team included items that gauged how the implementation team members assessed the professional learning sessions and their ability to implement the instructional strategy. The survey questions that supported this theme were as follows:

- Rate your understanding of the instructional strategy.
- Rate your comfort in implementing the instructional strategy.

The design team recorded and analyzed survey responses in Google Sheets. The researcher calculated the mean score for each question in the questionnaire. The design team used the same questionnaire after each cycle. The questionnaire mean score increased for each cycle, indicating growth after each cycle. Tables 5.2, 5.3, and 5.4 indicate an increase in the understanding of the instructional strategy and the comfort level in implementing the strategy.

Table 5.2

Mean scores for Understanding and Comfort of Implementing the Strategy.

Perception Survey items	Mean score	*N*=Responses
Please rate the overall quality of this professional learning series.	4.0	8
Please rate the level of support you received throughout this series.	4.6	8
Please rate your understanding of the AVID instructional strategy.	*3.4*	8
Please rate your comfort in implementing the AVID instructional strategy.	*3.4*	8

Table 5.3

Mean Scores for Understanding and Comfort of Implementing the Strategy.

Perception Survey items	Mean score	*N*=Responses
Please rate the overall quality of this professional learning series.	4.6	8
Please rate the level of support you received throughout this series.	4.6	8
Please rate your understanding of the AVID instructional strategy.	*4.0*	8

Perception Survey items	Mean score	*N*=Responses
Please rate your comfort in implementing the AVID instructional strategy.	*3.8*	8

Table 5.4

Mean Scores for Understanding and Comfort of Implementing the Strategy.

Perception Survey items	Mean score	*N*=Responses
Please rate the overall quality of this professional learning series.	4.9	8
Please rate the level of support you received throughout this series.	4.8	8
Please rate your understanding of the AVID instructional strategy.	*4.8*	8
Please rate your comfort in implementing the AVID instructional strategy.	*4.9*	8

Theme 2 - Efficacy and Innovation Autonomy.

The second theme that emerged from the data was the positive effect that professional learning had on their efficacy. In addition to efficacy, teachers appreciated the autonomy of implementing the strategy. This finding materialized through the learning series and the focus groups conducted during the study. In a professional learning session, which focused on applying the strategy to their content, Mrs. Jones commented:

> *For my scholars who are in a co-taught setting, I needed to modify the strategy by breaking down steps into smaller parts.*

Ms. Anthony typically provides PowerPoint presentations to her class before delivering the lesson. In trying to determine how best to implement the strategy, she said:

> *I flipped my classroom and I gave the students notes ahead and allowed them to organize their notes using the tools presented. Their processing was different than I expected.*

As a result of the learning, Mr. Anderson asked, *"So it is okay to modify the actual tool?"* When the presenter responded, *"Indeed,"* Mr. Anderson responded, *"OK, because I actually re-designed the tool to fit the format of what I was teaching."* These exchanges exemplified teachers becoming comfortable with making the strategy work for them based on their teaching styles and content.

Theme 3 - Collaboration and Support

At the outset of the study, implementation team members participated in a pre-assessment to determine their initial understanding of a culture of instruction and their knowledge about the AVID strategy. Additionally, the researcher provided an overview of their role in the process. During that discussion, the topic of feedback after classroom visits emerged. Ms. Jones suggested group feedback sessions to lessen the tension from individual feedback sessions and increase collaboration. Ms. O'Neil, in support of that decision, added, *"I have never participated in a group feedback session. I think it would be really good to hear how other teachers are doing."* As a result, after each professional learning session and classroom observation, the design team conducted group feedback sessions with selected teachers from the implementation team. The group feedback added a level of collaboration amongst colleagues that was integral to their growth. Mr. Thorpe, in one session, asked Ms. Jordan to describe in more detail how she implemented a portion of the note-taking.

Alongside the feedback sessions, the design team issued a questionnaire after Cycle 1. Question 5, an open-ended question, asked about the barriers to implementing the strategy thoroughly. One response highlighted the lack of opportunity to observe peers as a barrier to growth. The group feedback sessions, which Mr. Thorpe found particularly helpful, fostered a sense of camaraderie. He commented, *"This type of feedback helps me to hear what we are*

struggling with and what is working. Makes me feel like I am not alone." This feedback provided a trustworthy environment for teachers to receive feedback and represented an additional layer of support.

Research question 3: Articulating the Impact of the Action Research Design

An analysis of the results from the focus group interviews, classroom observations, and notes gathered allowed for a look into how the implementation team described the impact of the design and implementation of the research study. After the researcher completed the initial coding, he shared the themes with the team members to provide an opportunity for feedback.

1. Action research allowed for leadership development for teachers and leaders.
2. Processes created a level of buy-in.
3. Action research provided a blueprint for how professional learning connects to implementation.

Theme 1 - Leadership Development for Teachers and Leaders

To detect how the design and implementation led to the theme of leadership development, teachers articulated the barriers and successes throughout the process in their focus group interviews and questionnaires. In the questionnaire, respondents identified barriers such as a lack of knowledge of the strategy and their inability to connect it to their specific content. After the first cycle of the study, while meeting with the design team to develop the subsequent professional learning, Mrs. Knoll commented, *"I don't understand why we didn't see more teachers using the strategy."* Mrs. Glare supported the comment, saying, *"I know, I thought the professional development was good."* After the research study, Mr. Knoll, in the concluding focus group, stated, *I now have a better understanding of what it takes to go from a professional*

learning to actual implementation. It takes more that one professional learning on the same exact thing.

Mr. Gore attributed the growth to modeling.

> *I think it was the modeling. When we modeled for the teachers what could happen in their content, it hit different.*

The perspective of implementation team members, who are also department chairs, described the entire process as a learning experience. Mr. Whales, when commenting on his leadership growth, noted:

> *I feel like I have a better understanding of what it takes to implement something new. I look forward to trying this in my own department.*

Ms. Jones took away:

> *It was the consistency that did it for me. As soon as you all did the classroom observations and feedback session, we were in another professional learning that was related to what we had done.*

Theme 2 - Creating buy-in

Teacher efficacy emerged as a theme in theme two of research question two. This theme of buy-in began to appear after the first cycle, but the theme fully formed after the study. Buy-in is the scope to which individuals believe in and enthusiastically support interventions (Grebing et al., 2023). A sense of ownership emerged throughout the study, and the implementation team put more effort into learning and implementing the strategy. Mr. Whales said throughout the process, he *"began to feel special"* and, as a result, put forth effort to get the strategy right. Mr. Anderson, in a focus group after the study, said:

> *I truly tried my best to implement because I did not want to let the group down. I wanted*

to do well.

Although there was a sense of accomplishment and growth after the study, participants were eager to share their experiences with their colleagues in their content and desired to replicate the process.

Theme 3 - Blueprint for Professional Learning that Leads to Implementation.

The researcher used focus groups and researcher notes to determine how the process provided a blueprint for translating professional learning into implementation. At the outset, the researcher relied on effective professional learning to lead to consistent and effective implementation. The initial implementation strategy challenged this notion after the first cycle but was not consistent or effective. This theme connected to the findings related to research question one around modeling and feedback. After professional learning Cycle 2, Mrs. Greate commented, *"This modeling thing really matters."* Mr. Gore replied, *"The group feedback has been good for the teachers and me, too."* When scripting notes during the focus group, the researcher claimed that the group feedback makes more self-reflection of your instructional decisions, making implementation more effective. Ms. O'Neil realized that each cycle was instrumental in building capacity to the point that implementation occurs. She made her point by stating:

> *I think I have a clearer understanding of just how much it takes to get us to implement a strategy. The modeling was needed after the initial learning in order to visualize what should happen. Then the group feedback sessions allowed for the opportunity to learn from each other. After all that, I feel super confident to implement. Looking forward to repeating the process with my department.*

It was apparent that the implementation team members categorized their participation in the study as impactful to their development instructionally and as building leaders. To account for this, the design team reviewed the questionnaire provided to the implementation team members and listened to the interviews and focus group sessions multiple times. The design team also reviewed professional learning notes, classroom observation notes, and researcher notes to triangulate data points. As a result, the design team determined that the implementation team became more adept at implementing the instructional strategy throughout the study.

In the final meeting, the design team identified behaviors and characteristics required by administrators to build a culture of instruction. They based the conclusion on the inductive analysis of interviews, feedback sessions, and questionnaires. The team read through the notes of the observations, professional learning series, and researcher notes, in addition to listening to the interviews multiple times. Lastly, as a part of analyzing the data, the design team uncovered that team members expressed great enthusiasm for repeating the process with their departments in the final focus group. They even suggested that the school implement the process as a blueprint for implementing new strategies in a 3-part series.

Chapter Summary

This action research study sought to investigate how the behaviors and actions of building leaders can build and sustain a culture of instruction in one urban high school and what impact that would have on instructional leaders in the building. The study was guided by research questions and collecting various data points to provide evidence to address each question. The data gave rise to three themes in response to the first research question, which explored the behaviors and actions of administrators. The themes included modeling, consistency, and feedback.

The second research question examined how teachers described the impact of leader behaviors and actions and produced three themes. These themes, which emerged from both qualitative and quantitative data, were teacher's ability to implement the strategy, efficacy, their ability to innovate the strategy, and collaboration and support.

The final research question, which examined the impact of the design and implementation process on the AR team, uncovered three themes. The themes emerged after the researcher connected several data points: leadership development, buy-in, and how professional learning leads to implementation.

Chapter 6 discusses this action research study's foremost findings related to the literature review, conclusions on the research questions, limitations, implications, and recommendations for building leaders, educators, and district leaders.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS, AND CONNECTIONS TO LEADERSHIP PRACTICES

The current educational landscape expects building leaders to be instructional leaders. Instructional leadership includes a keen focus on increasing capacity in teaching and learning through curriculum development, supporting teachers in their capability to educate, and implementing instructional strategies (Kilag & Sasan, 2023). Instructional leaders need to build capacity in teachers through their behaviors and actions. This action research study was intended to identify those actions and behaviors that should be exhibited by administrators with the aim to build and sustain a culture of instruction in one urban high school. The three research questions that guided this study were:

1. How can school leaders' actions and behaviors create a culture of instruction as they progress throughout the year in one urban, high-needs high school?
2. How do teachers describe the impact of school leader's behaviors and actions to positively affect their teaching practices to create a culture of instruction in one urban, high-needs high school?
3. How does the action research team articulate the impact of the design and implementation of a culture of instruction for teacher leaders in one urban, high-needs high school?

This chapter will conclude the study by reviewing the key findings, connecting the existing literature, and addressing the study's limitations while also discussing the value and contributions this study can provide to the educational field.

Summary of the Study

The action research case study began in the spring of 2023-2024 at Pursuit of Excellence High School (PEHS). The researcher constructed the study based on a qualitative case to examine the behaviors and actions needed from administrators to build and sustain a culture of instruction. A transformational approach grounded the study so the teacher leaders could understand how to implement an instructional strategy consistently and use their learning to share with their respective departments. The Action Research Design Team (ARDT) worked collaboratively with the researcher to construct professional learning sessions, classroom observations, and data aggregations to include an analysis of the findings.

The study happened while PEHS implemented the Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID) program. AVID is a nationwide program focusing on increasing access to high levels of instruction for all students through research-based instructional strategies. The researcher structured the study around implementing Focused Note-Taking, an AVID-based instructional strategy.

PEHS is a charter school, so several teachers do not possess a teaching certificate issued by the state and have a varied skill set regarding instructional strategies. Flexibility in certification resulted in inconsistencies in the instructional programming across the school, which created a need to address the culture around instructional classroom practices.

Action Research Study

The implementation team included eight department chairs and teachers representing the following content areas: English, Math, Social Studies, Science, World Language, Career Technology, Physical Education, and AVID departments. The design team comprised the researcher, the two instructional coaches, and the two assistant principals. The action research team completed the study in three research cycles.

Summary of the Findings

The researcher, in collaboration with the Action Research Design Team (ARDT), used a variety of data sources to collect evidence to gain insight and determine themes that led to significant findings. The researcher gathered data from the following sources:

- Interviews
- Focus Groups
- Classroom Observations
- Feedback Sessions
- Questionnaires
- Observation Notes

The data analysis provided insight into the necessary behaviors and actions of administrators that led to a culture of instruction and the impact that instructional leadership had on the teacher leaders who participated in the study. Building administrators developed and supported teacher leaders by delivering professional learning, conducting classroom visits, and providing timely collaborative feedback. As a result of the data analysis, administrators planned the ensuing professional learning to meet the needs of the teachers. The conclusions developed after an examination of the findings from the research study and a correlation with the literature.

Major Findings Related to the Research Questions

This study aimed to examine the behaviors and actions of administrators building and sustaining a culture of instruction through developing teacher leaders in implementing an AVID-based instructional strategy. This action research study sought to observe the specific actions and behaviors administrators displayed with the purpose of building capacity in teacher leaders to implement the Focused Note-taking instructional strategy. The ARDT created and delivered a professional learning series on the AVID instructional strategy. The ARIT implemented the strategy, and the design team subsequently collected data from classroom observations, questionnaires, feedback and interview sessions, and researcher journal notes. After reviewing the data and identifying noteworthy findings, the researcher discovered three conclusions that addressed the overall research questions for this action study:

1. Implementation of an instructional strategy is most effective when leaders model application.
2. Implementing an instructional strategy is most effective when leaders provide relevant and collaborative feedback.
3. Implementing an instructional strategy is most effective when professional learning creates a sense of buy-in.

Table 6.1 outlines the research questions, findings, and conclusions and highlights the connectedness of the research analysis process to the research questions. The ARIT collaborated with school administrators to examine the effectiveness of the implications. The researcher noted that themes may have addressed more than one research question; however, for clarity, themes were aligned to only one research question, as indicated in Table 6.1.

Table 6.1

Themes, Findings, and Conclusions

Research Questions	Findings	Conclusions
RQ1: How can school leaders' actions and behaviors create a culture of instruction as they progress throughout the year in one urban, high-needs high school?	Theme 1: Modeling the Learning Theme 2: Consistency of Observations Theme 3: Accuracy and Type of Feedback	Conclusion 1: Implementing an instructional strategy is most effective when leaders model how to apply the strategy.
RQ2: How do teachers describe the impact of school leaders' behaviors and actions to positively affect their teaching practices to create a culture of instruction in one urban, high-needs high school?	Theme 1: Collaboration and Support Theme 2: Confidence to Implement	Conclusion 2: Implementing an instructional strategy is most effective when leaders provide relevant and collaborative feedback.
RQ3: How does the action research team articulate the impact of the design and implementation of a culture of instruction for teacher leaders in one urban, high-needs high school?	Theme 1: Development of Leaders Theme 2: Shared Values Theme 3: Connection to Content	Conclusion 3: Implementing an instructional strategy is most effective when professional learning creates a sense of buy-in.

The conclusion for research question 1 emerged from the aggregation of classroom observation notes after cycle one. During deliberations after cycle one, the design team determined that the ARIT inconsistently implemented the strategy. The interview feedback suggested that the participants needed more modeling. There was an understanding of the intent

of the instructional strategy, but knowing how to implement it remained a barrier. As a result, the design team included modeling in cycle two of professional learning.

Once the ARDT implemented modeling in the cycle two professional learning series, the design team observed more consistency of practice in the classroom. Once they observed the strategy implemented in professional learning, the implementation team expressed more confidence and comfort in their ability to implement the strategy. During the second interview session, implementation team members expressed how the modeling during the professional learning aided in their knowledge transfer.

During the focus group after the study, implementation team members expressed the importance of modeling when introducing new instructional strategies. They also highlighted that as it relates to behaviors and actions of building leaders, being able to model the strategy is a necessary behavior that leaders need to execute in professional development.

The conclusion for research question two emerged from the feedback sessions from each cycle. At the outset of the study, when discussing the idea of trustworthiness for the study, the implementation team members brought up the idea of group feedback sessions as opposed to individual feedback sessions. They felt that would remove the anxiety that can arise from feedback sessions. As a result, the ARDT collaboratively conducted feedback sessions, with three teachers receiving feedback in one session.

These feedback sessions were collaborative and informative. When one teacher shared feedback, it was valuable for all teachers to hear. Teachers grew from the feedback of others, and teachers asked their colleagues questions based on their feedback. This type of feedback resulted in increased confidence and more consistent implementation. The participants in the focus group

substantiated this idea after the study. Each implementation team member participated in a group feedback session.

At the study's conclusion, both the design and implementation teams expressed a sense of camaraderie, thus creating a sense of shared values and mission. The team established a collected responsibility and desire to get it right. All members articulated in interviews and during professional learning sessions that there was a feeling of collaboration and buy-in.

The design team spoke of growing in their leadership development throughout the process. Additionally, after the study, implementation team members articulated how much they learned about the instructional strategy and how to build teacher capacity. The researcher validated these sentiments when coding the data to identify themes, listening to interviews, and reviewing other relevant data.

Major Findings Related to the Literature Review

The findings presented in this section connect to the literature review. Chapter 5 presented the themes that emerged from the action research. According to Kilag and Sasan (2023), effective leadership includes the ability of an administrator to influence and rouse teachers to perform at a high level, which leads to improved student achievement. As building leaders work to increase their ability to lead instructionally, it profoundly impacts the culture of instruction.

Finding 1: Implementation of an Instructional Strategy is Most Effective When Leaders Model How to Implement

Although armed with academic qualifications of foundational knowledge, leadership coaching truly hones the practical skills of a teacher (Tsarkos, 2024). When using the modeling approach, what and how to implement a new instructional strategy equips teachers with the

knowledge and skill set needed to implement a new instructional strategy. Modeling also created a space for teachers to converse with one another about what may or may not work, particularly in a content group. Research has shown that collaborative teaching approaches improve the instructional abilities of instructors and create positive learning environments (Khasawneh, 2023).

Data indicated that teacher leaders who participated in this study improved their ability to implement the instructional strategy when administrators modeled what it should look like in the classroom. Administrators need to ensure that professional development does not stay at a theoretical level. Professional learning needs to include a significant portion of demonstrating strategy approaches. Modeling a lesson in the respective content yielded the best dividends for implementation.

Finding 2: Implementation of an Instructional Strategy is Most Effective When Leaders Provide Relevant and Collaborative Feedback

Principals who engage in regular observations and offer targeted feedback create an environment conducive to continuous improvement, enhancing teacher efficacy and performance (Groenewald et al., 2024). The authors identified several vital practices from instructional leaders: monitoring and providing feedback and fostering a collaborative learning environment. Leaders who engage in instructional leadership methods such as giving feedback to teachers, examining student improvement, and setting instructional goals have significant student achievement results (Kilag et al., 2024).

As teachers were involved in this action research study, the data highlighted that the teacher's strategy implementation improved because of good feedback. Administrators must know the importance of quality and timely feedback for teachers. Teachers receiving input in a

collaborative setting allowed for a discussion around successes and barriers, which can be very important for teacher growth. In this study, teachers consistently referenced the value of timely, relevant, and knowledgeable feedback and its impact on their instructional growth. In turn, administrators realized the importance of thinking critically about the feedback provided so that it results in real-time actionable steps for teachers.

Finding 3: Implementation of an Instructional Strategy is Most Effective When Professional Learning Creates a Sense Of Buy-In

A study conducted by Al-Mahdy et al. (2024) noted that principals play an essential role in creating a climate of trust wherein teachers believe that dedicating their time and energy to professional learning will benefit them and their schools. Teachers will be more willing to engage when professional learning creates a sense of shared values and purpose, with clear intentions and outcomes. According to Sims & Fletcher-Wood (2021), numerous influential reviews and two meta-reviews have joined in on the position that teacher professional growth is more effective when it is continuous, collaborative, subject-specific, draws on outside expertise, has buy-in from teachers, and is experienced based. This idea connects several findings drawn from the data, including teacher buy-in, modeling, collaboration, and being content-specific. Although professional learning can be charismatic and engaging, several factors must be involved to create a sense of buy-in.

Limitations of the Current Study

The researcher determined the study findings from data collected from one urban high school in the southeastern region of the United States. These findings may not transfer to other schools in the state or the nation. In contrast, the unique characteristics of PEHS, as it relates to the teaching population, offer a valuable contribution to the research literature. Moreover, the

sample size of two assistant principals and two instructional coaches can be considered small. A larger sample size of both leaders and teacher leaders may have provided the researcher with a more robust data set and possibly increased the reliability and transferability of the findings.

Implications and Recommendations for Practitioners

This study builds on the existing knowledge base concerning the importance of the behaviors and actions of building leaders and their impact on an instructional culture. Delivering professional learning on a new instructional strategy is not novel. However, the identification of specific behaviors and actions is reasonably new. This particular research study on creating a culture of instruction could help connect culture to instruction and identify what is needed for building leaders to develop an instructional culture. Pinpointing specific behaviors and actions could potentially aid in the development of school leaders, positively impact the growing capacity of teachers, and ultimately create better outcomes for teaching and learning.

Furthermore, the researcher found no direct line between initiating professional learning and seeing the strategy realized in the classroom. As opposed to a straight line, it resembled more of an ark. In addition to providing initial professional learning, the researcher recognized the importance of additional teacher training before implementation. The researcher found that modeling, connection to content, and practice within professional learning communities are necessary steps.

Implications and Recommendations for Researchers

A critical implication for future researchers was the limitations of conducting this research, which were the size of the study. PEHS is a small school of approximately 700 students with a teaching capacity of 42 teachers. The small size garnered a limited amount of data. Although the data gathered suggested that the impact on both the design and implementation

teams was positive, a larger sample size may have provided a more extensive data set wherein more themes could have emerged. A larger sample size would allow for more in-depth feedback sessions and classroom observations. This additional data would provide more input in answering research questions.

An additional implication was the knowledge base of the instructional strategy for administration. PEHS has two alternatively certified leaders and two instructional coaches with strong singular content backgrounds. During the study, it became evident that the team needed to work towards equally leading all content areas. Without leaders who can lead each content equally, the ability to create an instructional culture is limited, which could require professional opportunities for building leaders. Moreover, researchers can continue learning about specific behaviors and actions needed for instructional leadership. Simply knowing about the strategy may not always be sufficient in building a culture of instruction.

Implications and Recommendations for Policy Makers

The impact of instructional leadership has been heavily influenced and studied within the traditional school model. Policymakers and school districts recognize the importance of sound instructional leadership and its effect on student achievement. Therefore, policymakers may wish to further this study within the context of similar charter schools wherein teachers do not need to follow the traditional certification path to gain employment. Although teachers who do not possess a conventional certification are less qualified, policymakers are encouraged to review the steps necessary to ensure development models for teachers in non-traditional settings promote consistency in practice. Policymakers have the opportunity to enhance professional learning opportunities and topics for instructional leaders so they may exhibit those needed behaviors and actions to grow instructional cultures in schools.

In creating policies specifically for charter schools, policymakers can study the impact of hiring practices for teachers and building leaders to ensure positive student outcomes. Connected to the hiring practices, professional learning opportunities can be specific to meet the needs of charter school personnel, as their needs may differ from those of their public-school counterparts. While it holds that all schools have unique cultures and needs, those of charter schools may present needs that are not as heavily studied.

Chapter Summary and Final Thoughts

The purpose of this action research study was to identify those actions and behaviors that administrators should exhibit when building and sustaining a culture of instruction in one urban high school. The three research questions that guided this study were:

1. How can school leaders' actions and behaviors create a culture of instruction as they progress throughout the year in one urban, high-needs high school?
2. How do teachers describe the impact of school leader's behaviors and actions to positively affect their teaching practices to create a culture of instruction in one urban, high-needs high school?
3. How does the action research team articulate the impact of the design and implementation of a culture of instruction for teacher leaders in one urban, high-needs high school?

This chapter summarized the findings and their connection to the review of the literature and the overall research questions. Conclusions from the data gathered outlined the experiences of the action research team, which comprised building administrators in one large urban district.

Chapters 4 and 5 outlined the following findings that emerged:

Behaviors and Actions

Theme 1: Teachers valued when leaders modeled the learning in real-time.

Theme 2: Teachers valued the ongoing consistency of observations.

Theme 3: Teachers valued when leaders provided accurate and timely feedback.

Impact on Instruction

Theme 1: Teachers valued collaborative group feedback and support from colleagues.

Theme 2: Leaders imparted a high confidence level to implement a strategy to teachers.

Action Research Process

Theme 1: All participants perceived the process as beneficial in their leadership development.

Theme 2: All participants developed a sense of shared values.

Theme 3: Teachers valued the connection of the strategy with their specific content.

While inconclusive, the researcher believes that this study is a bridge for identifying and developing the necessary skillset for building administrators to provide the type of development for teachers to build and sustain a culture of instruction.

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Appendix A

Empirical Findings Table

APA Citation	Key Findings
Boyce, J., & Bowers, A. J. (2018). Toward an evolving conceptualization of instructional leadership as leadership for learning. Journal of Educational Administration, 56(2), 161-182. https://doi.org/10.1108/JEA-06-2016-0064	Review of 25 years on instructional leadership wherein the authors identified principal leadership, teacher autonomy, adult improvement, and school climate as instructional themes. This study provided data to support the positive effects of instructional leadership.
Neumerski, C., (2012). Rethinking instructional leadership, a review: What do we know about principal, teacher, and coach instructional leadership, and where should we go from here. Educational Administration Quarterly, 49(2), 310-347. https://doi.org/10.1177/0013161X12456700	An overview of what the literature says about instructional leadership, what it looks like, and where the knowledge base falls short. The study included principals, teacher leaders, and instructional coaches.
Hallinger P., Gumus, S., Bellibas, M., (2020). Are principals' instructional leaders yet? A science map of the knowledge base on instructional leadership, 1940-2018. Scientometrics, 122, 1629-1650	*Definition of an Aspiring School Leader*: Aspiring school leaders need to learn how to switch from "plant manager to leaders of instruction" (Hauge et al., 2014, p. 359).
Barth, R. S. (2001). Teacher Leader. The Phi Delta Kappa, 82(6), 443–449. http://www.jstor.org/stable/20439932	*Definition of an Aspiring School Leader*: Aspiring school leaders need to learn how to switch from "plant manager to leaders of instruction" (Hauge et al., 2014, p. 359).

MacNeil, A., Prater, D., Busch, S., (2009). The effects of school culture and climate on student achievement. International Journal of Leadership in Education, 12(1), 73-84,	Study focused on how schools differ in their climates measured by the 10 dimensions of the Organizational Health Inventory. Study found that on all 10 dimensions exemplary schools out-performed acceptable schools. However, there wasn't a significant difference between exemplary and recognized schools.
Yusof, H., Al-Hafiz Osman, M., Noor, M., (2016). School culture and its relationship with teacher leadership. International Journal of Academic Research in Business and Social Science, 6(11), 272-286	Study investigated the relations between teacher leadership and school culture. 194 teachers from 22 primary schools were respondents using a set of questionnaires. The authors found that teacher professionalism and setting goals were the dominant factors in establishing a positive school culture. Additionally, it was found that there is a strong correlation between school culture and teacher leadership.
Lewis, J., Asberry, J., DeJarness, G., King, G., (2016). The best practices for shaping school culture for instructional leaders. Alabama Journal of Education, 3, 57-63	Study focused on key leverage points in shaping school culture from a leadership perspective. Leverage points were personal mastery, team learning, building a shared vision, and the effectiveness of leadership.
McGinnins, S., (1994). Cultures of instruction: identifying and resolving conflicts. Theory into Practice, 33(1), 16-22	The author focused on what he called a "culture of instruction" and the conflicts that may arise between students and teachers. The author highlighted that a culture of instruction is reflective of the learning experience of its representatives.
Kruger, A., (2003). Instructional leadership: the impact on the culture of teaching and learning in two effective secondary schools. South African Journal of Education, 23(3), 206-211	This study highlighted the role of the principal to create and maintain a culture of learning and teaching by way of instructional management. The study found that principals play a vital role in instructional policy and planning, curriculum leadership, supervising teaching, resource management, and empowering teachers.

Appendix B

Action Research Implementation Team

Interview Protocol

Alignment of Interview questions to Research Questions

Question Number	Interview Question	Research Question Alignment
1	How do you describe a culture of instruction?	RQ1,
2	What do you see as challenges for leaders in creating a culture of instruction?	RQ1
3	What do you understand about focused note taking?	RQ2
4	How can focused note taking be supported by the leaders in the building?	RQ2
5	What behaviors of administration will best support the implementation of focused not taking?	RQ2
6	How have the actions of administrators led to building a culture of instruction?	RQ3

7	What does instructional leadership look like to you?	RQ3
8	What instructional leadership skill set do you believe is most influential in building a culture of instruction?	RQ3

Appendix C

Focus Group Questions

1. What leadership actions or behaviors do you think have the most impact on your instruction?

2. How would you define a culture of instruction?

3. Considering the professional learning you have received, what additional resources or support would enhance your ability to integrate focused note-taking strategies into your instructional practices?

4. Which phase(s) of the focused note taking process do you need additional support or professional development on?

5. What type of coaching and/or feedback would be most beneficial to your implementation of focused note taking.