UNLEARNING ISOLATION: AN ACTION RESEARCH STUDY OF AN INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP TEAM AND ITS WORK TO PROMOTE COLLABORATIVE PRACTICES

by

MIRIAM LEDFORD-LYLE

(Under the Direction of Sally J. Zepeda)

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this action research study was to examine the perspectives of an instructional leadership team as they fostered a culture that encouraged teachers to unlearn habits associated with isolation and to learn practices of collaboration. The theory of change was situated in the unlearning processes by segmenting new practices into manageable parts, minimizing the influence of outdated knowledge, communicating clear expectations for the newly embedded structural changes, and designing effective feedback structures to support positive experiences with new learning. Action research provided the necessary methodology for identifying practices of isolation, developing interventions to encourage collaboration, and systematically analyzing feedback provided by the participants.

The findings illustrated that instructional leader actions, including facilitating time to collaborate during the school day and providing clear expectations, impacted teacher attitudes and approaches toward collaboration; intentional team building fostered a culture of trust that used collaborative planning to make teaching practices public; and, participating in collaborative planning increased experiential knowledge, which supported teacher reflection and professional dialogue.

INDEX WORDS: Collaboration, Collaborative planning, De-privatization of practice, High school course teams, Isolation, Principal leadership, School culture, Unlearning

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to teachers and educational leaders,

whose work supports student growth and development.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Page

LIST OF TABLES

Page

LIST OF FIGURES

Page

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Teacher isolation has often been cited as a negative but profoundly ingrained feature of American public education. In his 1975 seminal work, *Schoolteacher: A Sociological Study*, Lortie defined the fundamental principles of the teaching profession as conservatism (concentrating on small classroom changes), individualism (teaching in isolation), and presentism (focusing on the short term). Lortie (1975) contended that conservatism, individualism, and presentism "work together to produce features of the occupational subculture" which resist change (p. 229). Schools were places in which "each teacher was assigned specific areas of responsibility and was expected to teach students the stipulated knowledge and skills without assistance from others" (Lortie, 1975, p. 15). This type of arrangement created organizational segmentation in schools as the work of teachers focused solely on their students with minimal interaction with colleagues. Lortie (1975) further characterized this arrangement with the "egg-crate" metaphor to symbolize isolation in schools.

The perennial nature of teacher isolation has been chronicled in numerous studies (Cook & Collinson, 2013; Heider, 2021; Krakehl et al., 2020; Little, 1990; Rogers & Babinski, 2002; Wheelan, 2005). Flinders (1988) reaffirmed Lortie's concept of the physical isolation of teaching and acknowledged the deleterious psychological toll that physical and psychological states of isolation have on teachers. The high attrition rate of teachers, which negatively impacts student learning, has often been linked to feelings of isolation and stress (Darling-Hammond, 1984; Dussault et al., 1999; Kelchtermans, 2017; Schlichte et al., 2005; Smith & Ingersoll, 2004).

Furthermore, isolation has impeded teacher leadership and denied teachers opportunities for job-embedded professional learning (Harris & Muijs, 2004; Martin et al., 2020; National Commission on Teaching & America's Future, 1996; Nerlino, 2020).

The structures and schedules kept by schools often physically and psychologically distance teachers from one another. McLaughlin (1992) alleged the culture of high school departments typically determined its collaborative practices, as some departmental cultures encouraged collaboration whereas others perpetuated isolationism. However, high schools organized into subject-specific departments have often perpetuated teacher isolation (Ávila de Lima, 2003; Childs et al., 2013; Davis, 1986; Ostovar-Nameghi & Sheikhahmadi, 2016; Siskin, 2014). Teacher isolation has hindered the professional growth of teachers since teacher expertise has remained locked in individual classrooms instead of being collaboratively explored and shared (Johnson, 2015; Murray, 2021; Sutton & Knuth, 2020). Teacher isolation has also perpetuated differences in student learning experiences in the same schools since:

> [t]he more that teachers—even the best among them—keep to themselves, the more the content and quality of instruction varies from classroom to classroom. As students move from class to class and grade to grade in the eggcrate school, they are very likely to get an uneven and incoherent education. (Heller, 2020, p. 36)

Historically, the structures and schedules of high school departments have perpetuated isolation, limiting the opportunities for teachers to learn from one another. Moreover, these structures account for the variation in teacher effectiveness found in the same school (Heller, 2020; Murray, 2021).

Incorporating student performance on standardized tests as a significant component of teacher evaluation systems reinforced the importance of the individual teacher. The teacher

evaluation systems championed by the 2001 No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation and the 2009 Race to the Top (RTTT) Program held teachers more accountable for individual student achievement (Baker et al., 2013; Finn & Hess, 2004; Jewell, 2017; McDonell, 2005; Steinberg & Donaldson, 2016). To meet the demands of the NCLB legislation, schools attempted to hire highly qualified and then later, highly effective teachers with solid content knowledge and emphasized the ability of individual teachers to impact student test scores; thereby upholding the tradition of individualism in teaching (Berry et al., 2004; Schoen & Fusarelli, 2008).

To comply with the demands of the accountability movement, instructional leadership emphasized the responsibility of the principal for student learning (Daniëls et al., 2019; Day et al., 2016; Fullan & Pinchot, 2018; Hallinger, 2011; Marzano et al., 2005; Supovitz & Poglinco, 2001; Tan, 2018; Zepeda et al., 2017). Researchers have noted instructional leadership can create effective learning environments for students and teachers (Hallinger, 2005; Hitt & Tucker, 2016; Zepeda, 2013). Some instructional leaders chose to meet the requirements of standardized testing through strategically crafting teams, clearly communicating expectations, leading through collaboration, and addressing teacher actions that did not contribute to the collaborative process (DuFour & Marzano, 2011; Goddard et al., 2007; Ramirez, 2020; Zepeda et al., 2017).

Wenner and Campbell (2017) challenged principals to create a culture that empowered teachers to evaluate and reflect on instructional practices, given that principals were not the sole educational leaders in schools. Typically, school leaders who intentionally devoted time to observing instruction, designing professional development, coaching teachers in instructional practices, and fostering an environment based on trust and collaborative learning experienced more positive student learning outcomes in their schools (Andrews & Lewis, 2002; Boyce &

Bowers, 2018; Grissom et al., 2014; Hallinger et al., 2020; Hargreaves, 2019; Svendsen, 2020; Tschannen-Moran, 2001; Tschannen-Moran & Constantino, 2021).

When school leaders create a culture of collaborative practices, teachers lead by critically evaluating the extent to which instructional practices improve student learning (DuFour, 2004; Hallinger & Huber, 2012; Jones-Goods, 2018; Liebowitz & Porter, 2019; Short & Echevarria, 1999; Tschannen-Moran et al., 2000; Urick & Bowers, 2014).

Positive school cultures mitigate the impact of isolation by advocating for the "deprivatization of practices and reflective dialogue" and encourage a "collective responsibility for student learning" to empower teachers to hone the craft of teaching by working with one another (Vanblaere & Devos, 2016, p. 208). Collaboration, a fundamental principle of professional learning, encourages teachers to make their knowledge and teaching practices public, resulting in teachers enhancing their instructional practices (Hiebert et al., 2002; Kruse & Louis, 1993; Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2000).

Teacher teams that consistently work together toward a specific purpose were more effective than those that worked in isolation (Supovitz & Poglinco, 2001). Collaboration encourages teachers to believe they have the capacity to influence student learning positively, which in turn can encourage teachers "to select complex and challenging tasks, to experiment…to be more creative" and to "implement greater changes in their teaching practice" (Vanblaere & Devos, 2016, pp. 209-210).

Instructional leaders can positively impact student learning by creating a culture that empowers teachers to learn and reflect on instructional practices collaboratively (Blase & Blase, 2000; Goddard et al., 2015; Lambrecht et al., 2020; Luyten & Bazo, 2019; Marks & Printy, 2003; Preston & Barnes, 2017; Schleifer et al., 2017; Smith et al., 2017).

Specifically, this study centered on an instructional team in a small, semi-rural high school. The primary focus was to examine how instructional leaders created the necessary supports to facilitate unlearning the habits of isolation and to encourage engagement in collaborative practices.

Statement of the Problem

Yancey School District (YSD, a pseudonym) is a small district in which teacher isolation persisted. New district leadership intentionally facilitated unlearning the habits of isolation by encouraging collaboration as a way in which teachers could reflect on instructional practices.

During the 2019-2020 school year, YSD leadership embarked on a strategic planning process that purposefully incorporated stakeholders' voices to redefine the district's vision and mission and to create goals and core values that emphasized instructional excellence informed by community values. To implement this portion of the strategic plan, YSD purposefully attempted to limit the impact of isolation by encouraging YHHS (Yancey Hills High School, a pseudonym) to create course teams that collaboratively analyzed the effectiveness of classroom instructional practices in their courses. Moreover, school and district leaders participated in professional development activities to increase their instructional leadership capacity to lead collaborative teacher teams.

During the 2020-2021 and 2021-2022 school years, YHHS examined information from the strategic planning process and professional development sessions to work with teachers to craft a new School Improvement Plan, situated within the broader framework of the district goals. Woven throughout the YHHS School Improvement Plan was a commitment to prioritizing teacher collaboration to improve instructional practices by unlearning the habits of teacher isolation.

The current study is especially timely given the forced isolation schools across Georgia experienced due to the COVID-19 Pandemic, which eclipsed face-to-face instruction during the 2019-2020 and 2020-2021 school years at Yancey Hills High School. Given the propensity for the teachers at YHHS to work in isolation, the study's outcomes related to collaboration could have been impacted by the COVID-19 Pandemic.

Overview of the Research Site Context

Teacher isolation has been a cultural norm at Yancey Hills High School. It was commonplace for one instructor to teach all sections of a particular academic course. The small enrollment size and a concerted effort to limit course preparations for teachers deeply embedded the practice of having one instructor teach all sections of a particular academic course. Given that there was often only one instructor per course, instruction was private, and teacher isolation was pervasive.

As a response to the district's strategic planning process during the 2019-2020 school year and ongoing professional development to increase student outcomes, district leadership emphasized teacher collaboration as a method to improve instructional practices. Beginning in the 2020-2021 school year, district instructional expectations included supporting students' social and emotional needs, incorporating engaging, standards-based activities that personalize learning, providing effective feedback on student work, and tailoring instruction based on analysis of assessment results.

For the 2021-2022 school year YHHS created course teams for some academic courses and provided the opportunity for most course teams to have common planning time three days a week. To assist teachers in meeting district instructional expectations, course teams were required to meet weekly. Furthermore, all academic department members participated in half-day

release time four times a year (extended collaborative planning) to facilitate collaborative planning between the members of course teams and across grade levels in each department. During the 2022-2023 school year, the master schedule was specifically crafted to facilitate more course teams in each of the grade level courses taught in the English department and all course teams had common planning three times each week. Departments also continued to participate in extended collaborative planning.

Research has indicated that effective collaboration among teachers enhances professional conversations and instructional practices that positively impact student learning (de Jong et al., 2019; Lefstein et al., 2020; Lipscombe et al., 2020; Zepeda, 2018) and increase student achievement (Ronfeldt et al., 2015). Since Yancey Hills High School moved to create instructional course teams with common planning during the 2021-2022 school year, a lack of professional knowledge and professional experiences with collaboration remains. Working in isolation was engrained in the culture of YHHS; therefore, moving to a more collaborative culture will require teachers to engage in a process of unlearning isolation (Durst et al., 2020; Martignoni & Keil, 2021; McGill & Slocum, 1993; Park & Kim, 2020; Tsang & Zahra, 2008).

Additionally, the district's previous emphasis on state-mandated standardized test scores as the primary evaluative tool for teachers created an atmosphere of fear for teachers. Teachers tended to avoid analyzing assessment data due to their negative experiences with data analysis. District leadership intentionally created a more supportive environment that empowered teachers to evaluate their effectiveness by measures agreed on by stakeholders, thereby decreasing the fear surrounding the analysis of assessment data.

Bryk et al. (2017) stated, "far too many efforts at improvement are designs delivered *to* educators rather developed *with* them;" therefore, "it is essential that all involved in

the work be active agents in its improvement" (p. 34, emphasis in the original). To that end, this study used the action research process to develop the necessary supports to facilitate unlearning practices of isolation and engagement in collaborative planning to de-privatize instructional practices.

The Action Research Design Team (ARDT-Instructional Leadership Team) worked to develop interventions to help members of the Action Research Implementation Team (ARIT-English Course Teams) unlearn isolation practices that remained prevalent at YHHS. Furthermore, the ARDT-Instructional Leadership Team worked with the ARIT-English Course Teams to develop interventions to promote collaboration.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine the perspectives of an instructional leadership team as they fostered a culture that encouraged teachers to unlearn habits associated with isolation and to learn practices of collaboration (see Appendix A). Perspectives were gathered in two complementary ways. First, views from the Action Research Design Team (ARDT-Instructional Leadership Team) were compiled as they developed and implemented interventions to increase collaboration with this group of teachers. Secondly, perspectives were drawn from six English teachers configured into course teams based on the courses they taught. Members of the Action Research Implementation Team (ARIT-English Course Teams) identified which supports most facilitated unlearning habits of isolation and learning of practices of collaboration (see Appendix B).

The researcher approached this study with some overall questions: Can instructional leaders foster a school environment that unlearns isolation by encouraging a robust collaborative culture? What lessons can be learned using the action research process to impact collaborative

planning for teachers? What is involved in unlearning the habits of isolation? These questions helped to frame the overall research questions and guided the purpose and focus of the present study.

Research Questions

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

1. In what ways can instructional leaders support the unlearning of isolation by increasing collaborative practices in one semi-rural high school?
2. How can instructional leaders foster a culture that uses collaborative planning to make teaching practices public in one semi-rural high school?
3. To what extent does participating in collaborative planning impact teacher practices in one semi-rural high school?

Definition of Terms

For this study, the following key terms are defined:

- "Collaboration" refers to how teachers work together to plan, dialogue, analyze, and inquire about their impact on student learning. Collaboration promotes solidarity among teachers as they "pursue challenging work together and where they collaborate professionally in ways that are responsive to and inclusive of the cultures of their students, themselves, the community, and the society" (Hargreaves & O'Conner, 2018, p. 5).
- "Collaborative Planning" in the context of Yancey Hills High School refers to scheduled times (once a week during common planning blocks and four times a year for half-day

release-time). Teachers who teach common academic subjects work together to impact student learning by working and learning together (Krakehl et al., 2020).

- "High School Course Teams" in the context of Yancey Hills High School refers to teachers who teach the same academic course and collaborate on instructional practices. Specifically for this study, the high school course teams in the English Department were collectively referred to as the Action Research Implementation Team (ARIT-English Course Teams).
- "Instructional Leadership Team" in the context of Yancey Hills High School refers to the Action Research Design Team (ARDT-Instructional leadership Team) comprised of the principal, assistant principal-primary researcher, English Department Chair, and an additional English teacher. The ARDT-Instructional Leadership Team worked with members of the English Department who were configured into course teams based on the courses they taught to unlearn habits of isolation and increase collaborative practices (see Appendix A).
- "Isolation" is characterized by the physical and psychological separation of teachers. Teachers remain physically and psychologically isolated (egg-crate model) due to a lack of collegial interaction, resulting in the privatization of practice (Lortie, 1975).
- "Principal Leadership" is defined by the following characteristics:
    - Affects conditions that create positive learning environments for students;
    - Creates an academic press and mediates expectations embedded in curriculum standards, structures, and processes;
    - Employs improvement strategies that are matched to the changing state of the school over time; and,

    - Supports ongoing professional learning of staff, which, in turn, facilitates efforts of schools to undertake, implement, and sustain change. (Hallinger & Murphy, 2013)
- "School Culture" is defined as a communal set of beliefs, customs, and norms that influence teachers' daily work (Deal, 2016; Hoy et al., 1991; McDougal & Beattie, 1998).
- "Unlearning" is defined as the intentional discarding of organizational beliefs, routines, or practices to create new knowledge (Klammer & Gueldenberg, 2019).

Situating the study further is the theoretical framework.

Theoretical Framework

Since isolation was deeply embedded into the culture of Yancey Hills High School, the theory of unlearning helped guide this study as the instructional leadership team worked with teachers to promote collaboration as a tool for improving instructional practices. The theory of unlearning, as a necessary component of organizational learning, gained traction after Hedberg's 1981 article, "How organizations learn and unlearn." Hedberg (1981) argued that an organization's unlearning or "discarding obsolete and misleading knowledge" was essential to creating new understandings (p. 3).

Organizations develop memories that store information and impact decision-making (Walsh & Ungson, 1991). Hedberg (1981) noted organizations have their own "cognitive systems and memories" and "develop world views and ideologies;" hence, "organizations' memories preserve certain behaviors, mental maps, norms, and values over time" even as members enter and leave the organization (p. 6). Given that organizations have memories, the process of unlearning must be an intentional one (Tsang & Zahra, 2008).

Organizational context is profoundly relevant to the unlearning process as contextual factors impact the extent to which outdated knowledge is embedded in the organization (Park & Kim, 2020). The role of established knowledge structures must be understood, as the organization's history and values influence how easily the organization discards outdated knowledge (Grisold et al., 2020). When memories and routines are deeply embedded into the organization's culture, it is more difficult to discard them, resulting in the necessity of using intentional strategies to increase the likelihood of the new learning becoming accepted (Grisold et al., 2020). Conversely, organizations are more likely to quickly incorporate new knowledge when they fashion networks to expand their understanding (Durst et al., 2020) or create a culture that promotes learning (McGill & Slocum, 1993).

Grisold et al. (2020) indicated that "goal-directed unlearning" occurred in "situations in which organizations implement new and pre-defined practices or routines, which interfere with established ones" (p. 609). The purpose of goal-directed unlearning is to incorporate new knowledge structures by institutionalizing new practices or routines. The Action Research Design Team (ARDT-Instructional Leadership Team) worked to institutionalize new methods of collaboration to replace the former habits of isolation.

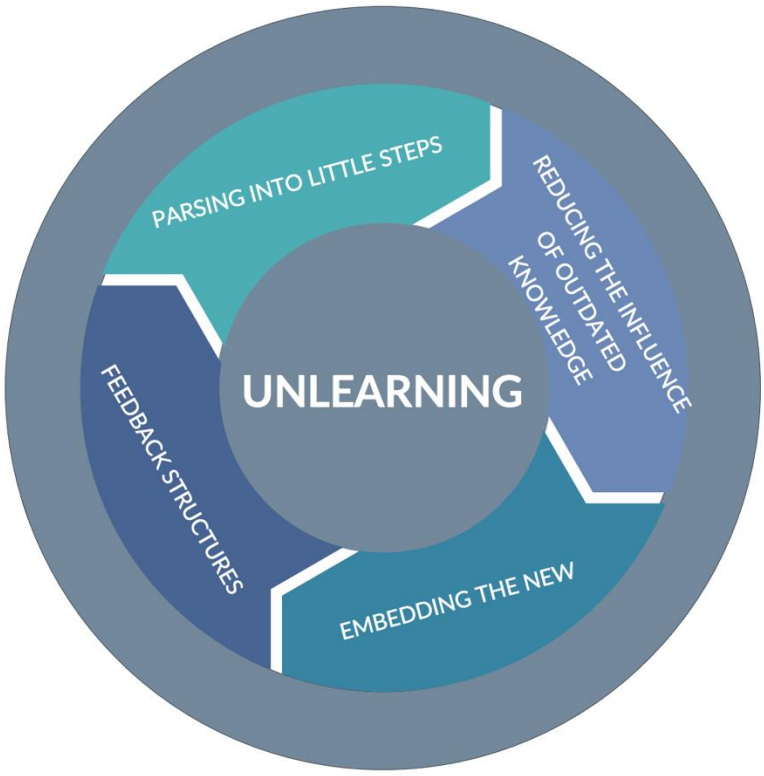
First, the ARDT-Instructional Leadership Team intentionally incorporated professional learning around effective collaborative teams. Then, the ARDT-Instructional Leadership Team scaffolded meetings to include collaborative practices. The unlearning process requires members of the organization to reflect on their current behaviors to identify how they can change to meet the new expected behaviors. To complete this necessary step of the unlearning process, the Action Research Implementation Team (ARIT-English Course Teams) reflected on their current collaborative practices and possible supports to assist their work of building collaborative teams.

Building a new culture at YHHS in which teachers can engage in collaborative, reflective dialogue surrounding instructional practices required supporting the ARIT-English Course Teams. The ARDT-Instructional Leadership Team worked with English teachers, configured into course teams based on what they taught, to assist them with deprivatizing their teaching practices and becoming collectively responsible for student learning.

The theoretical framework that guided the study broadly encompassed four types of interventions (Grisold et al., 2020). Figure 1.1 illustrates the theoretical framework of unlearning.

Figure 1.1

Theoretical Framework for Unlearning



Note. Adapted from Grisold et al. (2020).

In the study, Grisold et al.'s (2020) interventions of parsing new practices into little steps, reducing the influence of outdated knowledge, embedding new practices in daily work, and creating feedback structures to improve practices were used to build the theoretical framework to assist the ARIT-English Course Teams in unlearning isolation and learning collaborative teaching practices.

Logic Model

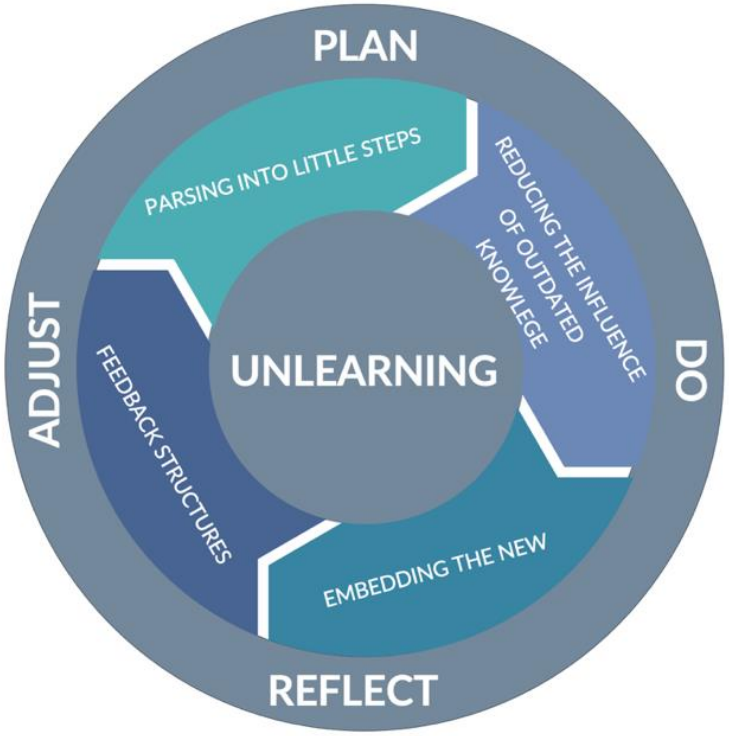
It is necessary to frame this study, which examined instructional leadership in cycles of action research focused on unlearning habits of isolation and learning collaborative practices in a cycle of continuous improvement. Continuous improvement is a defined process that addresses specific problems in real contexts by engaging in systematic inquiry to improve procedures, policies, and practices (Wang & Fabillar, 2019). Three foundational questions underpin continuous improvement:

1. What problem are we trying to solve?
2. What changes might we introduce and why?
3. How will we know what change is an actual improvement? (Shakman et al., 2017)

The Plan-Do-Reflect-Adjust cycle depicted in Figure 1.2 provided a specific structure for the instructional leadership team to define the problem of isolation, implement interventions to unlearn isolation and promote collaboration, reflect on the gathered data, and adjust interventions based on feedback from the ARIT-English Course Teams (Bryk 2020; Bryk et al., 2011; Hill et al., 2022).

Figure 1.2

Logic Model for the Study



Note. Adapted from Bryk et al. (2011); Grisold et al. (2020).

The logic model (Plan-Do-Reflect-Adjust) served a tri-purpose in this study. First, the logic model served to bracket the scope of the study. Second, the logic model served to situate change. Third, the logic model served to frame and enact interventions. The application of the logic model is presented.

Plan. During the "plan" phase, the instructional leadership team acknowledged the specific context in which isolation was situated and conducted a comprehensive investigation into the causes of teacher isolation. The "plan" phase also built a shared understanding of the complexities of teacher isolation. These understandings developed a standard set of objectives and targets to address teacher isolation. After the instructional leadership team analyzed the problem of isolation and possible targets to address isolation, they began planning the unlearning

process. Specifically, the instructional leadership team planned how to parse the new learning of collaboration into little steps, reduce the influence of the outdated knowledge of isolation, and embed new collaborative practices into the ARIT-English Course Teams.

Do. During the "do" phase of the model, the instructional leadership team launched trials to reduce the influence of isolation by embedding collaborative practices into the school culture that generated process data, outcome data, and an improvement hypothesis.

Reflect. The "reflect" phase of the continuous improvement cycle allowed the ARDT-Instructional Leadership Team to use formal protocols to examine collected data, consider the extent to which the identified objectives were met, reflect on the information gleaned from feedback structures, and make informed decisions about implementing additional cycles for data collection.

Adjust. Lastly, the "adjust" cycle phase allowed the ARDT-Instructional Leadership Team to integrate new learning generated throughout the unlearning process. The team adjusted defined objectives, hypotheses, purposes, and strategies based on the information garnered from the feedback structures.

Theory of Change

The purpose of this study was to examine the perspectives of an instructional leadership team as they fostered a culture that encouraged teachers to unlearn habits associated with isolation and to learn practices of collaboration. Aligning with the purpose of the study and the overarching research questions, the theory of change was situated in the unlearning processes by segmenting practices into manageable parts, reducing the influence of outdated knowledge, communicating clear expectations for the newly embedded structural changes, and creating effective feedback structures to support positive experiences with new learning (Grisold et al.,

2020). The logic model used in this study provided a cycle of support for the ARIT-English Course Teams from both peers and administrators who served as instructional leaders.

The unlearning process began with the ARDT-Instructional Leadership Team identifying the specific context and consequences of isolation at YHHS. The ARDT-Instructional Leadership Team helped to define habits, patterns, and causes of isolation and to hypothesize objectives and targets to address them. Based on these efforts, the instructional leadership team planned interventions to unlearn isolation and learn collaborative practices.

Data were collected from the interventions aimed at reducing habits of isolation and then data were analyzed based on their effectiveness. The ARDT-Instructional Leadership Team and ARIT-English Course Teams then reflected on the effectiveness of the interventions and determined how to proceed. The entire cycle was firmly situated around unlearning habits of isolation and learning collaborative practices. The study sought to investigate which interventions contributed to unlearning the habits of isolation and facilitated learning collaborative practices.

Overview of the Methodology

Action research is an inquiry process that seeks to invoke organizational change by increasing the organization members' knowledge and capacity (Coghlan, 2019). Participants in action research combine "action and reflection, theory and practice, in pursuit of practical solutions to issues of pressing concern" (Bradbury, 2015, p.1). In the context of this study, the primary researcher and the ARDT-Instructional Leadership Team used relevant scholarly literature to facilitate unlearning practices of isolation and learning habits of collaboration. The ARDT–Instructional Leadership Team worked with small groups of English teachers (ARIT-Action Research Implementation Team) who were configured into course teams based on what

they taught. The ARDT-Instructional Leadership Team sought to provide interventions that cultivated a culture of collaboration based on reflection and explicit feedback from members of the ARIT-English Course Teams.

Action Research

Action research was the preferred method of study to examine unlearning habits of isolation and learning collaborative practices. The collaborative nature of action research, with its emphasis—on the "quality of relationships" and working "with people" by emphasizing "trust, concern for others, [and] equality of influence,"—makes it an appropriate methodology for this study (Coghlan, 2019, p. 5). The emphasis on collaborative decision-making in the action research process buttressed the significance of learning collaborative practices for the ARDT-Instructional Leadership Team and the ARIT-English Course Teams.

Action research allowed the researcher and the participants to reflect on the impact of isolation on instructional practices, put collaborative practices into action, and then work together to understand the improvement of practice. Action research was an effective methodology to guide the Action Research Design Team (ARDT-Instructional Leadership Team) as they selected interventions to best support creating a collaborative culture. Glanz (2014) proposed instructional leaders "must first reflect on what needs to be accomplished and then take purposeful actions to enhance school improvement" (p. 217). Action research provided the necessary methodology for identifying the impact of isolation, creating interventions to encourage collaboration, and systematically analyzing feedback from the participants.

Participation in this study provided experiences in working with colleagues to unlearn habits of isolation. The collaborative nature of action research scaffolded the work of the ARDT-Instructional Leadership Team and the ARIT-English Course Teams to "cogenerate knowledge

through collaborative communicative processes in which all participants' contributions are taken seriously" (Clark et al., 2020, p. 18). Learning through collaborative inquiry could provide the necessary context to improve instructional supervision and classroom pedagogy (Clark et al., 2020). The process emphasized collaborative dialogue between the ARDT-Instructional Leadership Team and the ARIT-English Course Teams while focusing on research-based practices and interventions needed to support unlearning habits of isolation and learning collaborative practices.

Throughout the study, the Action Research Design Team (ARDT-Instructional Leadership Team) supported the unlearning of isolation and the creation of a collaborative culture in one small, semi-rural high school. The action research process enhanced the combined work of the Action Research Design Team (ARDT-Instructional Leadership Team) and Action Research Implementation Team (ARIT-English Course Teams) as they consistently engaged in collaborative practices to unlearn habits of isolation. Data from the ARIT-English Course Teams were collected and analyzed to provide direction for the ARDT-Instructional Leadership Team to create interventions based on scholarly literature.

The research cycle provided time for reflection for the ARDT-Instructional Leadership Team and ARIT-English Course Teams based on the results of implemented interventions. Interviews were conducted with ARIT-English Course Teams members at the beginning, middle, and end of the research cycles to elicit information regarding changes in collaborative practices. Weekly check-ins were conducted to provide an opportunity for feedback and support while also gathering evidence for adjusting the necessary interventions. Required and voluntary collaborative team meetings were used to engage in professional learning and dialogue surrounding collaborative practices.

Data Collection

Data collection for this study incorporated several qualitative methods. These methods included:

1. Individual interviews with members of the Action Research Implementation Team (ARIT-English Course Teams) at the beginning, middle, and end of the research process;
2. A focus group was conducted with the Action Research Design Team (ARDT-Instructional Leadership Team) at the end of the study to elicit perspectives regarding the perceived effectiveness of the interventions;
3. Feedback questionnaires were implemented to gather the effectiveness of the interventions;
4. Observations of course team meetings;
5. Researcher's journal notes based on observations of the Action Research Implementation Team (ARIT-English Course Teams) and observations of the Action Research Design Team (ARDT-Instructional Leadership Team). Additionally, the researcher's journal included reflexive notes to chronicle thoughts, reactions, and researcher analyses during the research cycles. The reflexive portion of the research journal assisted in monitoring the evolution of the researcher's development as an educational leader. It provided insight into how the researcher's biases may have impacted the development of the study; and,
6. Artifacts, including collaboratively designed teaching documents, provided additional insights into the context of the study, and these documents were used to corroborate observations and other data.

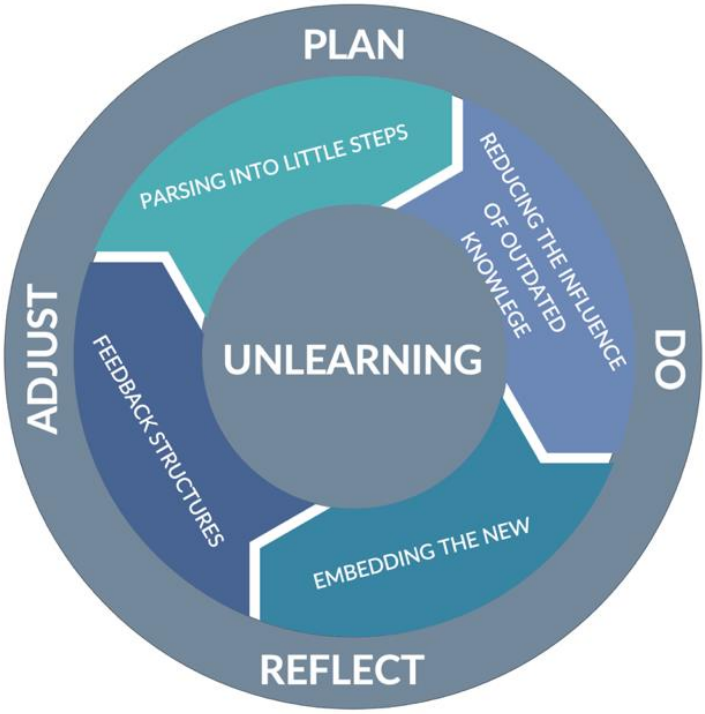
The researcher analyzed the qualitative data from individual interviews and focus group meetings. A data coding scheme created a path to track specific patterns, which provided insight into common themes.

Interventions

The primary interventions of this study were based on Grisold et al.'s (2020) model of unlearning portrayed in Figure 1.3. Parsing new practices into little steps, reducing the influence of outdated knowledge, embedding new practices in daily work, and creating feedback structures to improve practices provided concrete interventions to unlearn isolation habits and learn collaboration methods.

Figure 1.3

Unlearning Intervention Cycle



Note. Adapted from Bryk et al. (2011); Grisold et al. (2020).

Parsing into Little Steps

Organizational actors may feel overwhelmed when change occurs; therefore, breaking down the process into more manageable steps provides the necessary support. At YHHS, the first step toward collaboration allowed teachers from the ARIT-English Course Teams to participate in professional learning surrounding effective teamwork. Next, the teachers collaboratively developed standard curriculum maps and course pacing guides. Then, they used collaborative planning time to plan and prepare for instruction and engage in analyses of student performance on assessments.

Reducing the Influence of Outdated Knowledge

To decrease the outdated practice of teacher isolation, the master schedule facilitated more than one teacher teaching the same academic course. Therefore, rather than an individual, a teacher team became responsible for planning and reflecting on the effectiveness of instructional strategies used in the course.

Embedding the New

YHHS incorporated a structural change of having teachers who taught the same courses (members of the same course team) have a common planning period. They could meet, collaboratively prepare, and analyze assessment results for the course. Additionally, instructional leaders chose department chairs who valued collaborative practices to serve as instructional leaders in each department.

Feedback Structures

Organizations that foster unlearning use member feedback to make the new process more effective. At YHHS, one of the first refinements of the collaborative planning experience based

on feedback from teachers was to provide them with a half-day release time four times a year to facilitate their work to meet department-wide expectations for collaborative teams.

Significance

The pervasiveness of isolation in education has been detailed throughout numerous studies (Krakehl et al., 2020; Little, 1990; Lortie, 1975; Nerlino, 2020). For schools, isolation has often impeded teacher leadership, led to higher teacher attrition rates, escalated stress for teachers, and decreased opportunities for job-embedded professional learning (Martin et al., 2020; Nerlino, 2020). High schools organized into subject-specific departments often perpetuate teacher isolation (Heller, 2020) and subsequent differences in student learning experiences (Murray, 2021). Additionally, the 2001 NCLB legislation and the 2009 Race to the Top Program (RTTT) emphasized the ability of individual teachers to impact student test scores, thereby upholding the tradition of individualism in teaching (Schoen & Fusarelli, 2008).

Using the theory of organizational unlearning as the guiding framework, this study increased understanding of specific steps instructional leadership teams can take to promote the unlearning of isolation and the learning of collaborative practices. When school leaders establish a culture of collaborative practice, students experience more positive learning outcomes (Hargreaves, 2019; Tschannen-Moran & Constantino, 2021). Increasing collaborative practices provide opportunities for teacher leadership development (de Jong et al., 2019; Lefstein et al., 2020; Liebowitz & Porter, 2019; Lipscombe et al., 2020). The ARDT-Instructional Leadership Team and the ARIT-English Course Teams worked together in an improvement cycle to de-privatize instructional practices, thereby contributing to unlearning habits of isolation and supporting collaborative school culture.

This study specifically looked at what was done to unlearn habits of isolation and to learn practices of collaboration in one semi-rural high school. Additionally, this study contributed to the literature surrounding organizational unlearning in an educational setting. Finally, this action research used the Plan-Do-Reflect-Adjust conceptual framework that provided unique insights into the process of unlearning habits of isolation and learning collaborative practices in one semi-rural high school.

Organization of the Dissertation

Chapter 1 provides an overview of the study of this dissertation and lays out the research questions, the problem of practice, and the methods for the study. Chapter 2 reviews the related literature for the research and discusses isolation, unlearning and learning, school culture, and principal leadership that encourages collaborative practices. Chapter 3 describes the methodology involved in action research, the qualitative methods as they relate to this study, and contextualizes the study. Chapter 4 examines the findings from the action research case, describes the interventions, and leads to thematic analysis. Chapter 5 details the themes that were drawn from the findings. Chapter 6 provides a discussion about the findings across the research questions, offers implications for school leaders, and points to implications for further research. Final perspectives conclude the chapter.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE RELATED LITERATURE

The literature surrounding the positive impact of collaborative practice on student and teacher learning is robust (DuFour, 2004; Jones-Goods, 2018; Liebowitz & Porter, 2019). Although the negative impacts of teaching in isolation are well documented, the structures and schedules of schools contribute to isolation remaining a profoundly entrenched norm (Heider, 2021; Krakehl et al., 2020; Little, 1990; Lortie, 1975). To support the learning of collaborative practice, teachers must engage in unlearning habits of isolation (Durst et al., 2020; Grisold et al., 2020; Tsang & Zahra, 2008). To create a collaborative culture, school leadership must intentionally devote time to observing instruction, designing job-embedded professional learning opportunities, and fostering an environment based on trust and collaborative learning experiences (Boyce & Bowers, 2018; Hallinger et al., 2020; Hargreaves, 2019; Tschannen-Moran & Constantino, 2021).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine the perspectives of an instructional leadership team as they fostered a culture that encouraged teachers to unlearn habits associated with isolation and to learn practices of collaboration.

Research Questions

The following research questions addressed the purpose of this action research study and guided this inquiry:

1. In what ways can instructional leaders support the unlearning of isolation by increasing collaborative practices in one semi-rural high school?
2. How can instructional leaders foster a culture that uses collaborative planning to make teaching practices public in one semi-rural high school?
3. To what extent does participating in collaborative planning impact teacher practices in one semi-rural high school?

To investigate the research questions, the researcher worked with an action team to study unlearning practices of isolation and learning habits of collaboration at Yancey Hills High School. Individual interviews, a focus group, feedback questionnaires, observations, researcher journal notes, and collaboratively designed teacher artifacts were used to analyze data about unlearning practices of isolation and learning collaborative techniques.

Chapter 2 explores the significant writings and areas that influenced the conceptualization of the present study. A review of the related literature on unlearning habits of isolation and learning collaborative practices was conducted and divided into four sections. The first section provides information on the impact of teacher isolation on teachers and students. The second section explores unlearning theory, adult learning theory, and professional job-embedded learning. The third section defines elements of school culture that contribute to collaborative practices, including building trusting relationships. The final section outlines dimensions of instructional leadership that foster a collaborative school culture. Both empirically based and scholarly works were examined. The empirical findings table can be found in Appendix C.

Isolation

Lortie's 1975 seminal work *Schoolteacher: A Sociological Study* described three types of isolation; physical, psychological, and adaptive. Lortie characterized the physical isolation of teachers by using an "egg-crate" metaphor to symbolize the architecture of schools where classrooms remain secluded from one another. The "egg-crate" metaphor acknowledged the independent work of teachers in isolated classrooms as they taught their students without significant influence from parents, administrators, or policymakers (Woulfin et al., 2019). Psychological isolation encompasses how teachers perceived and responded to interactions with others in their buildings. Adaptive isolation is associated with the overwhelming state of mind that teachers experienced when they struggled to meet new demands. Teachers face all three types of isolation as part of their work.

Lortie (1975) proposed conservatism, individualism, and presentism were the fundamental principles of the teaching profession that reinforced teacher isolation. He asserted that teachers were socialized to preserve the educational system, which encouraged them to focus on small-scale classroom changes (conservatism) rather than on whole-school reform. Individualism, which heralded a specific teacher's skill to impact their students' learning, upheld the practice of teaching in isolation. Presentism (focusing on the short term) further sustained isolation as teachers focused on the present with their specific students instead of focusing on widespread, long-term reform. These features of education perpetuated isolation and impeded the use of collaborative practices to improve instruction.

Perennial Nature of Isolation

The perennial nature of teacher isolation has been chronicled in numerous studies. Fullan and Hargreaves (1991) asserted, "The problem of isolation is a deep-seated one. Architecture

often supports it. The timetable reinforces it. Overload sustains it. History legitimizes it" (p. 6). The enduring nature of isolation in the teaching profession undermined collaborative agreement on professional norms and made collaborative work illusive (Fullan & Hargreaves, 2016; Schleicher, 2018). Lortie (1975) proposed that the pervasiveness of isolation in schools necessitated teachers "undergo training experiences which offset their individualistic and traditional experiences" (p. 67). In other words, teachers must unlearn practices of isolation to learn collaborative practices.

In *The Persistence of Privacy: Autonomy and Initiative in Teacher's Professional Relations,* Little (1990) affirmed that isolation practices were deeply embedded in schools. She proposed a continuum of collegial relations to clarify the types of interactions teachers have with one another and the extent to which those interactions impact their work. She asserted the most common form of collegial relations was "storytelling and scanning for ideas," a type of collaboration in which "colleagues learn indirectly and informally about their own and others' practice through moment-to-moment exchanges" (Little, 1990, p. 514). These interactions are often characterized by quick, informal conversations in which one teacher seeks reassurance or advice from a colleague. However, the pattern of independence in teaching remains as one teacher's individual judgment, rather than collective problem-solving, works to solve issues.

Little (1990) acknowledged that merely increasing collegial interactions would not translate into teachers working interdependently. Isolation often remained a dominant cultural feature of schools since "groups are instruments both for promoting change and preserving the present" (Little, 1990, p. 509). Ronfeldt (2017) recognized "it is critical to examine whether and how collaboration actually improves teaching and learning" (p. 71) as well as the kinds of "content, structure, frequency, facilitators, and norms ... that promote better collaboration

quality" (p. 87). Collaborative work can increase teacher and student learning. However, a deeper understanding of the types of collegial relations must occur to comprehend the connection between collegial interactions on collaborative practices (Bodenheimer, 2020). Due to the persistence of isolation in schools, it is necessary for teachers to unlearn isolationist habits by learning collaborative practices.

Although Flinders (1988) reaffirmed Lortie's conceptualization of physical and psychological isolation, he also acknowledged two paradoxes of professional isolation. First, classrooms are crowded physical spaces where secondary teachers often see more than 100 students a day. However, teachers may feel lonely if they do not have opportunities to work with colleagues collaboratively. Secondly, teachers may view their seclusion as a barrier to interaction while also appreciating it as a means of protection from being judged by outside sources (Ostovar-Nameghi & Sheikhahmadi, 2016; Snow-Gerano, 2005).

Teachers who promote privacy and autonomy often perpetuate the culture of isolation in schools, thereby undermining "genuine dialogue among teachers in schools" (Rogers & Babinski, 2002, p. 2). Teachers may perpetuate isolation practices because they remain unconvinced that initiatives that promote collaborative work will become the norm in their schools or because they lack knowledge and skills of how to work on a team (Wheelan, 2005). Teachers and schools value self-reliance, which manifests itself in the "rule of privacy," allowing for trivial conversations about insignificant events, but discouraging collaboratively detailing classroom practices (Lieberman & Miller, 1984). Lieberman and Miller (1984) lamented the role that teachers play in perpetuating isolation in schools.

> For most teachers in most schools, teaching is indeed a lonely enterprise. With so many people engaged in so common a mission in so compact a space and time, it is perhaps the

> greatest irony—and the greatest tragedy of teaching—that so much is carried on in self-imposed and professionally sanctioned isolation. (p. 11)

Given that teachers often perpetuate isolationist practices, isolation remains deeply engrained in the culture of most schools and negatively impacts teachers and students.

Impact of Isolation on Teachers

One of the impacts of teaching in isolation is that teachers suffer from loneliness and eventually decide to leave the profession (Heider, 2021; Schlichte et al., 2005; Smith & Ingersoll, 2004). A positive and significant correlation exists between professional isolation and job-related stress (Dussault et al., 1999). Furthermore, a lack of professional working conditions can contribute to teacher attrition, including the "lack of opportunity for professional discourse" (Darling-Hammond, 1984, p. 13). Kelchtermans (2017) linked teacher retention to the quality of professional relationships that teachers develop. He proposed that professional relationships

> are structurally inherent to teaching and schooling and inextricably related to—as well as influencing—the core of the educational processes: teaching and learning. Whether they like it or not, all teachers have to professionally engage with and relate to each of these categories of actors. (Kelchtermans, 2017, p. 967)

Developing professional relationships can decrease isolation, which may contribute to retaining teachers.

Additionally, teaching in isolation has decreased opportunities for teachers to develop and hone leadership skills. Schools' organizational structures and schedules have perpetuated the professional norms of privacy and isolation and have limited options for teachers to develop instructional leadership skills (Wenner & Campbell, 2017; York-Barr & Duke, 2004). Teacher leaders are uniquely positioned and can lead instructional changes that impact student learning

through increasing collaborative practices (Buchanan, 2020; Curtis, 2013; Mangin & Stoelinga, 2008; Muijs & Harris, 2003). Teacher leadership "is second only to classroom instruction among all school-related factors that contribute" to student learning (Leithwood et al., 2004, p. 5). However, when practices of isolation permeate school cultures, teachers are deprived of developing instructional leadership skills that can positively impact student learning.

Schools often have "leadership-resistant architectures" in which "norms of individualism, autonomy, and privacy are pervasive," resulting in a dearth of teacher leadership (Smylie et al., 2005, p. 183). In such isolated cultures, teachers may be reticent to accept instructional leadership roles "for fear that it will harm relationships and trust with colleagues" (Fairman & Mackenzie, 2015, p. 18). Integrating aspects of teacher leadership into preservice teacher preparation programs (Reeves & Lowenhaupt, 2016) or at the start of one's teaching career (Nerlino, 2020) could help normalize teacher leadership as an essential component of professionalism. Teacher leadership can address isolation in teaching; therefore, it is necessary to cultivate the instructional leadership capacity of teachers to mitigate the influence of the deeply embedded cultural norms and practices of isolationism and privacy (Weiner, 2011).

Teaching in isolation has also denied teachers opportunities for job-embedded professional learning, which thwarts professional growth. Improvements in teaching are more likely to occur when opportunities for teachers to work and learn together are prevalent. Teaching pedagogy improves when teachers construct meaning from interactions, discussions, and professional dialogue (Harris & Muijs, 2004; Villavicencio et al., 2021). Teachers are most likely to change teaching practices when empowered to pursue learning with and from their colleagues (Murphy, 2015).

Job-embedded professional learning occurs in collaborative cultures in which teachers consistently and collectively learn and work together as they investigate their practice, construct new knowledge, and commit to collective professional growth (Hairon et al., 2017; Martin et al., 2020). Teaching in isolation undermines opportunities for teachers to learn from one another; moreover, students are negatively impacted by isolation.

Impact of Isolation on Students

Teacher isolation has also contributed to different learning experiences for students. When teachers work in isolation, the content and quality of instruction often vary, resulting in students encountering vastly different learning experiences (Heller, 2020). Students' learning experiences may differ as teaching in isolation can promote a lack of collegiality that fosters competitive individualism among teachers (Murray, 2021).

In Westheimer's (2008) comprehensive review of professional learning communities as a method to diminish isolation in teaching, he asserted that increased student learning and intellectual inquiry are fundamental to the goals of collaborative work among teachers. Schools designed to build the collective capacity of teachers attempt to ensure all students receive effective instruction, thereby diminishing the impact that less effective teachers have on students.

Quantitative research demonstrates when teachers work in collaborative communities, student achievement increases (Lee & Smith, 1996; Lomos et al., 2011; Louis & Marks, 1998; Newmann et al., 1996). A positive correlation existed between student outcomes and a collaborative culture in which teachers learned and worked together (Krakehl et al., 2020; Saka, 2021). When teachers work collaboratively, they are more likely to take risks, resulting in more innovative and engaging lessons that translate into increased student outcomes (Egodawatte et

al., 2011; Nguyen et al., 2021; Zepeda, 2020). To mitigate the impact of isolation, teachers must unlearn the habits of isolation by learning practices of collaboration to increase student achievement.

Structures That Perpetuate Isolation: High School Departments

Historically, teachers have often conceptualized their work from a socialization process that included internalizing their roles from their time as pupils in classrooms (Feiman-Nemser et al., 1999; Lortie, 1975; Tabacbnick & Zeichner, 1984) and their early teaching experiences (Hoy & Rees, 1977). For secondary teachers, the departmental model in high schools also influences their work (Siskin & Little, 1995). Looking to departments rather than schools provides a different perspective,

> one in which the realm of knowledge of the academic department becomes the potential site for social and professional community. For the boundaries of departmental realms are not only lines which divide the faculty, they can also be seen as circles which enclose colleagues together within them. (Siskin, 2014, p. 90)

Consequently, as high school departments contribute to the socialization of how teachers approach their work, it is necessary to examine the microcultures that departments develop.

The culture of high school departments typically determines the use of collaborative practices, as some departmental cultures encourage collaboration, whereas others perpetuate isolationism (McLaughlin, 1992; Schipper, 2020; Sutton & Knuth, 2020). High school departments do not often promote collegiality, as "their structure and organization, tends to foster isolation" (Davis, 1986, p.72), and they engage in uneven layers of collaborative activity (Ávila de Lima, 2003; Krakehl et al., 2020). However, Childs et al. (2013) found that high school departments were more likely to participate in collaborative practices if members valued one

another, leadership fostered collaborative practices, and shared physical spaces where collaboration could occur. Academic departments in secondary schools play an essential role in unlearning isolation practices and learning collaboration habits.

Unlearning and Learning

The purpose of this study was to examine the perspectives of an instructional leadership team as they fostered a culture that encouraged teachers to unlearn the practices associated with isolation and learn collaborative practices. Therefore, it is necessary to investigate how adults discard obsolete or misleading information to facilitate new learning. First, the theory of unlearning is defined and explored. Next, the andragogical model (adult learning) is examined. Finally, a nexus is drawn between the theory of adult learning and job-embedded professional learning.

Unlearning

Hedberg (1981) predicated his theory of unlearning on the concept that organizations need to discard obsolete or misleading information as a necessary step in creating new knowledge. He proposed that "knowledge grows, and simultaneously it becomes obsolete as reality changes" (p. 3). Unlearning "involves a process of consciously choosing to abandon or give up particular knowledge, values, or behaviors" (Hislop et al., 2014, pp. 541-542). Since new information can challenge what has been accepted in the past, organizations must create the capacity to discard old knowledge (unlearn) and incorporate new knowledge (learn). However, organizations are often unwilling or unable to discard old knowledge, which impedes acquiring new knowledge (Cegarra-Navarro et al., 2016). Therefore, for practices of collaboration to be learned, the habits of isolation must be unlearned.

Organizations develop memories that shape their collective decision-making capacity by preserving existing knowledge through identity stewardship (Ravasi et al., 2019; Walsh & Ungson, 1991) or encouraging new learning through identity evangelizing (Cegarra-Navarro & Martelo-Landroguez, 2020; Ravasi et al., 2019). Organizational memory influences the extent to which an organization can accept and internalize new knowledge (Adel Odeh et al., 2021). Therefore, encouraging internal collaboration among members of the organization is an effective strategy by which individual knowledge can be combined to generate new organizational knowledge (Antunes & Pinheiro, 2020; Feiz et al., 2019; McLeod et al., 2020; Park & Kim, 2020). Since organizational memories guide decision-making capacity, the process of unlearning must be intentional (Lau et al., 2019; Tsang & Zahra, 2008; Wensley & Navarro, 2015).

Organizational context is profoundly relevant to the unlearning process as contextual factors impact the extent to which outdated knowledge is embedded in the organization (Cegarra-Navarro & Wensley, 2019). To facilitate the unlearning of outdated knowledge, it is necessary to understand the organization's context, as the organization's history and values impact the extent to which outdated knowledge is discarded (Becker & Bish, 2021; Grisold et al., 2020; Matsuo, 2019; Park & Kim, 2020). Organizations face difficulties adapting to change when outdated knowledge is deeply embedded into the organization's memory and culture (Eggers & Park, 2018; Grisold et al., 2020). Conversely, organizations that continue to learn create cultures in which new learning is facilitated by building the collective capacity to integrate new knowledge into their organization (Durst et al., 2020; McGill & Slocum, 1993; Park & Kim, 2020; Senge, 1990; Sheng et al., 2021).

Goal-directed unlearning aims to meet specified organizational goals by deliberately abandoning obsolete knowledge to facilitate new learning (Becker, 2018; Grisold et al., 2020;

Linder & Foss, 2018). Typically, organizations that intentionally embark on a specified process of unlearning have an identified goal that requires unlearning to occur before new knowledge is incorporated into the organization (Grisold & Kaiser, 2017; Linder & Foss, 2018). Becker (2018) posits that unlearning involves the collective questioning of existing knowledge since organizational memory may impede acquiring new knowledge or skills. According to Grisold et al. (2020), facilitating the unlearning of obsolete information to achieve a specified goal includes creating a scaffold for unlearning by parsing new practices into little steps, reducing the influence of outdated knowledge, embedding new practices in daily work, and creating feedback structures to improve practices. Organizations that incorporate principles of adult learning to guide processes of unlearning enhance the likelihood that new, desired knowledge will be incorporated into their organization's culture.

Learning: Adult Learning

Knowles (1970) substantially altered the field of education when he articulated a new perspective on learning: adults learn differently from children. He proposed the term "andragogy" to characterize adult learning in contrast to "pedagogy," a term related to learning for children. For children, the pedagogical model proposed teachers accept responsibility for the learning of submissive pupils. In contrast, the andragogical model assumed that adult learners are co-partners in their own learning (Holton et al., 2001). Merriam (2008) recognized adult learning as a complex, multidimensional phenomenon that occurs across numerous contexts. Adults need to be flexible enough "to reject earlier learning and engage in new learning" as they learn in the context of their work (Illeris, 2018, p. 73). Thus, adult learning must provide opportunities for learners to unlearn obsolete information to learn new knowledge.

As people mature, their self-concept evolves from dependency to self-directedness; therefore, their learning needs change (Ozuah, 2016). Knowles et al. (2020) have noted over time, the andragogical model (adult learning) has assumed the following:

1. Adults need to know why they need to learn something before undertaking to learn it.
2. Adults develop a deep psychological need to be seen by others and treated by others as being capable of self-direction.
3. Adults come into an educational activity with both a greater volume and a different quality of experience from that of youths.
4. Adults become ready to learn those things they need to know and cope effectively with real-life situations.
5. Adults are motivated to learn to the extent that learning will help them perform tasks or deal with problems they confront in their life situations.
6. Adults are responsive to external motivators (e.g., better jobs, promotions, higher salaries, etc.). Still, the most potent motivators are internal pressures (e.g., the desire for increased job satisfaction, self-esteem, quality of life, etc.)

Merriam and Baumgartner (2020) emphasized the necessity of understanding the uniqueness of individual situations when they assert, "[t]he more we know about adult learners, the changes they go through, and how these changes motivate and interact with learning, the better we can structure learning experiences that both respond to and stimulate development" (p. 345). Andragogy is most effective when it adapts learning experiences to adult participants' unique situations and goals (Brookfield, 1986; Holton et al., 2001; Knowles et al., 2020).

The andragogical model is a process model which emphasizes the necessity for the instructor to provide opportunities to involve the learner in acquiring new information and skills

(Knowles et al., 2020). Specifically, the andragogical instructor constructs learning experiences that focus on (1) preparing the learner; (2) establishing a climate conducive to learning; (3) creating a mechanism for mutual planning; (4) diagnosing the learning needs; (5) formulating program objectives (i.e., content) that will satisfy these needs; (6) designing a pattern of learning experiences; (7) conducting these learning experiences with suitable techniques and materials; and (8) evaluating the learning outcomes and re-diagnosing learning needs (Knowles et al., 2020). As adults, teachers need learning opportunities through job-embedded professional development that allow them to reflect on their beliefs and knowledge to identify obsolete and outdated information they need to relinquish (Coombe, 2020; Matsuo, 2019).

Learning: Job-Embedded Professional Learning

Job-embedded professional learning emphasizes the role of the teacher as a driving force in their learning (Calvert, 2016; Svendsen, 2020). Zepeda (2019) proposed professional learning "needs to be situated within the school as a proactive process, not as a 'fix-it' intervention merely to remediate perceived weaknesses in teacher performance" (p. 39). Effective professional learning changes teacher practices that benefit students (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017). Furthermore, Darling-Hammond et al. (2017) found after analyzing three decades of research, that effective professional learning:

1. Is content-focused
2. Incorporates active learning utilizing adult learning theory
3. Supports collaboration, typically in job embedded contexts
4. Uses models and modeling of effective practice
5. Provides coaching and expert support
6. Offers opportunities for feedback and reflection

7. Is of sustained duration.

Therefore, professional learning must be job-embedded to promote the teachers' development, as they unlearn outdated knowledge and learn more effective instructional strategies to impact student learning positively.

Professional development should be reconceptualized to account for the specific needs of adult learners (Hunzicker, 2011; Svendsen, 2020; Zepeda, 2019). Typically, adult learners work to maintain responsibility for their learning and use specific life experiences to construct meaning from their learning (Hunzicker, 2011, Mews, 2020). Adults are motivated by learning opportunities that afford them the autonomy to create solutions to problems that directly impact their lives (Blaschke, 2019). When professional development honors tenets of adult learning theory, participants are more likely to engage in authentic, relevant, open-ended learning activities that support their work (Knowles et al., 2020; Wozniak, 2020). Therefore, when adult learning theory guides job-embedded professional learning, teachers are more likely to develop as they consistently continue to learn and improve their teaching practices (Zepeda, 2019).

Job-embedded professional learning allows teachers to situate their work within social and professional networks in which knowledge is socially constructed and negotiated (Coburn & Russell, 2008; Darling-Hammond et al., 2017; Smylie & Evans, 2006; Von Esch, 2021). Collaboration through job-embedded professional learning supports and motivates teachers as they become agents of their learning (Loughland & Ryan, 2021). When teachers engage in continual conversations regarding teaching and learning, they learn and benefit from the collective guidance of fellow educators (Pirtle & Tobia, 2014; Svendsen, 2020; Tam, 2015). Through job-embedded professional learning, teachers become invested in collaborative work and reduce habits of isolation by de-privatizing instructional practices (Croft et al., 2010;

DuFour, 2004; Spencer, 2016). Educational leaders who facilitate a culture that values continual learning, trust, and collaboration support teachers' professional learning.

School Culture

Given that the purpose of this study was to examine the perspectives of an instructional leadership team as they fostered a culture that encouraged teachers to unlearn the practices associated with isolation, it is necessary to explore the role that school culture plays in guiding teacher behavior. First, school culture is defined for the purposes of this study. Secondly, factors that discourage and encourage collaborative culture are explored. Finally, the extent to which trusting relationships between administrators and teachers and among members of collaborative course teams impact collaboration is reviewed.

School Culture Defined

Waller (1932) helped to define school culture when he asserted that each school's specific set of rituals and folkways, and moral code (cultural values) shaped their unique behaviors and relationships. School culture is often viewed as a shared set of beliefs, customs, norms, and behaviors that influence how people approach work (Abdullah, 2019; Deal & Peterson, 1999; Geertz, 1973; Muhammad, 2018; Schein, 1985). Often, staff members fulfill roles in an informal cultural network as "keepers of the values who socialize the newly hired, gossips who transmit information, storytellers who keep the history and lore alive, and heroines or heroes who act as exemplars of core values" to maintain the existing culture (Peterson & Deal, 2011, pp. 8-9). Gruenert and Whitaker (2015) suggested that the following building blocks comprise school culture: climate, mission/vision, language, humor, routines, rituals/ceremonies, norms, roles, symbols, stories, heroes, and values/beliefs.

Historically, an agreed-upon definition of school culture has proven elusive and has often been conflated with school climate (MacNeil et al., 2009; Miner, 1995; Schoen & Teddlie, 2008). Although the concepts of school culture and school climate overlap, they emanate from different research traditions. School climate stems from a psychological tradition that assumes a rational-systems perspective and incorporates qualitative analyses of behavior through surveys and multivariate statistics (Heck & Marcoulides, 1996; Hoy, 1990). However, school culture typically focuses on assumptions, values, and norms held in a school; therefore, it is more likely to employ ethnographic techniques and qualitative research methods (Hoy et al., 1991; McDougal & Beattie, 1998).

In the present study, school culture was defined as a communal set of beliefs, customs, and norms that influence teachers' daily work. The underlying beliefs of a school guide the school's actions; therefore, an examination of school cultures that can either undermine or promote collaboration is necessary for the purpose of this study.

Toxic School Culture

Toxic school cultures reward individualism and eschew collaborative practice. In toxic school cultures, a sense of community and shared purpose is lacking, resulting in the perpetuation of isolated practices (Peterson & Deal, 2011; Redding & Corbett, 2018; Zahed-Babelan et al., 2019). Often, a culture of blame prevails rather than collaborative efforts to define problems and work toward solutions (Mette, 2020; Muhammad, 2018; Redding & Corbett, 2018). Toxic cultures are permeated with "nondiscussables", subjects so laden with anxiety and fear that open discussion does not occur (Barth, 2002). School culture so dominates the actions of schools that Schlechty (1997) asserted, "[s]tructural change that is not supported by cultural change will eventually be overwhelmed by the culture, for it is in the culture that the

organization finds meaning and stability (1997, p. 136). Therefore, a toxic school culture will undermine efforts to unlearn practices of isolation and learn habits of collaborative practice.

Although toxic school cultures are characterized by isolation, schools with positive cultures foster collaboration (Liu et al., 2021; Ponnuswamy & Manohar, 2016). Understanding the nuances of a school's culture is necessary before embarking on school improvement efforts since a school's culture determines the extent to which reform efforts succeed (Millán et al., 2014; Prosser, 1999). Schools with effective collaborative cultures in which teachers were respected and learned from one another were more likely to achieve school improvement goals (Goddard et al., 2015).

Deeply woven throughout Stoll et al.'s (1996) 10 cultural norms for improving schools are shared goals, responsibility for success, collegiality, continuous improvement, lifelong learning, risk-taking, support, mutual respect, openness, celebration, and humor-all necessities of collaboration. School culture undergirds school improvement; therefore, it is necessary to foster collaboration as a cultural value to discourage isolation habits and encourage collaborative practices (Engels et al., 2008; Pavlidou & Efstathiades, 2021; Stoll, 1998).

Building Trust to Support Collaborative School Culture

Educational researchers define trust as a social construct that develops during interpersonal relationships when those involved meet the obligations of their perceived roles (Finnigan & Daly, 2017; Gümüş & Bellibaş, 2020**;** Tschannen-Moran, 2004). Finnigan and Daly (2017) noted, "[o]ver time these interactions transform into what researchers call formal and informal networks; it is through these networks that learning takes place, as educators interact with one another, exchanging knowledge, advice, and professional support and engaging in

friendships" (p. 24). Tschannen-Moran (2004) reaffirmed that trust takes time to build and explicitly included benevolence, honesty, openness, reliability, and competence as traits of trust.

Trust is constructed by a reciprocal relationship that requires members of the group to be vulnerable to one another based on the premise that others will exemplify traits of trust and are willing to collaborate, learn, problem-solve, and share information to work toward coordinated actions (Finnigan & Daly, 2017; Tschannen-Moran, 2004). Building trust between people who are in a hierarchical relationship poses challenges. The base from which power is derived is somewhat of a disputed concept. Foucault (1980) posed power as a commodity that a leader exercises over followers. In contrast, French and Raven (1959) asserted that personal (expert/referent) or positional (legitimate/reward/coercive) power was derived from followers. In either case, the power dynamic between those who hold and do not hold formal power complicates trust-building, given that leaders may use their formal power to reward and to coerce (Gregory, 2017).

Schools have multiple levels of authority (district leadership, principals, assistant principals, department chairs, grade level leaders, instructional coaches, leadership teams, etc.), which may further complicate the power dynamics of the school. Having multiple power dynamics often weakens sources of formal power and necessitates the development of trust. Gregory (2017) advised educational leaders to investigate "the power base structure undergirding the trust relationships in schools" to be "better prepared to navigate the challenging interpersonal relationships" as a method to promote collaborative practices (pp. 144-145).

Building trust is the first step to creating effective working relationships that prioritize collaboration (Antinluoma et al., 2018; Gümüş & Bellibaş, 2020; Rinio, 2018; Shakenova, 2017). A school culture based on trust increases collaboration among faculty as they investigate

and mitigate barriers to learning, thereby increasing student outcomes (Gregory, 2017; Gümüş & Bellibaş, 2020; Hallam et al., 2015, Yin et al., 2019). Hargreaves (2015) noted, "the difference between deliberately arranged collegiality and artificially contrived collegiality lies in whether there is already enough trust, respect, and understanding in the school culture" (p.131). The trust that develops among collaborative teams supports job-embedded professional learning and is more likely to alter instructional practices than merely having a trusting relationship with the principal (Tschannen-Moran, 2004; Wahlstrom & Louis, 2008; Yin et al., 2019; Yin & Zheng, 2018).

When school culture is based on trust, honesty, and openness, educators more consistently work together, resulting in strengthened relationships built on trust. Rinio (2018) proposed schools must communicate consistently and effectively, become aware of one another's knowledge base, prioritize collaborative work, and model trust and collaboration to foster building trust in professional relationships. Building trusting professional relationships honors the team members' expertise as they learn, work, and solve problems together (Finnigan & Daly, 2017; Gümüş & Bellibaş, 2020). As team members commit and complete tasks, they discover they can count on one another (Rinio, 2018). Trust allows teachers to be "deeply critical of one's assumptions and beliefs, and to test these in public contexts, and in collaboration with others" (Benade, 2018, p. 129). Not only does trust increase collaboration, but collaboration increases trust, indicating trust is a necessary component of building a collaborative culture.

Principal Leadership Practices That Facilitate Collaboration

Effective collaboration depends on educational leadership that successfully navigates a school's unique characteristics and cultural norms to promote collaborative practice (Vangrieken et al., 2015). The role of the principal is critical in fostering practices of collaboration (Hallam et

al., 2015; Hitt & Tucker, 2016; Leithwood, 2019, Liebowitz & Porter, 2019). Principal leadership practices that promote collaboration include empowering teachers to engage in collective professional inquiry (Goddard et al., 2015; Griffiths et al., 2021; Mwanza & Changwe, 2020); leading job-embedded professional learning that supports a clear vision of collaboration and inspires a continuous learning environment (Jones & Thessin, 2017; Pirtle & Tobia, 2014; Spencer, 2016; Zepeda, 2019; Zepeda, 2020); and managing the schedules and structures of the school to create time for teachers to engage in collaborative practice (Goddard et al., 2015; Raywid, 1993, Tallman, 2020; Zepeda, 2014).

The purpose of this study was to examine the perspectives of an instructional leadership team as they fostered a culture that encouraged teachers to unlearn the practices associated with isolation and to learn practices of collaboration. Therefore, an examination of principal leadership practices that facilitate collaboration is warranted.

The Principal's Critical Role in Promoting Collaboration

Within schools, instructional leaders must promote collaborative learning among teachers to facilitate reflective teaching practices. As instructional leaders, principals play a significant role in implementing learning communities that collaborate to impact student achievement; therefore, it remains critical that principals understand their role as instructional leaders (Blase & Blase, 2000; Goddard et al., 2015; Marks & Printy, 2003; Neumerski, 2013). DuFour and Fullan (2013) emphasized the importance of the principal as an educational leader when they suggested that learning communities are a process rather than a program that requires systematic cultural changes that principals must navigate.

The principal's role in transforming schools into learning communities is "crucial," given that "[m]ore than anyone else, the principal has the opportunity and the responsibility to

change meetings...into gatherings…where unique personal-teacher characteristics are valued and respected as a scaffold for authentic knowledge sharing" (Benoliel & Schechter, 2017, p. 228).

Empowering Teachers to Engage in Collaborative and Reflective Professional Inquiry

Principal leadership that encourages teachers to engage in reflective and collaborative professional inquiry demonstrates the belief that instructors are professionals who embody the expertise to learn from one another (Goddard et al., 2015; Griffiths et al., 2021; Mwanza & Changwe, 2020). School cultures that advocate the "deprivatization of practices and reflective dialogue" in addition to encouraging a "collective responsibility for student learning" empower teachers to hone the craft of teaching by working with one another (Vanblaere & Devos, 2016, p. 208).

When teachers believe they embody the capacity to influence student learning positively, they are "more likely to select complex and challenging tasks, to experiment, and to be more creative" and are more likely to "implement greater changes in their teaching practice" (Vanblaere & Devos, 2016, pp. 209-210). Principal leadership that empowers teachers to hone their teaching craft encourages unlearning habits of isolation and learning collaborative practices.

Weiner (2011) encouraged principals to select participants of instructional teams who had the instructional expertise and willingness to coordinate collaborative work. Vanblaere and Devos (2016) also emphasized the importance of influential teacher leaders who can "[capitalize] on teachers' unique instructional expertise about teaching and learning to improve both the instruction and the culture in schools, with the ultimate aim of enhancing student learning" (p. 91). Effective department heads often serve in two instructional leadership roles:

they employ collaboration in planning for instruction and its assessment (group-oriented leadership), and they work to develop, monitor, and evaluate teaching practices in their departments (development-oriented leadership) (Vanblaere & Devos, 2016).

Principals that restructure schools to empower teachers to share in the instructional decision-making processes facilitate collaboration (Tan, 2018). The emergent discourse encourages critique of instructional practices within a collaborative group of professionals who provide academic and emotional support to students (Blase & Blase, 2000). Professional discourse by empowered teachers enables building and cultivating a collaborative culture that develops a collective understanding, vets instructional practices, quantifies student learning, and actively forwards collective participation to engage in continuous improvement (Martin et al., 2020).

When teachers are empowered to solve problems through collective inquiry, it serves as a catalyst to increase collaborative practice (Carpenter, 2015). Principals can enhance collaborative practice by empowering teachers to collaborate with other professionals in collective decision-making. When teachers are empowered to address instructional issues collectively, they work together to unlearn the habits of isolation and learn collaborative practices.

Leading Job-Embedded Professional Learning to Support a Vision of Collaboration

Effective collaboration requires a vision that is clearly defined and appropriately supported. Collaborative practice increases when expectations are effectively communicated and supported through professional learning and the allocation of resources (Buttram & Farley-Ripple, 2016). Carpenter (2015) emphasized that collaborative work must focus on a shared purpose, collaborative culture, collective inquiry, and continuous improvement.

The work of teacher collaboration must be supported by establishing a clear structure and purpose, scheduling time to meet, monitoring collaborative meetings and the classroom implementation of planned instruction, and encouraging teacher efficacy (Jones & Thessin, 2017; Pirtle & Tobia, 2014; Spencer, 2016). Zepeda (2019) reported, "[p]rofessional development cannot be left to chance. [It]must be planned purposefully and deliberately as part of the workday, systemically integrated within other learning systems that support teacher learning;" otherwise, the school cannot continue to learn and grow (p. 55).

Leading Job-Embedded Professional Learning to Inspire a Learning Environment

Educational leaders should ensure that teachers continue to learn and develop throughout their careers since teachers significantly impact student learning (Guskey, 2014; Loughland & Ryan, 2021; Tam, 2015). Given the importance of teacher actions on student learning, Guskey (2014) stressed "[h]igh-quality professional learning is the foundation on which any improvement effort in education must build" (p. 16). Guskey further emphasized the necessity of defining the success of professional learning by the extent to which student learning was positively impacted.

Loughland and Ryan found professional learning most effective when teachers worked together to incorporate what they learned from professional development into their instructional practices (2021). Additionally, Tam (2015) demonstrated how collective learning through a PLC "characterized by openness and trust, supported teacher change, and increased the efficacy of teachers in designing and implementing new initiative" supported teachers in changing their beliefs and instructional practices (p.28). Since teachers impact student learning most, students benefit when principals create learning environments that encourage collaboration.

Practically, principals may encourage a learning environment by leading non-evaluative learning opportunities. Incorporating non-evaluative peer feedback for teachers through "mentoring, peer coaching, reflection and dialogue, study groups, videotape analysis of teaching and discussion about the events on the tape, and journaling" empowers teachers to learn continuously (Zepeda, 2019, p. 25). Principals may lead teams through book studies to increase capacity for building a culture of continuous learning (Jones & Thessin, 2017). Visone (2016) asserted "all teachers have valuable contributions to share" even if the teacher doesn't recognize their value (p. 69).

Principals may encourage collegial visits to help teachers who don't understand their role in student learning to learn from other teachers (Visone, 2016). When instructional leaders create schools in which job-embedded learning is "differentiated to the unique and developmental needs of teachers…considers the context of the school, the characteristics of the faculty, and the needs of students," they increase teacher capacity to impact student learning (Zepeda, 2019, p. 6).

Principal Management of School Schedules to Support Collaborative Practices

Time is a resource that principals must manage to promote collaborative practices (Lockton, 2019). School schedules often constrain collaboration opportunities; therefore, principals must employ innovative solutions to create regular opportunities for teachers to work together (Bae, 2017). Hargreaves (2019) heralded the importance of informal, voluntary collaborative opportunities, noting that "contrived collegiality" may result when teachers must participate in formal collaborative structures. However, other researchers reported that collaboration often fails to materialize if collaboration is expected, but formal structures and schedules do not support it (Berry et al., 2009; Goddard et al., 2015; Tallman, 2020). Whalley

and Barbour (2020) propose that effective schools support informal or teacher-driven and formal, top-down collaborative practices.

According to Raywid (1993), when teacher responsibilities necessitate collaborative time with colleagues, "[t]he time necessary to examine, reflect on, amend, and redesign programs is not *auxiliary* to teaching responsibilities —nor is it "released time" from them. It is absolutely central to such responsibilities, and essential to making schools succeed!" (p. 34, emphasis in the original). Fundamentally, how teachers spend time during the workday must be reconceptualized to include time to participate in collaborative practice. A key component in creating a collaborative environment is to provide the necessary time during the school day for teachers to unlearn habits of isolation by engaging in collaborative practice.

One of the difficulties in implementing a structure for collaboration occurs when only one teacher in the school teaches a particular subject. Battersby and Verdi (2015) emphasized that teachers who are the only teacher of their subject in their school "do not receive support or resources at their school professional development meetings or are not scheduled to receive content-specialty meetings at all" (p. 23). Given that student achievement testing is often limited to traditional academic subjects, structures for teachers to collaborate on instructional practices and reflect on student learning have remained primarily limited to core academic subjects.

For students to benefit from all their teachers' collaborative teaching practices, school leaders must implement a structure that facilitates collaboration for educators who do not have access to other instructors in the buildings where they work (Battersby & Verdi, 2015). Specifically, school leaders may utilize technology so that teachers can access professional development and learning communities outside the confines of their geographical locations (Whalley & Barbour, 2020).

Principal Management of School Structures to Support Collaborative Practices

Principals must model a collaborative mindset to encourage collaborative practice. Zepeda (2019) encouraged educational leaders to collaboratively create a culture of continuous improvement in which "learning, refining, and collaborating…enhances dialogue, promotes reflection, and paves the way for improving instructional practices" (p. 26). Principals must lead collaborative teams in which teachers can share their expertise; however, there is some discrepancy regarding which leadership actions are most significant to support this effort (Buttram & Farley-Ripple, 2016; Carpenter, 2015; Pirtle & Tobia, 2014; Spencer, 2016).

Buttram and Farley-Ripple (2016) emphasized that leaders must clearly understand how collaborative work can be achieved, set a culture of high expectations of learning, enhance teacher skills and knowledge, and allocate and manage resources to facilitate collaborative work. However, other researchers emphasized the necessity of collaborative and distributed leadership to build trust between school leadership and instructors (Carpenter, 2015; Pirtle & Tobia, 2014; Spencer, 2016). Teachers are professionals who have a wealth of knowledge to share. Although teachers may find collaborative work uncomfortable when isolation is a cultural norm, they are more likely to engage in collaborative practices when principals model and provide structures to support collaboration (Carpenter, 2015; Luyten & Bazo, 2019; Spencer, 2016; Zepeda, 2020).

One of the most successful structures that encourages unlearning the habits of isolation and learning collaborative practices is Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) (Haiyan & Allan, 2021; Harris & Jones, 2010; Luyten & Bazo, 2019; Meyer et al., 2020; Stoll et al., 2006). To implement PLCs with fidelity and continually impact student learning, principals must intentionally support instructors' work to become more collaborative in planning their instructional practices (Luyten & Bazo, 2019; Moosa et al., 2020; Prenger et al., 2021).

Professional learning communities allow instructors to participate in a structured environment to collectively plan for and reflect on student learning (Admiraal et al., 2021; Luyten & Bazo, 2019).

According to DuFour (2004), professional learning communities consist of three big ideas: ensure that students learn, create a culture of collaboration, and focus on results. Ensuring that students learn encourages teachers to investigate research-based strategies to inform their instruction (Vescio et al., 2008). Creating a collaborative culture allows teachers to plan and practice lesson delivery with other instructors (Azorín et al., 2020; Bektaş et al., 2020). By focusing on student learning results, PLCs create a collaborative space for teachers to reflect on instructional strategies, the extent to which the students learned required information or skills, and how future instruction can further student learning (Brodie, 2021; Keung et al., 2020).

DuFour (2004) specifically highlighted the collaborative nature of PLCs as he posed questions faculty often ask as they develop shared responsibility for student learning with the support of the structure of the PLC:

> What school characteristics and practices have been most successful in helping all students achieve at high levels? How can we adopt those characteristics and practices in our own schools? What commitments do we have to make to one another to create such a school? What indicators could we monitor to assess our progress? When the staff has built shared knowledge and found common ground on these questions, the school has a solid foundation in moving forward with its improvement initiative. (p. 8)

When principals manage the school's structure in a way that facilitates the opportunity for teachers to reflect on their instructional practices, a shared culture takes responsibility for all student learning develops, thereby eroding habits of teaching in isolation.

Chapter Summary

Physical, psychological, and adaptive isolation have often been recognized as detrimental, but deeply entrenched features of education (Cook & Collinson, 2013; Heider, 2021; Krakehl et al., 2020; Little, 1990; Lortie, 1975; Nerlino, 2020; Rogers & Babinski, 2002). Structures and schedules of schools physically and psychologically distance teachers from one another (Childs et al., 2013; Fullan & Hargreaves, 1991; Siskin, 2014; Villavicencio et al., 2021). The high attrition rate of teachers, which negatively impacts student learning and achievement, has often been linked to stress and feelings of isolation (Darling-Hammond, 1984; Kelchtermans, 2017; Smith & Ingersoll, 2004).

Isolation has hindered the development of teacher leadership and denied teachers opportunities for job-embedded professional learning (Harris & Muijs, 2004; Martin et al., 2020; National Commission on Teaching, 1996; Nerlino, 2020). When teachers work in collaborative communities, rather than in isolation, student achievement increases (Louis & Marks, 1998, Newmann et al., 1996; Saka, 2021); therefore, to mitigate the impact of isolation, teachers must engage in unlearning the habits of isolation and learning practices of collaboration.

Lortie (1975) proposed that the pervasiveness of isolation in schools necessitated teachers participate in targeted learning experiences aimed at undermining habits of isolation. Hedberg's (1981) theory of unlearning was predicated on the assumption that organizations develop memories, and those memories preserve traditional behaviors and profoundly impact decision-making (Walsh & Ungson, 1991). When memories and routines are deeply embedded into the organization's culture, it is more difficult to abandon them, resulting in the necessity of using intentional strategies to increase the probability that new learning is accepted (Grisold et al., 2020). According to Grisold et al. (2020), creating a scaffold for unlearning by parsing new

practices into little steps, reducing the influence of outdated knowledge, embedding new practices in daily work, and creating feedback structures to improve practices facilitates the unlearning of obsolete information.

Organizations that incorporate principles of adult learning to guide processes of unlearning increase the possibility that new, desired knowledge will be integrated into their organization's culture. The andragogical model recognizes adult learning as a multifaceted phenomenon that presumes adult learners can reject earlier learning and incorporate new learning into the context of their work (Holton et al., 2001; Illeris, 2018; Merriam, 2008). Thus, adults need learning opportunities through job-embedded professional development that allow them to reflect and identify obsolete and outdated information they need to surrender (Coombe, 2020; Matsuo, 2019). Through job-embedded professional learning, teachers become invested in collaborative work and reduce habits of isolation by de-privatizing instructional practices (Croft et al., 2010; DuFour, 2004; Spencer, 2016; Zepeda, 2019).

Although toxic school cultures are characterized by isolation, schools with positive cultures nurture collaboration (Liu et al., 2021; Ponnuswamy & Manohar, 2016). Building trust is the first step to creating effective working relationships that prioritize collaboration (Antinluoma et al., 2018; Rinio, 2018; Shakenova, 2017). A school culture based on trust increases collaboration among faculty as they examine and temper barriers to learning, thereby increasing student outcomes (Gregory, 2017; Hallam et al., 2015, Yin et al., 2019). When school culture is based on trust, honesty, and openness, educators more consistently work together (Finnigan & Daly, 2017; Rinio, 2018).

Effective collaboration depends on educational leadership that successfully navigates a school's unique characteristics and cultural norms to promote collaborative practice (Vangrieken

et al., 2015). The role of the principal is vital in fostering practices of collaboration (Hallam et al., 2015; Hitt & Tucker, 2016; Leithwood, 2019; Liebowitz & Porter, 2019). Principal leadership practices that promote collaboration include empowering teachers to engage in collective professional inquiry (Goddard et al., 2015; Griffiths et al., 2021; Mwanza & Changwe, 2020), leading job-embedded professional learning that supports a clear vision of collaboration, inspiring a continuous learning environment (Jones & Thessin, 2017; Pirtle & Tobia, 2014; Spencer, 2016; Zepeda, 2019; Zepeda, 2020) and managing the schedules and structures of the school to create time for teachers to engage in collaborative practice (Goddard et al., 2015; Raywid, 1993; Tallman, 2020; Zepeda, 2014).

Chapter 3 provides the rationale for using qualitative research, describes the specific action research techniques used in the study, explores the data sources, data collection, and data analysis methods Validity, trustworthiness, and the limitations of the study are also examined in Chapter 3.

CHAPTER 3

ACTION RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The structures and schedules of schools contribute to isolation remaining a deeply entrenched norm (Heider, 2021; Krakehl et al., 2020; Little, 1990; Lortie, 1975). Collaborative practices mitigate the influence of isolation and positively impact student and teacher learning (DuFour, 2004; Jones-Goods, 2018; Liebowitz & Porter, 2019). To support the learning of collaborative practice, teachers must engage in unlearning habits of isolation (Durst et al., 2020; Grisold et al., 2020; Tsang & Zahra, 2008). To create a collaborative culture, school leadership must intentionally devote time to designing job-embedded professional learning opportunities, observing instruction, and fostering an environment based on trust and collaborative learning experiences (Boyce & Bowers, 2018; Hallinger et al., 2020; Hargreaves, 2019; Tschannen-Moran & Constantino, 2021).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine the perspectives of an instructional leadership team as they fostered a culture that encouraged teachers to unlearn habits associated with isolation and to learn practices of collaboration.

Research Questions

The following research questions addressed the purpose of this action research study and guided this inquiry:

1. In what ways can instructional leaders support the unlearning of isolation by increasing collaborative practices in one semi-rural high school?

2. How can instructional leaders foster a culture that uses collaborative planning to make teaching practices public in one semi-rural high school?
3. To what extent does participating in collaborative planning impact teacher practices in one semi-rural high school?

Chapter 3 provides the rationale for using qualitative research, describes the research design and contextualizes the study. Additionally, Chapter 3 supplies the data sources, data collection methods, interventions and data analysis methods used in the study. Lastly, Chapter 3 discusses the validity and trustworthiness of the study.

Rationale for Qualitative Research

Qualitative research is an iterative process conducted by researchers who intentionally position themselves closer to the phenomenon to focus on the meaning people attribute to a social or human problem in a particular environment (Aspers & Corte, 2019; Creswell & Poth, 2018; Jensen, 2020). Qualitative research involves identifying questions and procedures, collecting data in a specific context, and using inductive data analysis to reveal themes, meanings, and the complexity of the unique research site (Merriam & Grenier, 2019).

The constructivist paradigm of qualitative research posits experiential knowledge and meaning are negotiated and co-constructed through interpreted interactions in specific contexts (Creswell, 2018). Constructivist researchers often provide robust descriptions of participant interaction, the context of the study, and constructed meaning to enhance the study's credibility (Creswell, 2018; Johnson et al., 2020). Although the values and beliefs of the researcher are assumed to influence the research process, the constructivist paradigm expects the researcher to investigate how their assumptions affect the co-construction of meaning during the research process (Haverkamp & Young, 2007; Merriam & Grenier, 2019).

Qualitative research is "especially well-suited for accessing tacit, taken-for-granted, intuitive understandings of culture…Rather than relying on participants' espoused values, we come to understand how participants live out these values daily" (Tracy, 2019, p. 7). Qualitative research allowed for a comprehensive understanding of how and why habits of isolation persisted, thereby providing necessary contextual information to help develop interventions to assist with learning collaborative practices. The researcher's immersion in the study allowed for co-constructing meaning surrounding unlearning habits of isolation and learning practices of collaboration. The descriptive case study methodology provided an opportunity to explore how an instructional team fostered a culture that encouraged teachers to unlearn habits associated with isolation and to learn collaboration practices. Action research methodology was used to situate the research within the context of the school site.

Overview of Action Research Methods

Avison et al. (1999) noted action research "combines theory and practice (and researchers and practitioners) through change and reflection in an immediate problematic situation within a mutually acceptable ethical framework" (p. 94). Action research is a type of applied qualitative research conducted by practitioners to improve practices in educational settings that potentially creates an ethos for professional problem solving, enhances decision-making capacities, promotes reflection, instills a commitment to continuous improvement, creates a more positive school climate, directly impacts practices, and empowers those who participate in the process (Glanz, 2014).

Action research is often grounded in a social constructivist paradigm, which asserts reality is socially, culturally, and historically constructed (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019; Creswell, 2018; Tracy, 2019). Constructivism holds that meaning is constructed through personal

experience; therefore, when action researchers are involved in the specific contexts with the participants, they are more likely to understand more fully how meaning is constructed in that space (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019; Merriam & Grenier, 2019). Unlearning practices of isolation were informed by the co-constructed meaning of the experiences of the ARDT-Instructional Leadership Team and the ARIT-English Course Teams.

A primary feature of action research is that the process is a systematic, albeit iterative, inquiry into a problem of practice and potential interventions (Coghlan & Brannick, 2014; Glanz, 2014; Stringer & Aragón, 2020). Given the iterative nature of action research, as the action research cycles were implemented, the steps of the action research process informed subsequent action research steps.

Figure 3.1 illustrates the cycles of action the Action Research Design Team (ARDT-Instructional Leadership Team) conducted, and the emphasized role reflection played in this action research study. Specifically, this study adapted Glanz's (2014) steps in action research and Zepeda's (2019) cycle of reflection to emphasize the role that reflection-in-action, reflection-on-action, and reflection-for-action contribute to sense-making.

Figure 3.1

Action Research Process

Note. Adapted from Glanz (2014); Zepeda (2019).

One of the purposes of action research is to increase learning for the participants as they situate their learning within social and professional networks in which knowledge is socially constructed and negotiated (Coburn & Russell, 2008; Darling-Hammond et al., 2017; Smylie & Evans, 2006; Von Esch, 2021). The iterative nature of action research engages teachers in making sense of teaching in specific contexts in which the "messy, mumbled nonlinear, recursive, and sometimes unpredictable" nature of learning unfolds (Avery, 1990, p. 43). When teachers engage in reflective conversations about teaching and learning, they learn and benefit from the collective guidance of fellow educators (Pirtle & Tobia, 2014; Tam, 2015). Through job-embedded professional learning, teachers become invested in collaborative work and reduce habits of isolation by de-privatizing instructional practices (Croft et al., 2010; DuFour, 2004; Spencer, 2016).

Another primary purpose of action research is "to put the knowledge emerging from research to practical use" (Stringer & Aragón, 2020, p. xvii). Action research attempts to bring about change through social learning (Bradbury et al., 2019) and provides opportunities for teachers to take action to address a problem of practice by making critical judgments, asking critical questions of practice, and then using judgment to adapt their practice based on their job-embedded professional learning (Zepeda, 2019). Systematic inquiry and reflection allowed for action to be taken to create and implement interventions that addressed unlearning habits of isolation and learning practices of collaboration.

Action research is, in essence, a collaborative practice. The purpose of this study was to examine the perspectives of an instructional leadership team as they fostered a culture that encouraged teachers to unlearn habits associated with isolation and to learn practices of collaboration. Therefore, action research was the chosen methodology for the study as the Action Research Design Team (ARDT-Instructional Leadership Team) worked collaboratively to create and implement interventions that helped the Action Research Implementation Team (ARIT-English Course Teams) unlearn habits of isolation and learn to engage in collaborative practices.

Action Research Design

Throughout the study, the Action Research Design Team (ARDT-Instructional Leadership Team) spiraled through the Plan-Do-Reflect-Adjust research cycles designed to support unlearning habits of isolation and learning practices of collaboration at Yancey Hills High School. Action research allowed the researcher and the participants to reflect on the impact of isolation on instructional practices, put collaborative practices into action, and then work together to understand the improvement of practice. The emphasis on collaborative decision-making in the action research process buttressed the significance of learning collaborative

practices for the Action Research Design Team (ARDT-Instructional Leadership Team) and the Action Research Implementation Team (ARIT-English Course Teams).

The Spiraling and Iterative Nature of Action Research

Fundamentally, action research is participatory and collaborative (Hendricks, 2019; Mertler, 2020; Stringer & Aragón, 2020). The goal of action research is to "increase the effectiveness and meaningfulness" of the participants' work "through systematic questioning and feedback" with the intent of opening "new communicative spaces" to heighten understanding (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019, p. 61). The action research process is iterative, cyclical, and participatory, as it intentionally fosters a deeper understanding of the collective experience (Creswell, 2018; Glanz, 2014; Kemmis et al., 2014). The spiraling and iterative nature of action research as envisioned by Stringer and Aragón (2020), is depicted in Figure 3.2.

Figure 3.2

The Spiraling and Iterative Nature of Action Research

Note. Adapted from Stringer and Aragón (2020).

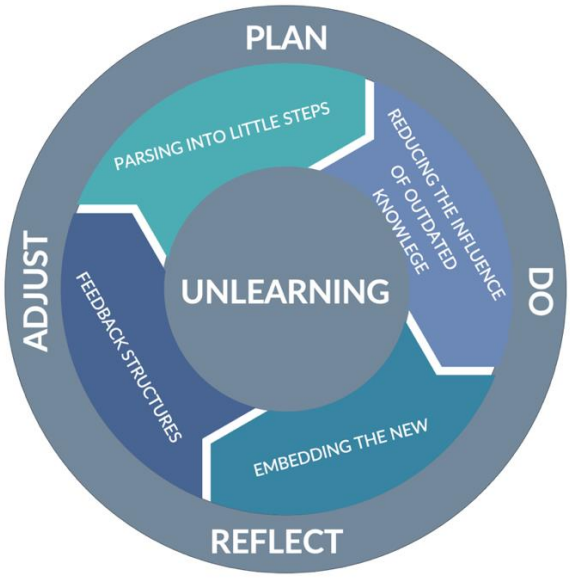
The iterations of the Plan-Do-Reflect-Adjust phases of the action research cycles encouraged the researcher and participants to spiral through the phases of reflection to understand the extent to which habits of isolation were embedded in the culture of the Yancey Hills High School and how the process of unlearning could support a culture that embraced practices of collaboration. The cycles of this study were defined by the logic model and provided a framework for the researcher and participants.

Logic Model for the Study

This study, which examined the action research work of an instructional leadership team, was framed in a cycle of continuous improvement (Bryk et al., 2011). The logic model served to bracket the scope of the study, to situate change, and to frame and enact interventions. The Plan-Do-Reflect-Adjust cycle depicted in Figure 3.3 provided a specific structure for the ARDT-Instructional Leadership Team to define the problem of isolation, implement interventions to unlearn isolation to promote collaboration, reflect on the gathered data, and adjust interventions based on feedback from the ARIT-English Course Teams (Bryk 2020; Bryk et al., 2011; Hill et al., 2022).

Figure 3.3

Logic Model for the Study



Note. Adapted from Bryk et al. (2011); Grisold et al. (2020).

Theory of Change

The purpose of this study was to examine the perspectives of an instructional leadership team as they fostered a culture that encouraged teachers to unlearn habits associated with isolation and to learn practices of collaboration; therefore, the foundation of the study was predicated on the concept that teachers must unlearn habits of isolation to learn collaborative practices (Bryk et al., 2011; Bryk, 2020; Grisold, 2020; Hill et al., 2022).

Supporting the learning of the collaborative approach necessitated engaging participants in unlearning habits of isolation (Durst et al., 2020; Grisold et al., 2020; Tsang & Zahra, 2008). The ARDT-Instructional Leadership Team intentionally devoted time to observing instruction, designing job-embedded professional learning opportunities, and fostering an environment based on trust and collaborative learning experiences to enhance Yancey Hills High School's

collaborative culture (Boyce & Bowers, 2018; Hallinger et al., 2020; Hargreaves, 2019; Tschannen-Moran & Constantino, 2021).

Aligning with the purpose of the study and the overarching research questions, the theory of change was situated in unlearning processes by reducing the influence of outdated knowledge, communicating clear expectations for the newly embedded structural changes, and creating effective feedback structures to support positive experiences with new learning (Grisold et al., 2020).

The Case

Since isolation was deeply embedded into the culture of Yancey Hills High School, the theory of unlearning helped guide this study as the ARDT-Instructional Leadership Team worked with teachers to promote collaboration as a tool for improving instructional practice. Organizational context is profoundly relevant to the unlearning process as contextual factors impact the extent to which outdated knowledge was embedded in the organization. The role of established knowledge structures should be understood, as the history and values of the organization influence how easily the organization discards outdated knowledge (Grisold et al., 2020).

Case studies provide comprehensive understanding and insight into a social phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The focus of a case study is the "detailed inquiry of a unit of analysis as a bounded system (the case), over time, within its context" (Harrison et al., 2017, p. 15). The research was bounded as a case of the experiences of an ARDT-Instructional Leadership Team as they fostered a culture that encouraged teachers to learn collaborative practices by unlearning habits of isolation.

Investigating and analyzing habits of isolation allowed for a deeper understanding of the extent to which the phenomenon of isolation was woven into Yancey Hills High school's culture and how unlearning habits of isolation could increase collaborative practice in this specific context. (Merriam & Grenier, 2019). The outcome of a case study can lead to an in-depth understanding of practices and relationships in context (Harrison et al., 2017). The rich description of case studies allows for thematic analysis that enhances understanding of the complexities of the unique social phenomenon in the study's specific context (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019).

Action Research Design Team (ARDT-Instructional Leadership Team)

Action research is fundamentally participatory and collaborative (Mertler, 2020; Stringer & Aragón, 2020) and strives to increase understanding of the participants' work (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019). The Action Research Design Team (ARDT-Instructional Leadership Team) was comprised of Yancey Hills High School (YHHS) personnel, including the primary researcher, the principal, the English Department Chair, and an additional member of the English Department.

The primary researcher served as an assistant principal for curriculum and instruction at YHHS and was vested in fostering a school culture that encouraged collaborative practices. The principal served on the Action Research Design Team (ARDT-Instructional Leadership Team) because, as the school's instructional leader, he had been tasked by district leadership to use collaboration to improve instructional practices. Mrs. Cameron Waters, the English Department Chair, entered the teaching profession after 25 years in the medical field. Although most of her experience with collaboration was beyond the confines of education, she contributed a unique perspective on developing interventions to encourage a collaborative culture at YHHS.

Ms. Mary Thomas, an English teacher, has more than 10 years of experience teaching high-school English courses. Additionally, she student taught at YHHS under the direction of another member of the English Department, who still teaches in the English Department at YHHS. After completing student teaching at YHHS, Ms. Thomas was hired and remained a member of the English Department. Table 3.1 lists the members of the Action Research Design Team (ARDT-Instructional Leadership Team) and their subsequent roles in this study.

Table 3.1

Action Research Design Team (ARDT-Instructional Leadership Team)

Team Member	Primary Role at Yancey Hills High School	Action Research Role
Primary Researcher	Assistant Principal, YHHS	Leads all research with the Action Research Design Team (ARDT-Instructional Leadership Team) to analyze data. Brings 20 years of teaching experience and 4 years of administrative experience.
Mr. Thomas Arlington	Principal, YHHS	Provides context and charge for school-wide instructional leadership, as well as perspective for action research. Brings 13 years of teaching experience and 7 years of administrative experience.
Mrs. Cameron Waters	English Department Chair, YHHS	Provides 4 years of experience in teaching high school English courses. English Department Chair at YHHS. Also serves as a member of the 9th-Grade Lit/Comp and 10th-Grade Lit/Comp course team.

Team Member	Primary Role at Yancey Hills High School	Action Research Role
Ms. Mary Thomas	English Department Member, YHHS	Provides more than 10 years of teaching experience in high school English courses. Also serves as a member of the 10th-grade Literature/Comp, and Honors American Lit/Comp course teams

The Action Research Design Team (ARDT-Instructional Leadership Team) was chosen for their leadership, instructional experiences, and varied roles within the school. During the first monthly meeting, the Action Research Design Team (ARDT-Instructional Leadership Team) participated in an initial orientation regarding the background of the study, action research, purpose of the study, research questions, and the roles of the ARDT-Instructional Leadership Team and the ARIT-English Course Teams (see Appendix D).

The ARDT-Instructional Leadership Team worked to create and implement interventions to increase collaborative practices by unlearning habits of isolation. The researcher and the ARDT-Instructional Leadership Team worked with the action research participants.

Action Research Participants

Members of the English Department were asked via letter in August 2022 to participate in this study, which occurred during the 2022-2023 school year. The Action Research Implementation Team was comprised of all six teachers in the English Department at YHHS. Given that YHHS is a small school, a unique feature of the Action Research Implementation Team is that two participants—Ms. Mary Thomas and Mrs. Cameron Waters—also served on the Action Research Design Team (ARDT-Instructional Leadership Team).

The English Department had limited previous experience working collaboratively as a department (formal writing expectations/rubrics) and in course teams (designing assessments/learning activities) for their respective courses. However, due to the department size, not all English courses have more than one teacher who teaches the course. Table 3.2 lists the members of the Action Research Implementation Team, the course team(s) on which they served, and their previous teaching experience.

Table 3.2

Action Research Implementation Team (ARIT-English Course Teams)

English Department Members	Course Team	Teaching Experience
Mrs. Amy Dobberstein	9th grade Lit/Comp Team Multicultural Lit Team	Provides experience from over 25 years of teaching high school English courses.
Ms. Jennifer Miller	9th grade Lit/Comp Team	Provides more than 20 years of experience in teaching high school English courses.
Mr. Rob Neighbors	10th grade Lit/Comp Team Honors Am. Lit/Comp Team Multicultural Lit Team	Provides more than 14 years of experience in teaching high school English courses.
Mrs. Hillary Rhodes	9th grade Lit/Comp Team	Provides more than 15 years of experience in teaching, 3 of which have been teaching high school English courses.
Ms. Mary Thomas	10th grade Lit/Comp Team Honors Am. Lit/Comp Team	Provides more than 10 years of experience in teaching high-school English courses.

English Department Members	Course Team	Teaching Experience
Mrs. Cameron Waters	9th grade Lit/Comp Team 10th grade Lit/Comp Team	Provides 4 years of experience in teaching high school English courses, and she serves as the English Department Chair at YHHS.

Research Plan and Timeline

Ongoing reflection and adjustment sustain continuous improvement (Bryk et al., 2017; Glanz, 2014). Glanz (2014) asserted, "[r]eflective practice is a process by which educational leaders take the time to contemplate and assess the efficacy of programs, products, and personnel in order to make judgments…so that improvements or refinements might be achieved" (p. 24). Instructional improvement occurs when reflection leads to action (Constantinou & Ainscow, 2020, Glanz, 2014). The action research timeline in Table 3.3 outlines the cycles of reflection and action used in the study.

Table 3.3

Action Research Timeline

Date	Action Research Activity	
	Action Research Design Team (ARDT)	**Action Research Implementation Team (ARIT)**
August 2022	• Secured consent to participate in study • ARDT Monthly Meeting • Collected Artifacts • Researcher's Journal-record data/reflections	• Secured consent to participate in study • Individual Interviews #1 • Observations of Course Team Meetings • Artifact collection • Researcher's Journal-record data/reflections

Date	Action Research Activity	
	Action Research Design Team (ARDT)	**Action Research Implementation Team (ARIT)**
September 2022	• ARDT Monthly Meeting • Collected Artifacts • Researcher's Journal-record data/reflections	• Feedback questionnaire #1 • Observations of Course Team Meetings • Artifact collection • Researcher's Journal-record data/reflections
October 2022	• ARDT Monthly Meeting • Collected Artifacts • Researcher's Journal-record data/reflections	• Individual Interviews #2 • Observations of Course Team Meetings • Artifact collection • Researcher's Journal-record data/reflections
November 2022	• ARDT Monthly Meeting • Collected Artifacts • Researcher's Journal-record data/reflections	• Feedback questionnaire #2 • Observations of Course Team Meetings • Artifact collection • Researcher's Journal-record data/reflections
December 2022	• ARDT Focus Group • Collected Artifacts • Researcher's Journal-record data/reflections	• Individual Interviews #3 • Observations of Course Team Meetings • Artifact collection • Researcher's Journal-record data/reflections
January 2023	• Appropriate follow up activities	• Appropriate follow up activities

Context of the Study

The Yancey School District (YSD) is a small town (14.2 square miles) located 45 miles east of a large southern city. One of the more unique features of Yancey Hills is that its geographical boundaries extend into two separate counties. In addition to serving the families within the town of Yancey Hills, this public city school system draws students from the two

counties in which the town is located. Civil rights legislation, reciprocal agreements, and out-of-district applications, which require families to pay tuition, govern which students attend YHHS. YSD serves 1,800 students, of which 18% are black and 72% are white. The schools of YSD include a primary, elementary, middle, and high school. Even though Yancey Hills High School (YHHS) draws its student body from various communities, it remains one of the state's smaller public high schools, with enrollment trending around 600 students.

Student Body Characteristics

The demographic composition of YHHS differs from that of the town of Yancey Hills. Students who live outside the town's city limits and enroll at YHHS contribute to the school's demographics not mirroring the town's demographics. Many students outside Yancey Hills who enroll in YHHS contribute to the increase in the percentage of white students at YHHS. According to the United States Census Bureau, 38.7% of the town's population is black/African American, while 54.8% is white. However, at Yancey Hills High School, the student population more closely resembles the district demographic profile rather than the town's demographic profile, as 16.4% of YHHS students are black, and 75.5% of YHHS students are white.

Student participation in school-sponsored activities is significant. Examples of student clubs include the BETA Club, National Honor Society, Future Farmers of America, Fellowship of Christian Athletes, and Art Club. Approximately 50% of the student body participates in the school's marching band, as a member of the color guard, or on an athletic team.

The students at Yancey Hills High School have various identified learning needs. Students identified as gifted comprise 21% of the student population. Students who have qualified for Special Education services total nine percent of the population. Students who access accommodations for identified disabilities based on section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act

comprise seven percent of the student body. The ESOL (English to Speakers of Other Languages) population of YHHS is less than one percent of the student population.

Dual Enrollment and Career, Technical and Agricultural Education (CTAE) Program Offerings

Given the diversity of student learning needs at YHHS, several programming options are designed to meet the educational needs of the student body. Approximately 20% of the junior class and 25% of the senior class participate in the Dual Enrollment Program. The Dual Enrollment program allows students to take college classes while still in high school and earn credit from both the high school and college for the same course. Georgia's Student Finance Commission provides funding for tuition and books for a maximum of 30 semester hours of college credit when students take approved academic or Career, Technical, and Agricultural Education (CTAE) pathway courses.

Additionally, YHHS provides a robust offering of Career, Technical, Agricultural and Educational courses for a school of its size. Students may complete any of the seven CTAE pathways offered: Agricultural Mechanics and Metal Fabrication, Allied Health, Business and Technology, Early Childhood Education, JROTC-Army, Sports Medicine, and Web Development.

Academic Achievement

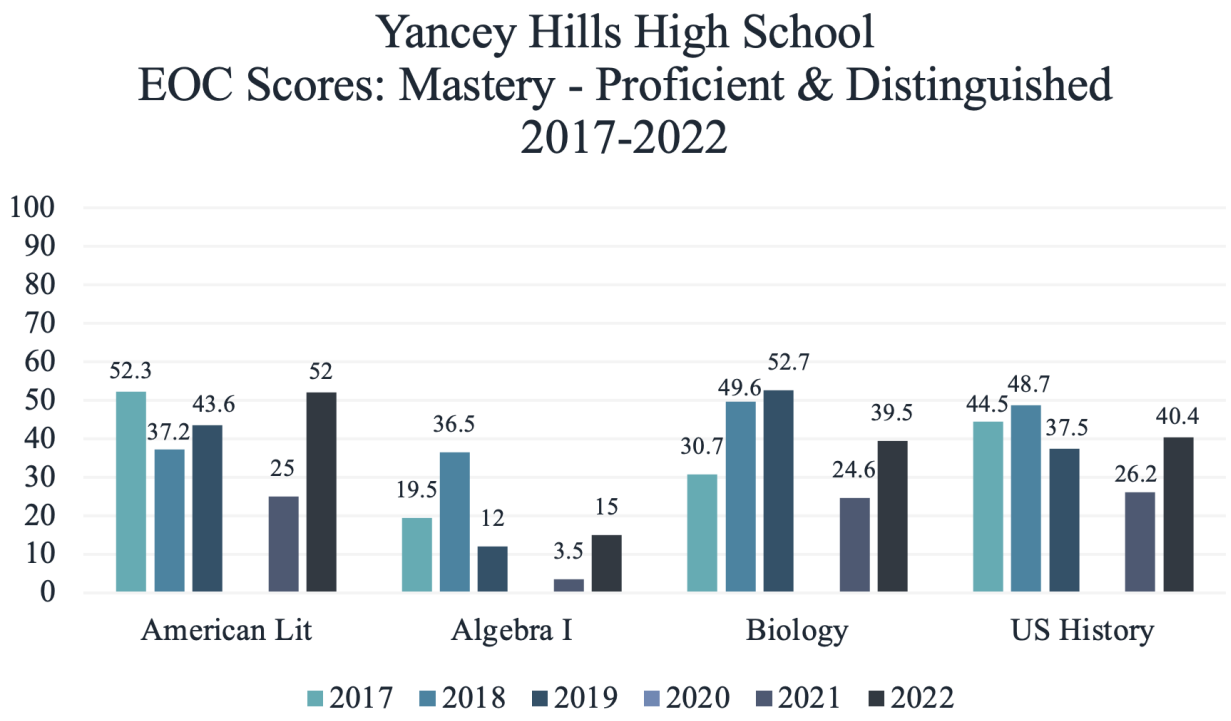
Academically, YHHS provides a variety of course offerings to meet the educational needs of students. Courses include those which offer additional support for students who have previously demonstrated difficulty meeting grade-level standards, grade-level courses, honors courses, and Advanced Placement courses. One of the ways that the state measures academic achievement in high schools is by student performance on End of Course tests. Beginning in the

2020-2021 school year, the state reduced the number of high school courses that would retain an End of Course test from eight to four. The courses of American Literature, Algebra I/Coordinate Algebra, Biology, and United States History issue a state-created End of Course test as their final exam which accounts for 20% of the student's final average.

The Georgia Department of Education (GaDOE) defines scores that indicate mastery of course standards as proficient or distinguished. Figure 3.4 illustrates student performance at the proficient and distinguished levels on End of Course Tests between 2017-2022, except for the 2020 results, as students remained at home and received remote instruction during the COVID-19 pandemic. Given that the state could not offer EOC testing remotely, students across the state of Georgia did not participate in EOC testing during the Spring of 2020.

Figure 3.4

End of Course (EOC)Test Scores: *Yancey Hills High School*



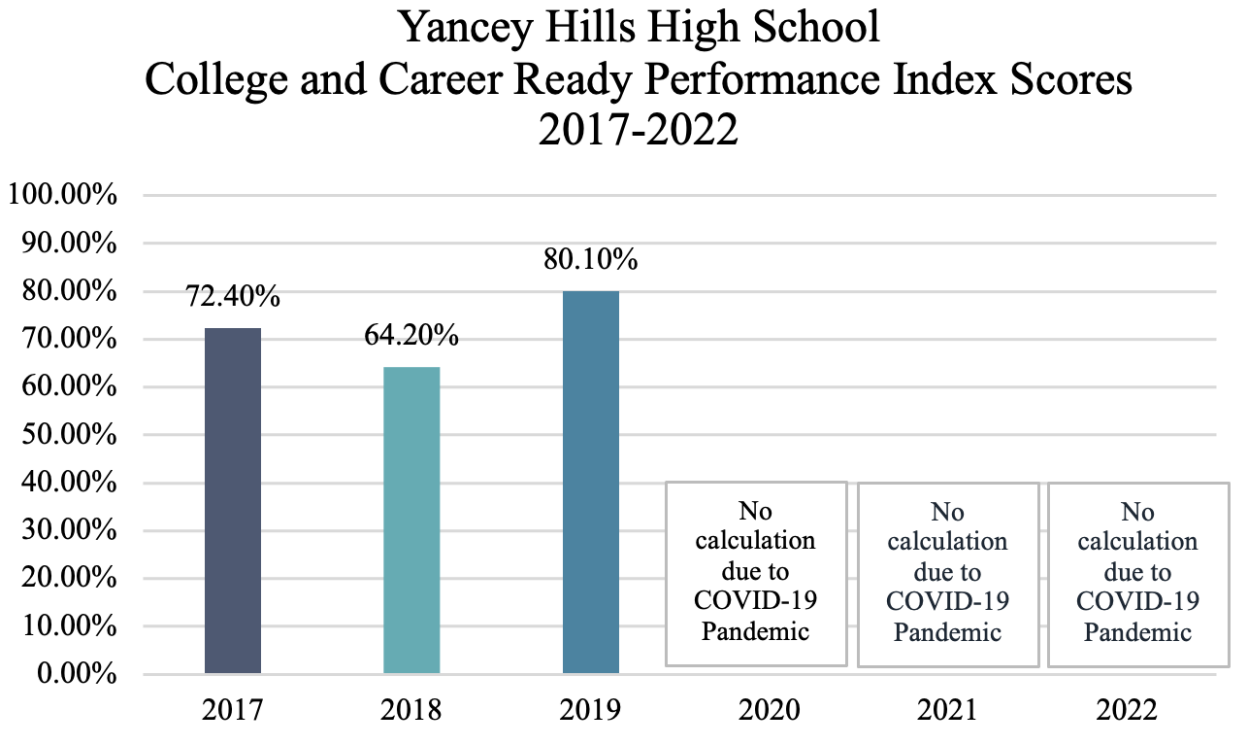
Note. As extrapolated from the Georgia Governor's Office of Student Achievement, 2017-2022.

YHHS student scores on End of Course tests have fluctuated significantly. Of note is the significant decrease in scores during the 2020-2021 school year. Over the course of the 2020-2021 school year, YHHS families could choose the most appropriate instructional method, remote or face-to-face, for their children. Approximately 20% of the student body at YHHS received remote instruction during the 2020-2021 school year. At YHHS, students who received both remote and face-to-face instruction participated in EOC testing; however, the GaDOE did not use the student scores to rank schools or districts during the 2020-2021 or 2021-2022 school years, citing the lingering impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on student learning. During the 2022-2023 school year, YHHS student performance increased in all tested areas; however, American Literature scores had the most significant gain.

Each year the Georgia Department of Education assigns schools a score ranging from 1-100 that indicates how well students are being prepared for their next steps, as defined by the state's metrics. High schools across the state are measured in the following areas: Content Mastery, Progress, Closing Gaps, Readiness, and Graduation Rates. Most metrics used to calculate the CCRPI score are derived from student performance on End of Course (EOC) Tests. As the state grappled with the COVID-19 pandemic, the GaDOE decided not to use EOC test scores to rank high schools for the 2020, 2021 and 2022 school years. Figure 3.5 details YHHS CCRPI scores since 2017, except for 2020, 2021, and 2022, as CCRPI was not calculated due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Figure 3.5

College and Career Ready Performance Index (CCRPI) Scores: Yancey Hills High School

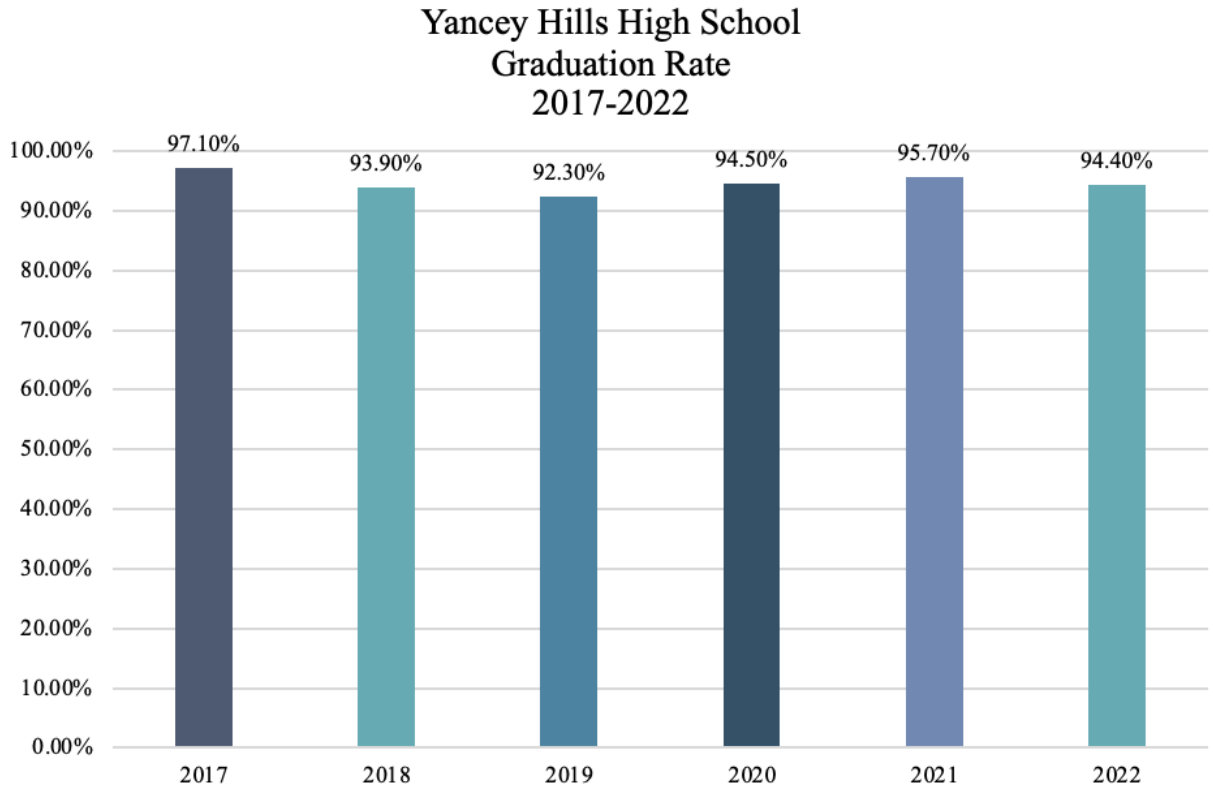


Note. As extrapolated from the Georgia Department of Education, 2017-2022.

Georgia's Department of Education also releases data concerning each high school's graduation rate. The graduation rate is determined by the students who graduate four years after entering high school as freshmen. All students who entered with the 9th-grade cohort and any additional students who enroll in the high school are included when calculating the high school's graduation rate. Students who withdraw and do not enroll in another high school or who do not graduate four years after entering high school are counted as non-graduates for the graduation rates. Although student performance on End of Course tests has significantly varied, the graduation rate has remained relatively high. Figure 3.6 provides the Graduation Rates for YHHS since 2017.

Figure 3.6

Graduation Rates: Yancey Hills High School



Note. As extrapolated from the Georgia Governor's Office of Student Achievement, 2017-2022.

Staff Characteristics

The staff at Yancy Hills High school is comprised of a three-person administrative team, a counselor, a college advisor, teachers, paraprofessionals, and other classified support staff. Most of the YHHS staff live outside the geographical boundaries of Yancey Hills. The racial makeup of the staff does not mirror the student body. Overall, the staff is 90% white and 10% black.

YHHS's teaching faculty is 93% white and 7% black. The English Department is comprised of five females and one male. All teachers are white and hold graduate degrees in education. The English Department has extensive teaching experience. Many of the teachers in

the English Department also have significant experience teaching at YHHS. In the English Department, 3 of the teachers have been working at Yancey Hills High School for more than 10 years, while the remaining 3 have worked at YHHS for less than 5 years. Four members of the six-person English Department live within the city limits of Yancey Hills.

The school's student support services include a full-time school counselor and a college advisor, both of whom are white. Additionally, two district-wide positions support students' academic, emotional, and physical needs and mitigate barriers preventing them from fully participating in their education. Yancey Hills District employs one social worker and one Student Support Alliance Coordinator, one of whom is black and one of whom is white. Both the social worker and the Student Support Alliance Coordinator have offices and spend much of their workday at YHHS.

The school's administrative leadership team includes a principal, an assistant principal who also serves as the athletic director, and an assistant principal for curriculum and instruction. All three members of the school's administrative leadership team are white, two are male, and one is female. The school's administrative leadership team members have worked together for the previous four years. They have focused on instructional leadership by intentionally working to increase the effectiveness of instruction, creating opportunities for social-emotional learning, and promoting equity.

Impact of COVID-19

Due to states of emergency issued by the President of the United States and Georgia's governor, the Yancey School District Board of Education announced its decision that students would begin remote learning for two weeks starting Monday, March 16, 2020. YHHS students attended classes on Friday, March 13, 2020, and teachers and administrators worked to distribute

instructional materials, Chromebooks, and information regarding the expectations of remote learning to students and families. As COVID-19 cases and death tolls increased, many schools across the country, including YHHS, finished the 2019-2020 school year remotely. YHHS teachers prioritized review and remediation of previously taught content for their students.

For the 2020-2021 school year, the Yancey School District provided families with a choice of two learning delivery models, in-person or remote. Depending on their specific needs, families could change their student's learning delivery model throughout the school year. Approximately 20% of the student body chose the remote learning model. Teachers at YHHS managed both remote and in-person learners for the duration of the 2020-2021 school year. The school's schedule was adjusted to include a more flexible schedule each Friday, as both remote and in-person learners chose whether to attend school remotely or in-person on Fridays.

Teachers worked tirelessly as they prioritized standards necessary for students to succeed in future courses, implemented the district's COVID-19 safety protocols, and maintained contact with students using the remote learning delivery model. Teachers spent much of their planning periods creating specific lessons for remote learners and contacting students who were at home; therefore, the emphasis on collaborative planning waned.

At the opening of the 2021-2022 school year, students who had been successful in the remote learning platform were allowed to continue remote learning through a new virtual program. Following the Department of Public Health guidance, the district's COVID-19 protocols regarding contact tracing changed dramatically. Families were informed by the YHSD if their child had been exposed to COVID-19. Subsequently, YHSD encouraged families to follow the advice of their healthcare provider; however, the choice to quarantine remained with the family.

In a community that had grown weary of COVID-19 protocols, most families decided to not quarantine, resulting in many more students being in person for classroom instruction. Teachers no longer balanced both in-person and remote learners; subsequently, common planning time was more likely used by course teams to create and evaluate instructional strategies and student performance on assessments.

Data Sources

This study aimed to examine the perspectives of an instructional leadership team as they fostered a culture that encouraged teachers to unlearn habits associated with isolation and to learn practices of collaboration. Data were collected from primary (participants in the study) and secondary (school and district documents) sources (Stringer & Aragón, 2020).

Participants

The Action Research Design Team (ARDT-Instructional Leadership Team) was comprised of the principal, assistant principal, English Department Chair, and an additional English teacher who worked with members of the Action Research Implementation Team (ARIT-English Course Teams) to unlearn habits of isolation and to increase collaborative practices (see Appendix A). The ARIT-English Course Teams identified the most effective supports that facilitated unlearning habits of isolation and learning of practices of collaboration (see Appendix B). Data from members of the ARIT-English Course Teams were collected and analyzed to provide direction for the ARDT-Instructional Leadership Team to create interventions based on scholarly literature. The research cycle provided time for reflection for the ARDT-Instructional Leadership Team and the ARIT-English Course Teams based on the results of implemented interventions.

Selection Criteria

Qualitative research employs the intentional and targeted selection of participants to increase insight and understanding of the studied phenomenon (Merriam, 2008; Stringer, 2014). Action research assumes that each research setting has unique social, cultural, and historical contexts that contribute to how meaning is constructed (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019; Creswell, 2018; Tracy, 2019). When action researchers are involved in the specific contexts with their participants, they are more likely to fully understand how meaning is constructed in that space (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019; Merriam & Grenier, 2019).

This study sought to examine the perspectives of an instructional leadership team as they fostered a culture that encouraged teachers to unlearn habits associated with isolation and to learn practices of collaboration. To this end, the Action Research Design Team (ARDT-Instructional Leadership Team) and the Action Research Implementation Team (English Course Teams) were intentionally selected as they possessed unique experiences and knowledge of habits of isolation and practices of collaboration at the site of the study.

Purposeful selection allows "for accessing appropriate data that fit the purpose of the study, the resources available, the questions being asked, and the constraints and challenges being faced (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019, p. 186). Members of the Action Research Design Team (ARDT-Instructional Leadership Team) were invited to participate based on their roles as instructional leaders at YHHS. Members of the English Department were invited to participate in the study as they had varying degrees of experience and perceptions of the effectiveness of collaboration in increasing learning outcomes for students. Each of the six members of the English Department agreed to participate in the study. The members of the English Department were configured into course teams based on the courses they taught.

Both the Action Research Design Team (ARDT-Instructional Leadership Team) and the Action Research Implementation Team (ARIT-English Course Teams) provided rich information about how interventions impacted the unlearning of habits of isolation and the learning of practices of collaboration at Yancey Hills High School.

The next section of this chapter describes the data collection methods included in this action research study.

Data Collection Methods

Qualitative research contributed to a comprehensive understanding of how and why habits of isolation persisted, thereby providing necessary contextual information to help develop interventions to assist with learning collaborative practices. The researcher's immersion in the study allowed for co-constructing meaning around unlearning habits of isolation and learning practices of collaboration. The descriptive case study methodology provided an opportunity to explore how an instructional team fostered a culture that encouraged teachers to unlearn isolation habits and learn collaboration practices. Action research methodology was used to situate the research within the context of the school site.

Data collection for this study incorporated the following qualitative methods:

1. Individual interviews with members of the Action Research Implementation Team (ARIT-English Course Teams) at the beginning, middle, and end of the research process;
2. A focus group was conducted with the Action Research Design Team (ARDT-Instructional Leadership Team) at the end of the study to elicit perspectives regarding the perceived effectiveness of the interventions;

3. Feedback questionnaires were implemented to gather the effectiveness of the interventions;
4. Observations of course team meetings;
5. Researcher's journal notes based on observations of the Action Research Implementation (ARDT -English Course Teams) and observations of the Action Research Design Team (ARDT-Instructional Leadership Team). Additionally, the researcher's journal included reflexive notes to chronicle thoughts, reactions, and researcher analyses during the research cycles. The reflexive portion of the research journal assisted in monitoring the evolution of the researcher's development as an educational leader. It provided insight into how the researcher's biases may have impacted the development of the study; and,
6. Artifacts, including collaboratively designed teaching documents, provided additional insights into the context of the study, and these documents were used to corroborate observations and other data.

The researcher intentionally used multiple sources of information to triangulate data. A data coding scheme was used to highlight specific patterns and to provide a way to track emerging themes. The data collected through interviews, focus groups, journaling, and artifact collection supported the researcher in narrating the study's findings through thick description (Mertler, 2020).

Interviews

Interviews of members from the Action Research Implementation Team (ARIT-English Course Teams) were used to understand how they described the impact of the interventions implemented by the Action Research Design Team (ARDT-Instructional Leadership Team) to

unlearn habits of isolation and to learn practices of collaboration. Interviews allowed the researcher to gain insights into the participants' values, beliefs, and thoughts that informed the development of future interventions (Kemmis et al., 2014; Mertler, 2020).

The study used semi-structured interview questions that allowed participants to articulate their experiences more fully, as the researcher incorporated prompts and probes to elicit further details (Brown & Danaher, 2019; Denscombe, 2017). The semi-structured interview format allowed the researcher to respond to each member of the ARIT-English Course Teams in privacy. A one-on-one interview provided an environment for them to speak freely without being influenced by other English Department members, as they revealed their sense-making about collaborative practices (Glanz, 2014).

Interview questions were developed to elicit a deeper understanding of the experiences of the ARIT-English Course Teams as they engaged in unlearning isolation and learning collaborative practice (deMarrais, 2004). Table 3.4 presents a sampling of interview questions. The full interview protocol can be found in Appendix E.

Table 3.4

Sampling of Interview Questions

Research Questions	Interview Questions
RQ1 In what ways can instructional leaders support the unlearning of isolation by increasing collaborative practices in one semi-rural high school?	From your experience at our school, what actions by instructional leaders this year support collaborative practices? From your experience at our school, what actions by instructional leaders this year undermines collaborative practices? What challenges remain at our school to decreasing isolation and implementing collaborative practices?

Research Questions	Interview Questions
RQ2 How can instructional leaders foster a culture that uses collaborative planning to make teaching practices public in one semi-rural high school?	What can instructional leaders in our school do to foster a culture that supports collaboration? Which attributes of our school's culture support isolation? Which attributes of our school's culture support collaborative practice?
RQ3 To what extent does participating in collaborative planning impact teacher practices in one semi-rural high school?	What have been the biggest challenges in making your teaching practices public? Which of those challenges have been addressed? Which remain? How has participating in collaborative planning changed your instructional practices?

Focus Groups

The researcher conducted one focus group session with the Action Research Design Team (ARDT-Instructional Leadership Team) to gain their perspectives and sense-making about the impact of the study (Glanz, 2014). Focus groups provide an efficient method for data collection, a safe environment for sharing perspectives, and privilege spontaneity (Cyr, 2019; Tritter & Landstad, 2020).

The focus group method of data collection was intentionally chosen due to the previously established trusting relationships of the group. Trust is a social construct that develops during interpersonal relationships when those involved meet the obligations of their perceived roles (Finnigan & Daly, 2017; Tschannen-Moran, 2001). Finnigan and Daly (2017) noted, "[o]ver time these interactions transform into what researchers call formal and informal networks; it is through these networks that learning takes place, as educators interact with one another,

exchanging knowledge, advice, and professional support and engaging in friendships" (p. 24). The Action Research Design Team (ARDT-Instructional Leadership Team) had previously developed trusting relationships and were accustomed to speaking freely with one another.

The focus group structure created an environment that allowed members of the Action Research Design Team (ARDT-Instructional Leadership Team) to elaborate on the perspectives of all members, which enhanced the ability for the information to be socially constructed (Merriam & Grenier, 2019). The focus group method allowed the researcher to capture the perspectives of the action research team as they negotiated and co-constructed their experiential knowledge to collaboratively develop and implement interventions to unlearn habits of isolation and to learn more about collaborative practices (Creswell, 2018). Specifically, the focus group was asked questions that allowed them to reflect on how instructional leaders support collaboration, what cultural factors undermine or support collaboration, and how the COVID-19 pandemic impacted the school's progression toward increased teacher collaboration to improve instruction (see Appendix F). Table 3.5 provides a sampling of focus group questions.

Table 3.5

Sampling of Focus Group Questions

Research Questions	Focus Group Questions
RQ1 In what ways can instructional leaders support the unlearning of isolation by increasing collaborative practices in one semi-rural high school?	How do you as an instructional leader support collaborative practice? From your perspective, what challenges do teachers have as they unlearn habits of isolation and implement collaborative practice?

Research Questions	Focus Group Questions
RQ2 How can instructional leaders foster a culture that uses collaborative planning to make teaching practices public in one semi-rural high school?	What attributes of a school's culture support isolation? What attributes of a school's culture support collaborative practice?
RQ3 To what extent does participating in collaborative planning impact teacher practices in one semi-rural high school?	How has participating in collaborative planning changed instructional practices in the English department? What challenges remain to making teaching public?

Observations

Throughout the study, the researcher collected data during observations of Action Research Design Team (ARDT-Instructional Leadership Team) meetings, collaborative course team meetings, and classroom instruction. During meetings of the Action Research Design Team (ARDT-Instructional Leadership Team), the researcher took copious notes to track the ideas and interactions of team members as they worked to devise and implement interventions aimed at supporting the unlearning of habits of isolation and the learning of collaborative practices. Additionally, the researcher noted how teachers described and assessed the implementation of collectively designed instructional materials and student assessments. During collaborative course team meetings, the researcher focused on how the course team members interacted and worked to reach consensus. During classroom observations, the researcher focused on implementing the mutually agreed-on instructional strategies devised during collaborative course team meetings. This study called for the researcher to be both a participant (facilitator) and an observer.

Qualitative research acknowledges that a participant-observer impacts the observation and assumes that impact helps guide the study and promotes a collective sense-making experience (Merriam & Grenier, 2019; Mertler, 2020). According to Stringer (2014), "the major purpose of the process is to achieve a higher-level synthesis, to reach a consensus where possible"; as such, the participant-observer serves to enhance the collective sense-making experience (p. 75). To record observations, a two-column approach enabled tracking of the researcher's jotted observations and reactions (Emerson et al., 2011; Mertler, 2020). Stringer (2014) further explored how action research facilitators may contribute to sense-making by making themselves available to participants in the study for de-briefing. Table 3.6 offers a sampling of observation notes taken during the study.

Table 3.6

Sampling of Observation Notes

Observation	Date	Highlights of Observations
9th Grade Literature Course team Meeting: 4/4 teachers present	August 12, 2022	The 9th Grade Literature Course team used their collaboration time to plan the instruction for the next week. They agreed to the following: • Introducing the narrative essay • Elements of the narrative essay on which to focus • Expectations for feedback on student work • Assessment - Summative category: 50 points
10th Grade Literature Course team Meeting: 3 of 3 teachers present	September 14, 2022	The 10th Grade Literature Course team used their collaboration time to review student performance. • Unit 1 Narrative: discussion of areas where students struggled – the discussion was limited as only one of the three teachers had completed grading the narrative essays. The teachers agreed to an opportunity for remediation and resubmission of the Unit 1 Narrative Essay. • Teachers expressed frustration for some students who had yet to submit their Unit 1 Narrative Essay and many students failed to incorporate teacher feedback into the final submissions.

Observation	Date	Highlights of Observations
Extended Collaborative Planning: 6 of 6 teachers present	October 19, 2022	The English Department discussed the possibility of adding an academic elective course offering for the 2023-2024 school year. • Discussion centered on which course(s) could be offered. • One member of the English department checked the digital copy of the novel inventory • Another member of the English department pulled up the state course catalog to provide the list of possibilities for course offerings • Another member of the English department pulled up current standards for academic elective courses (discussion ensued regarding new course standards) • A rich discussion surrounding how academic electives would be designed (and possibly taught) by all members of the English department so consensus was necessary.
Multicultural Literature Course team Meeting: 2 of 2 teachers present	November 11, 2022	The Multicultural Literature teachers used their collaboration time to discuss an additional summative assessment for students to demonstrate mastery of standards (possibility of raising their grade in Multicultural Literature). • Discussion of how to incorporate plot, setting, tone, mood, theme, characterization into summative assessment • Chose specific short stories with higher Lexile scores (to match rigor of course)

Researcher's Journal

The researcher's jottings, notes taken during observations, and reflections were kept in a researcher's journal. The reflections facilitated making meaning and interpreting the rich data that characterizes action research (Stringer & Aragón, 2020). Reflexive journaling included in the researcher's journal provided a path to create a reflective commentary, which included the researcher's initial impressions of data collection, emerging patterns in data collection, and possible theories (Shenton, 2004). The researcher's reflexive journaling throughout the study aided in creating clarity in terms of the context of the study, the evolution of her role as the

researcher, and the study's findings (Bradbury et al., 2019). The commentary that emerged from reflexive journaling helped the researcher to develop an awareness of her values, background, and previous experiences with the phenomenon of unlearning isolation as she attempted to mitigate her bias from unduly influencing the study (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019; Cope, 2014).

To assist in detailing observations in the researcher's journal, the researcher utilized the guidance of writing ethnographic field notes as provided by Emerson et al. (2011). Observations and the subsequent recording of the observations are inherently linked and ultimately provide a collective understanding of shared experiences (Creswell, 2018; Glanz, 2014). Emerson et al. (2011) offer the following guidelines for writing fieldnotes:

1. what is observed and ultimately treated as "data" or "findings" is inseparable from the observational processes;
2. in writing fieldnotes, the field researcher should give special attention to the indigenous meanings and concerns of the people studied;
3. contemporaneously written fieldnotes are an essential grounding and resource for writing broader, more coherent accounts of others' lives and concerns; and
4. such field notes should detail the social and interactional processes that makeup people's everyday lives and activities. (p. 15)

The data collected through the observations of Action Research Design Team (ARDT-Instructional Leadership Team) meetings, collaborative course team meetings, reflections on interviews, and reflections on data analysis served as a foundation for constructing meaning and the subsequent rich description (Stringer, 2014). Qualitative research acknowledges the dual and complicated role of the researcher as participant and observer (Merriam & Grenier, 2019). However, observations provided a path to creating meaning surrounding the extent to which the

interventions crafted by the Action Research Design Team (ARDT-Instructional Leadership Team) facilitated the unlearning of habits of isolation and the learning of collaborative practice. A sampling of the researcher's journal is provided in Table 3.7.

Table 3.7

Sampling of Researcher's Journal

Topic	Date	Highlights from Researcher's Journal
Reflection on Round 1 Interviews	August 30, 2022	• I'm (the researcher) surprised that so many teachers listed singleton courses as a challenge to collaboration when the master schedule now allows for many more courses to have more than one teacher who teaches the course. • Gather the challenges that the teachers listed in Round 1 of interviews to create follow up questions based on their answers in Round 2 of interviews.
Conversation with Cameron Waters	September 13, 2022	• Cameron shared the following story today. Today a student came up to me to let me know that "we" are being too hard. When I asked the student who "we" was, her reply was "all you 10th grade teachers". • Cameron gleefully indicated that she was so excited that students were recognizing that teachers were working together.
Reflection on Coding	November 21, 2022	• Idea: Change coding from Ti (Time) to MS (Master schedule) to better differentiate between constraints on teacher time during the school day and the master schedule allowing/not allowing collaboration.
Reflection on Definition of Collaboration	December 16, 2022	• Idea: pay attention to the evolving definition that teachers have of collaboration. I define it as course team collaboration, but they continually see/define collaboration as course team collaboration, vertical collaboration, cross-curricular collaboration, department collaboration, and grade level collaboration (think about why the teacher's view of collaboration has expanded to include more than what is being tracked in the study)

Artifacts

Documents collected from participants' daily work pair well with interviews and observational data to provide a more complete portrayal of the experiences and sense-making of the phenomenon (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019; Merriam & Grenier, 2019). Documents that may inform a study include records that pre-dated the study, documents created in the same period as the study during the participants' daily work, and documents created at the researcher's request. An advantage of documents that pre-date the study is that "they do not intrude upon or alter the setting in ways that the presence of the researcher might" (Merriam & Grenier, 2019, p. 15). However, given that documents produce and reproduce organizational realities "within social, economic, historical, cultural, and situational contexts," it is vital to analyze the context of documents as one would a participant's contributions (Charmaz, 2015, p. 46). Documents and artifacts produce and reproduce organizational realities; therefore, the researcher must consider the subsequent bias that could be present in them (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019; Prior, 2017).

Some artifacts that pre-dated the study were collected and analyzed to triangulate the extent to which isolation was embedded into the culture of YHHS. Other documents created during the study's timeframe, as part of the participant's daily work, were analyzed to triangulate the impact of the interventions on encouraging collaborative practice. Furthermore, some documents were created at the researcher's request, as the Action Research Design Team (ARDT-Instructional Leadership Team) recorded the planning and implementation of interventions (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019; Jiang, 2018; Prior, 2017).

No matter when or for which purpose the documents were created, information derived from these documents was used to triangulate data garnered through interviews and focus groups (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019). Artifacts collected throughout the study provided insights into the

phenomenon of unlearning habits of isolation and learning practices of collaboration (Merriam & Grenier, 2019). Data collection and analysis occurred concurrently during the study, allowing the researcher to facilitate the adjustment interventions and to test emerging themes against subsequent data collection (Merriam & Grenier, 2019; Morse et al., 2002).

Interventions

Action research devises a systematic, iterative inquiry into potential interventions designed to address a problem of practice (Coghlan & Brannick, 2014; Glanz, 2014; Stringer & Aragon, 2020). Glanz (2014) defined treatments or interventions as a "specific instructional practice, program, or procedure that is implemented by the researcher to investigate its effect on the behavior or achievement of an individual or group" (p. 64). When making decisions on the direction of action research, also known as implementing interventions, Coghlan (2019) advised researchers to:

- Construct the initiative and desired outcomes with relevant stakeholders, and systematically generate and collect research data about an ongoing system relative to some objective or need;
- Engage with others in reviewing the data generated and collected;
- Conduct a collaborative analysis of the data;
- Plan and take collaborative action based on shared inquiry; and,
- Evaluate jointly the results of that action, leading to further planning. (p. 123)

The purpose of this study was to examine the perspectives of an instructional leadership team as they fostered a culture that encouraged teachers to unlearn habits associated with isolation and to learn practices of collaboration. Therefore, specific interventions crafted to enhance the

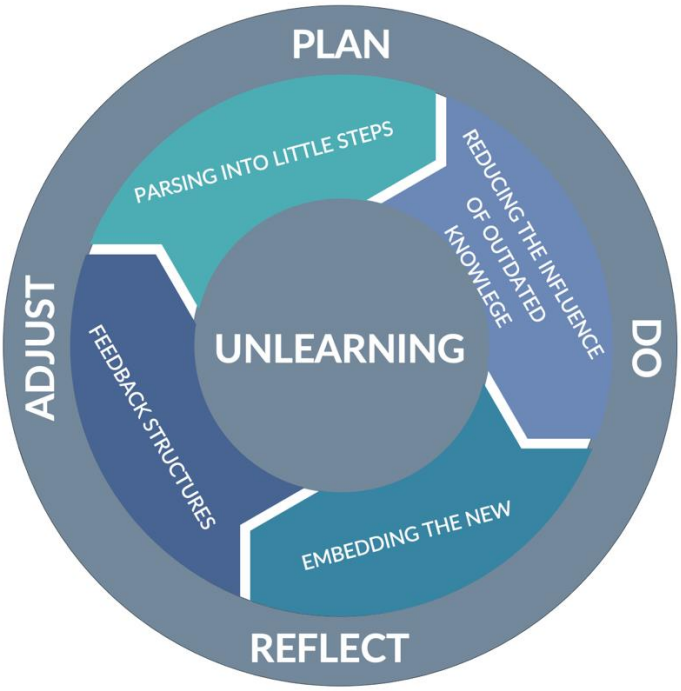
unlearning of habits of isolation and the learning of collaborative practices were implemented and analyzed.

Effective collaboration depends on educational leadership that successfully navigates a school's unique characteristics and cultural norms to promote collaborative practice (Vangrieken et al., 2015). The role of the principal is vital in fostering practices of collaboration (Hallam et al., 2015; Hitt & Tucker, 2016; Leithwood, 2019; Liebowitz & Porter, 2019). Principal leadership practices that promote collaboration include empowering teachers to engage in collective professional inquiry (Goddard et al., 2015; Griffiths et al., 2021; Mwanza & Changwe, 2020); leading job-embedded professional learning that supports a clear vision of collaboration, inspiring a continuous learning environment (Jones & Thessin, 2017; Pirtle & Tobia, 2014; Spencer, 2016; Zepeda, 2019; Zepeda, 2020); and managing the schedules and structures of the school to create time for teachers to engage in collaborative practice (Goddard et al., 2015; Raywid, 1993; Tallman, 2020; Zepeda, 2014).

The primary interventions of this study were based on Grisold et al.'s (2020) model of unlearning. Parsing new practices into little steps, reducing the influence of outdated knowledge, embedding new practices in daily work, and creating feedback structures to improve practices provided concrete interventions to unlearn isolation habits and learn collaboration methods. Figure 3.7 portrays the unlearning intervention cycle adapted from Bryk et al. (2011) and Grisold et al. (2020).

Figure 3.7

Unlearning Intervention Cycle



Note. Adapted from Bryk et al. (2011); Grisold et al. (2020).

Parsing into Little Steps

Organizational actors may feel overwhelmed when change occurs; therefore, breaking down the process into more manageable steps provides the necessary support. At YHHS, the first step toward collaboration allowed teachers from the ARIT-English Course Teams to participate in professional learning surrounding effective teamwork. Next, the teachers collaboratively developed standard curriculum maps and course pacing guides. Then, they used collaborative planning time to plan and prepare for instruction and engage in analyses of student performance on assessments. Course teams were asked to use agendas to record their planning and decision-making processes. While some course teams used agendas to drive their conversations, other course teams merely recorded what happened during the course team meetings. Although course teams were provided with the expectation of meeting for a minimum of 30 minutes per week, all

teams noted that they met formally and informally for longer periods of time. The teachers agreed that 30 minutes of collaboration time was not enough time to design instruction and analyze student work. Teachers also consistently noted that instructional conversations with one another increased in terms of frequency and length. Observation notes, interview transcripts and feedback questionnaires were used to track parsing the new learning into little steps.

Reducing the Influence of Outdated Knowledge

To decrease the practice of teacher isolation, the master schedule facilitated more than one teacher teaching the same academic course. Therefore, rather than an individual, a group of teachers became responsible for planning and reflecting on the effectiveness of instructional strategies used in the course. Having teachers participate in professional learning where they learned more about how they and their teammates approach work helped the teachers to understand how to approach teamwork.

The interview transcripts revealed a marked transition in the teacher's views of what they considered to be a challenge to working collaboratively. In the first round of interviews (conducted in August 2022), teachers often noted that collaboration couldn't occur due to a lack of courses that had more than one teacher teaching the course. However, by the second round of interviews (conducted in October 2022) teachers no longer commented that there was a lack of courses that had more than one teacher teaching the course. In addition to the interview transcripts, observation notes were kept from course team meetings, interviews, ADRT-Instructional Leadership Team Meetings, and department meetings to aid in tracing how teachers unlearned habits of isolation and learned practices of collaboration.

Embedding the New

YHHS incorporated a structural change of having teachers who taught the same courses (members of the same course team) have a common planning period. They could meet, collaboratively prepare, and analyze assessment results for the course. Additionally, instructional leaders chose department chairs who valued collaborative practices to serve as instructional leaders in their respective departments.

A new expectation for teachers for the 2022-2023 school year was that a minimum of 30 minutes of their common planning time each week was intentionally devoted to collaboratively planning their courses. Teachers were asked to keep a formal agenda to detail their discussions and decision-making processes. The researcher collected data on collaborative course team meetings through observations of course team meetings, analysis of course team agendas, interview transcripts and anonymous feedback questionnaires.

Feedback Structures

Organizations that foster unlearning use member feedback to make the new process more effective. At YHHS, one of the first refinements of the collaborative planning experience based on feedback from teachers was to provide them with a half-day release time four times a year to facilitate their work to meet department-wide expectations for collaborative teams. Teachers had opportunities to provide feedback on unlearning habits of isolation and learning practices of collaboration through one-on-one interviews with the researcher and through anonymous feedback questionnaires.

Grisold et al.'s (2020) unlearning framework of parsing new practices into little steps, reducing the influence of outdated knowledge, embedding new practices in daily work, and creating feedback structures provided the structure for the interventions used in the study. A

summary of the unlearning framework, intervention activities, target groups, frequency and data produced are provided in Table 3.8.

Table 3.8

Interventions for the Study

Unlearning Framework	Intervention Activities	Target Groups	Frequency of Interventions	Data Produced
Parsing into Little Steps	Professional Learning: Collaboration	Course teams	Weekly	• Observation Notes • Interview transcripts • Feedback Questionnaires
Reducing the Influence of Outdated Knowledge	Collaborative Planning Time	Course teams	Weekly	• Observation Notes • Interview transcripts
Embedding the New	Collaborative Course Team Meetings	Course teams	Weekly	• Observation Notes • Interview transcripts • Feedback Questionnaires
Feedback Structures	Feedback Forms	Course teams	Monthly	• Interview transcripts • Feedback Questionnaire

During the study, the data were gathered and analyzed using qualitative research data analysis methods. The data analysis led to the development of emerging themes, consistent patterns, and a thick description of the case.

Data Analysis Methods

Data analysis looks for themes, patterns, and relationships among the collected data that provide explanations or answers to the study's research questions (Glanz, 2014). Case study data analysis can be a holistic view of the entire case or an embedded analysis of part of the case (Yin & Zhang, 2018). Data analysis and data collection are intertwined and iterative (Merriam, 2008). The study followed Glanz's (2014) three phases of data analysis as the data were organized, analyzed for patterns, and interpreted.

A thick description of the process was generated throughout data collection as the researcher collected, analyzed, and constructed meaning which led to the emergence of common themes (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019; Creswell & Poth, 2018). The thick description increased trustworthiness and provided an audit trail for deep understandings that can be generated by studying the phenomenon (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019; Lincoln & Guba, 1986).

Coding

In qualitative research, coding is a strategy to categorize the large volume of collected raw data within the construct of the study's research questions and theoretical framework (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019). Saldaña and Omasta (2016) defined a code as "a researcher generated construct that symbolizes and thus attributes interpreted meaning to each individual datum for later purposes of pattern detection, categorization, theory-building, and other analytic processes" (p. 4). Coding promoted deductive analysis, as the initial categories of data analysis were generated from the literature (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019).

Coding also nurtured inductive analysis as unique patterns and themes from the specific context emerged from the collected data (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Williams and Moser (2019)

asserted that coding provides a scaffold for the researcher to constantly compare the data, enabling themes to be identified and interpreted.

In the study, two coding schemes were used. First the researcher used a deductive color-coding scheme to indicate whether information collected from individual interviews, the focus group, feedback questionnaires, observation of course team meetings, the researcher's journal and artifacts related to the specific research questions which guided this study. Secondly, an inductive coding scheme was used to identify emerging patterns rising from the data collected. Table 3.9 offers a sampling of codes, the meaning ascribed to the codes, and data examples.

Table 3.9

Coding Sampling for Data

Code	Meaning	Data Sample
MS	Master Schedule	"For a very long time we have had so many people teaching singletons. I have taught…on an island" – Amy Dobberstein reflecting on what challenges exist in decreasing isolation and implementing collaborative practices.
TB	Team Building	"We do a good job of doing things outside of school together. We go to dinner, we hang out…we go to football games together. We build trust in one another because of what we do outside of school together. So, when you have a student that you're not connecting with you can trust another teacher to help you build a relationship with that student." – Cameron Waters reflecting on the impact of a culture of collaboration.
II	Instructional Impact	"It's really helpful being on the 10th grade team to see what the sophomores are producing". To see how hard they work and their mindsets. It has been valuable for me to see how the sophomores work, so that I can know what they have done in in the past. It helps me to increase the rigor for the juniors I teach. -Mary Thomas (who primarily teaches juniors) reflecting on how working on the 10th Lit collaborative team impacted her instruction with juniors.

Thematic Analysis

Thematic analysis focuses on the identification and interpretation of data. Clarke and Braun (2017) defined thematic analysis as:

> a method for systematically identifying, organizing, and offering insight into patterns of meaning (themes) within qualitative data…[that] can be used to identify patterns within and *across* data in relation to participants' lived experience, views and perspectives, and behavior and practices. (p. 297, emphasis in the original)

Thematic analysis allows researchers to participate in the iterative nature of collecting, analyzing and making meaning of the collected data. The researcher first categorized the collected data based on the research questions which guided the study. Then, the researcher used an inductive approach to code the data. Finally, the researcher sorted the findings by emerging themes.

Qualitative research requires the researcher to function as the instrument of analysis, which increases the possibility that researcher bias will unduly influence the study. Therefore, adhering to a system for coding and identifying themes reduces researcher bias, improves the trustworthiness of the study, and assists in the triangulation of data, which strengthens the reliability and validity of the study (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019; Nowell et al., 2017; Williams & Moser, 2019).

A structure of thematic analysis reflects the high standards of ethical practice for reporting research findings and interpretations (Peel, 2020). The phases of thematic analysis and establishing trustworthiness are provided in Table 3.10.

Table 3.10

Phases of Thematic Analysis and Establishing Trustworthiness

Phases of Thematic Analysis	Means of Establishing Trustworthiness
Phase 1: Familiarizing yourself with the data	• Prolong engagement with data • Triangulate different data and collection modes • Document theoretical and reflective thoughts • Document thoughts about potential codes/themes • Store raw data in well-organized archives • Keep records of field notes, transcripts, and reflexive journals
Phase 2: Generating Initial Codes	• Peer debriefing • Researcher triangulation • Reflexive journaling • Use of a coding framework • Audit trail of code generation • Documentation of all team meetings and peer debriefings
Phase 3: Searching for Themes	• Researcher triangulation • Diagramming to make sense of theme connections • Keep detailed notes about development and hierarchies of concepts and themes
Phase 4: Reviewing Themes	• Researcher triangulation • Themes and subthemes vetted by team members • Test for referential adequacy by returning to raw data
Phase 5: Defining and Naming Themes	• Researcher triangulation • Peer debriefing • Team consensus on themes • Documentation of team meetings regarding themes • Documentation of theme naming
Phase 6: Producing the Report	• Member checking • Peer debriefing • Describing process of coding and analysis in sufficient details • Thick descriptions of context • Description of the audit trail • Report on reasons for theoretical, methodological, and analytical choices throughout the entire study

Note. Adapted from Nowell et al. (2017).

Reliability, Validity, and Generalizability

The purpose of action research is to provide opportunities to address a problem of practice that is specifically situated in a particular context and setting. Coghlan and Brannick (2014) proposed this "rigorous method of fact-finding and experimentation to practical issues" contributes to participants learning about and developing interventions to address the specified problem of practice (p. 6). Although Guba (1981) outlined the differences between quantitative and qualitative approaches to methodology, he proposed that trustworthiness could be enhanced in qualitative research through credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Later, Lincoln and Guba (1986) confirmed the traditional view of rigor in quantitative research could be equally attained in qualitative research by creating the parallel criteria of trustworthiness and authenticity.

Qualitative researchers increase trustworthiness and authenticity by creating studies that account for rigor during the development of methods for data collection, organization of the data, and analysis of the collected data (Glanz, 2014; Nowell et al., 2017). Qualitative studies employ the techniques of prolonged engagement, persistent observation, triangulation, member checking, and thick description to magnify credibility (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019; Glanz, 2014; Lincoln & Guba, 1986; Mertler, 2020; Stringer, 2014). Additionally, the verification strategies of methodological coherence, and appropriate sampling, while collecting and concurrently analyzing data increase the trustworthiness and authenticity of studies (Morse et al., 2002).

In the present study, multiple data sources were purposefully collected and analyzed by employing appropriate qualitative research strategies to ensure trustworthiness and authenticity. The strategies used in the study included:

1. Member Checking: The ARDT-Instructional Leadership Team and ARIT-English Course Teams reviewed the data collected, engaged in data analysis, and examined preliminary data reports to ensure an accurate representation of their perspectives and experiences (Stringer, 2014).
2. Persistent Observation: The researcher consciously observed and chronicled the observations by jotting, writing detailed notes, selecting narration views, and coding to discover meaning (Emerson et al., 2011).
3. Prolonged Engagement: Lengthy and prolonged engagement with the phenomenon of isolation and with the participants (Guba, 1981; Stringer, 2014).
4. Recognizing and Addressing Researcher Bias: Creating a subjectivity statement and keeping a reflexive journal assisted in highlighting the bias of the researcher so that it could be addressed throughout the development and analysis of the study (Holmes, 2020).
5. Triangulation: Data were collected from multiple sources that included interviews, focus groups, participant observations, researcher journal notes (observation notes and reflexive journaling), and the collection of artifacts (Glanz, 2014).

Triangulation efforts over the course of the study included examining the research questions in relationship to methods of data collection and analysis as presented in Table 3.11.

Table 3.11

Triangulation of Research Methods

Research Questions	Methods of Data Collection	Methods of Data Analysis	Approximate Timeline
RQ1 In what ways can instructional leaders support the unlearning of isolation by increasing collaborative practices in one semi-rural high school?	Focus Group	Coding/Analysis of Themes	December 2022
	Researcher Journal Notes	Researcher Reflection	August-December 2022
	Participant Observations	Coding/Analysis of Themes	August-December 2022
RQ2 How can instructional leaders foster a culture that uses collaborative planning to make teaching practices public in one semi-rural high school?	Focus Group	Coding/Analysis of Themes	December 2022
	Researcher Journal Notes	Researcher Reflection	August-December 2022
	Document Analysis	Coding/Analysis of Themes	August-December 2022
RQ3 To what extent does participating in collaborative planning impact teacher practices in one semi-rural high school?	Individual Interview Protocol	Coding/Analysis of Themes	August, October, and December 2022
	Researcher Journal Notes	Researcher Reflection	August-December 2022
	Document Analysis	Coding/Analysis of Themes	August-December 2022

One of the purposes of action research is to increase learning for the participants as they situate their learning within social and professional networks in which knowledge is socially constructed and negotiated (Coburn & Russell, 2008; Darling-Hammond et al., 2017; Smylie &

Evans, 2006; Von Esch, 2021). The iterative nature of action research engages teachers in making sense of teaching in their specific contexts in which the "messy, mumbled nonlinear, recursive, and sometimes unpredictable" nature of learning unfolds (Avery, 1990, p. 43). Action research aims not to produce definitive answers but rather to develop a thorough, descriptive, and content-specific representation of the study's findings that may apply to broader contexts (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019).

Although this study is situated in a specific context, a thick description was created so that future researchers may determine transferability to other contexts (Denscombe, 2017; Denzin, 2001). Given that qualitative research uniquely positions the researcher as a data collection mechanism, the thick description aided the researcher in acknowledging and addressing bias throughout the study (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019).

Subjectivity Statement

The nature of qualitative research places the researcher as the primary instrument of data collection (Clark, & Vealé, 2018; Merriam & Grenier, 2019; Xu & Storr, 2012). As such, the unique characteristics of the researcher have the potential to influence data collection and analysis that could impact interpretations of the findings (Holmes, 2020; Pezalla et al., 2012). Grandy (2018) asserted, "the subjectivity of the researcher is something to be embraced, not controlled or eliminated" (p. 178). Qualitative research focuses on recognizing biases to gain insights into how the researcher may approach creating and analyzing the results of the study (Bourke, 2014). To increase the recognition of qualitative researcher bias, Reinharz (1997) suggested that researchers consider the three selves that contribute to one's thinking: Research Self (professional research training and experiences); Personal Self (personal background); and Situational Self (new identities that may form during the research process). Throughout the

study, the researcher analyzed how her Research Self, Personal Self, and Situational Self impacted her work to diminish the impact of researcher bias on the study.

The researcher's undergraduate and graduate work impacted her Research Self. As a history major at Berry College, she conducted historical research. Her undergraduate work emphasized sourcing as a method to recognize bias in primary and secondary sources but did not require analysis of how her own bias impacted interpretations. Therefore, the researcher lacked experience in examining how her own bias could impact research. The researcher's training and professional experiences in qualitative research are limited to the instruction and research conducted using qualitative research methodology while attending the University of Georgia during her master's and doctoral programs. Both programs emphasized the unique position of qualitative research to derive meaning from one's experiences and to understand how making sense of those experiences impacts behavior.

The researcher's Personal Self is affected by her unique life experiences. The researcher's background includes 20 years teaching middle and high school social studies and four years as an assistant principal. As a teacher, the researcher's experiences with collaboration included "deliberately arranged collegiality and artificially contrived collegiality;" however, she maintains a positive view of teacher collaboration (Hargreaves, 2015, p. 131). Over the course of her teaching career, the researcher experienced significant learning when she worked with other teachers to create lessons and to analyze student work. She credits collaboration with helping her become a better instructor.

As an assistant principal who supports teachers as they strive to improve their instructional strategies, the researcher's interest in conducting a study on how educational leader actions impacted teacher collaboration was piqued. The researcher served as an assistant

principal for curriculum and instruction at YHHS and developed relationships with the faculty based on trust, which facilitated open communication regarding instructional practices. Trust allows for collaborative and public critical analysis of individual and group assumptions and beliefs (Benade, 2018).

The researcher's Situational Self impacted the lens with which she approached her research. During the present study, the researcher was an assistant principal at Yancey Hills High School tasked with prioritizing collaboration to improve instructional practices. The study focused on instructional leader actions that encouraged a collaborative culture by facilitating unlearning habits of isolation. The researcher had previously developed trusting relationships with the participants, which impacted the study, as the researcher was both an observer and a participant in the study. Throughout the study, the researcher's situational self intentionally examined the interview and focus group questions, data analysis, and framing of the research findings for researcher bias.

The researcher strove to understand how her research, personal, and situational selves impacted the study by keeping a research journal to track her thoughts and analyses. Additionally, the researcher kept analytical notes during meetings to track the behaviors and interactions of participants. Data were collected through individual interviews and focus groups to triangulate how members of the ARDT-Instructional Leadership Team and the ARIT-English Course Teams spoke of their experiences with unlearning habits of isolation and learning collaborative practice. The researcher removed evaluation from observations, asked for volunteers to complete anonymous reflective questionnaires, and conducted one on one interviews to support a culture of trust and collegiality.

Limitations

Some of the limitations of the study arose from the nature of qualitative research. First, the researcher served as a participant-observer during the study. Qualitative research assumes that the participant-observer will impact the study by providing guidance and promoting collective sense-making (Merriam & Grenier, 2019). However, participant-observers increase the amount of researcher bias in the study, and researchers must guard against unduly influencing the study (Mertler, 2020). Secondly, qualitative research may increase the likelihood of participants presenting a reality aligned to their perceptions of what is socially acceptable (Bergen & Labonté, 2020). Third, qualitative research emphasizes the specificity of the context of the study, thereby creating challenges for the generalizability of findings to other contexts (Carminati, 2018; Queirós et al., 2017).

Other limitations of the study were derived from the specific context of the study. A limitation of the study was that the researcher was in a position of power in the school (assistant principal) in which the study was conducted, which may have impacted the participants' willingness to share information they believed to be contrary to the researcher's views. Another limitation due to the specific context of YHHS was the school's small size, which directly impacted the number of participants. The Action Research Design Team (ARDT-Instructional Leadership Team) had four participants (three female and one male). The Action Research Implementation Team (ARIT-English Course Teams) had six participants, (five female and one male). The timing and length of the study were also limitations. The study was conducted from August to December 2022, which dictated the number of cycles of interventions, thereby limiting the diversity of experiences throughout the study.

Chapter Summary

Chapter three described the methods of data collection and analysis for this action research study. Action research was the preferred method of study due to its emphasis on collaboration (Coghlan, 2019). The focus on collaborative decision-making in the action research process bolstered the significance of learning collaborative practices by the ARDT-Instructional Leadership Team and the members of the ARIT-English Course Teams. Interviews, focus groups, feedback questionnaires, observations of course team meetings, artifacts, and researcher reflections were used as data sources. All collected data were coded and analyzed for themes and patterns as they related to the research questions.

The next chapter presents the findings of the study at Yancey Hills High School. The case study within the context of unlearning habits of isolation and learning practices of collaboration, along with the cycles of research are described in detail.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS FROM THE ACTION RESEARCH CASE

Isolation has often been recognized as a detrimental, but deeply entrenched feature of education (Heider, 2021). The structures and schedules of schools physically and psychologically distance teachers from one another (Villavicencio et al., 2021). Isolation has hindered the development of teacher leadership and denied teachers opportunities for job-embedded professional learning (Martin et al., 2020). When teachers work in collaborative communities, rather than in isolation, student achievement increases (Saka, 2021); therefore, to mitigate the impact of isolation, teachers must engage in unlearning the habits of isolation and learning practices of collaboration.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine the perspectives of an instructional leadership team as they fostered a culture that encouraged teachers to unlearn habits associated with isolation and to learn practices of collaboration.

Research Questions

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

1. In what ways can instructional leaders support the unlearning of isolation by increasing collaborative practices in one semi-rural high school?
2. How can instructional leaders foster a culture that uses collaborative planning to make teaching practices public in one semi-rural high school?

3. To what extent does participating in collaborative planning impact teacher practices in one semi-rural high school?

Chapter 4 explores the context and the findings from this case study. The context of the study includes a description of Yancy Hills High School, an overview of academic performance in the areas of reading and writing on state created exams, and a description of attempts to increase collaborative practices as a method of improving instructional practices in English courses.

Additionally, problem-framing in the context of the site of this action research study is provided. To facilitate a more comprehensive picture, the findings from this case study are presented through the action research cycles and from the perspectives of the Action Research Design Team (ARDT-Instructional Leadership Team) and the Action Research Implementation Team (ARIT-English Course Teams).

Context of the Study

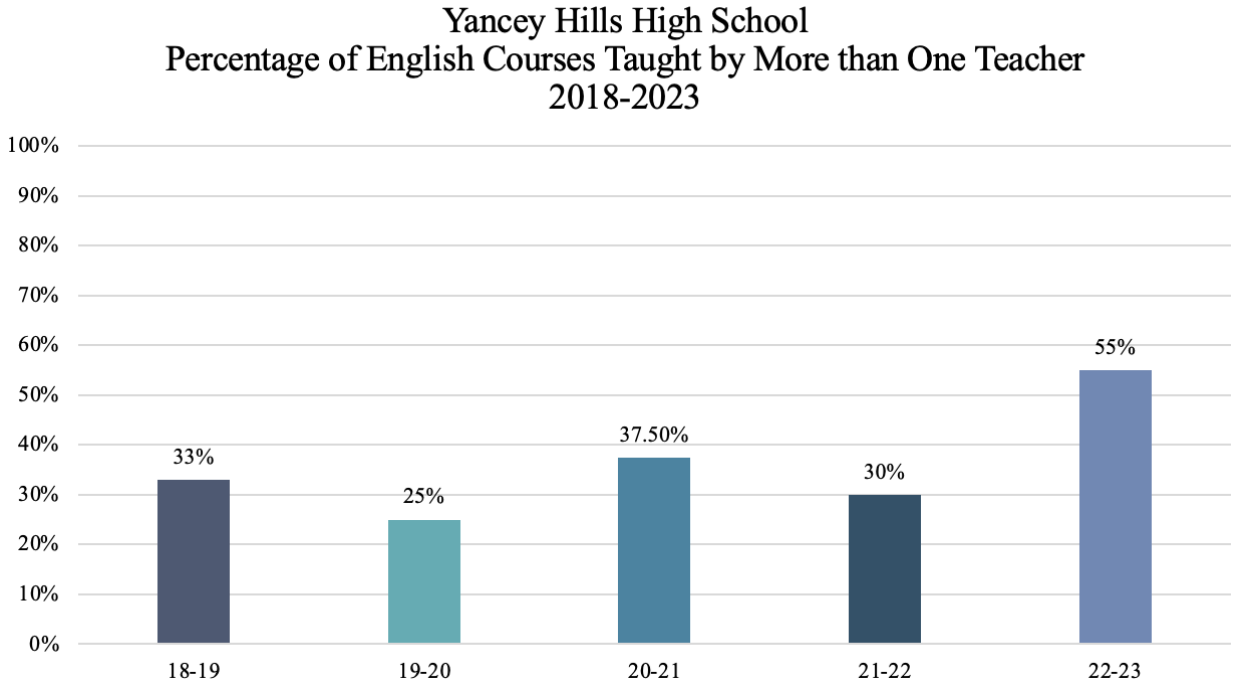
Teacher isolation has been a cultural norm at Yancey Hills High School. The small enrollment size and a concerted effort to limit course preparations for teachers deeply embedded the practice of having one instructor teach all sections of a particular academic course. Typically, one instructor would teach all sections of a particular academic course. Given that there was often only one instructor per course, instruction was private, and teacher isolation was pervasive.

The district's work through a strategic planning process and subsequent professional learning that increased the instructional leadership capacity of the administrative team at YHHS resulted in a concerted effort to prioritize collaboration as a method to improve instructional practices. As instructional planning occurred for the 2022-2023 school year, one of the instructional priorities was to create as many course teams as possible in the English Department

to increase the ability of teachers to collaboratively make instructional decisions and analyze student work. Figure 4.1 demonstrates the percentage of courses taught by more than one teacher in the English Department since the 2018-2019 school year.

Figure 4.1

Percentage of English Courses Taught by More Than One Teacher: Yancey Hills High School



Note. As extrapolated from Infinite Campus, Yancey Hills High School, 2018-2023.

In response to the district's strategic planning process during the 2019-2020 school year and ongoing professional development to increase student outcomes, district leadership emphasized teacher collaboration as a method to improve instructional practices. The administrative team at YHHS participated in district led professional learning to increase their capacity to support teacher collaboration through a book study and classroom observations with district leaders.

Beginning March 16, 2020, the Yancey Hills School District followed the governor's executive order to shelter in place for two weeks in response to the COVID-19 Pandemic. As

COVID-19 cases and death tolls increased, many schools across the country, including YHHS, finished the 2019-2020 school year remotely. YHHS teachers prioritized review and remediation of previously taught content in a remote environment for their students. Given the overwhelming nature of navigating teaching in a remote setting during a world-wide pandemic, teacher collaboration as a method to improve instructional practices failed to materialize in a significant way.

Beginning in the 2020-2021 school year, district instructional expectations included supporting students' social and emotional needs, incorporating engaging, standards-based activities that personalize learning, providing effective feedback on student work, and tailoring instruction based on analysis of assessment results. The Yancey School District provided families with a choice of two learning delivery models, in-person or remote. Depending on their specific needs, families could change their student's learning delivery model throughout the school year. Teachers at YHHS managed both remote (20%) and in-person (80%) learners for the duration of the 2020-2021 school year.

YHHS's schedule was adjusted to include a flexible Friday schedule, which allowed all students to attend school remotely or in-person each Friday. Teachers diligently worked to prioritize standards necessary for students to succeed in future courses, implement the district's COVID-19 safety protocols, and maintain contact with students using the remote learning delivery model. Most of their planning time was spent creating tailored lessons for remote learners and contacting students who were at home; therefore, the emphasis on collaborative planning dwindled.

At the opening of the 2021-2022 school year, students who had been successful in the remote learning platform were allowed to continue remote learning through a new district virtual

program. Following the Department of Public Health guidance, the district's COVID-19 protocols regarding contact tracing changed dramatically. Families were informed if their child was exposed to COVID-19 at school and were encouraged to follow the advice of their healthcare provider as whether to quarantine. In a community that had grown weary of COVID-19 protocols, most families decided to not quarantine, resulting in many more students being in person for classroom instruction. Teachers no longer balanced both in-person and remote learners; consequently, common planning time was more likely used by course teams to create and evaluate instructional strategies and student performance on assessments.

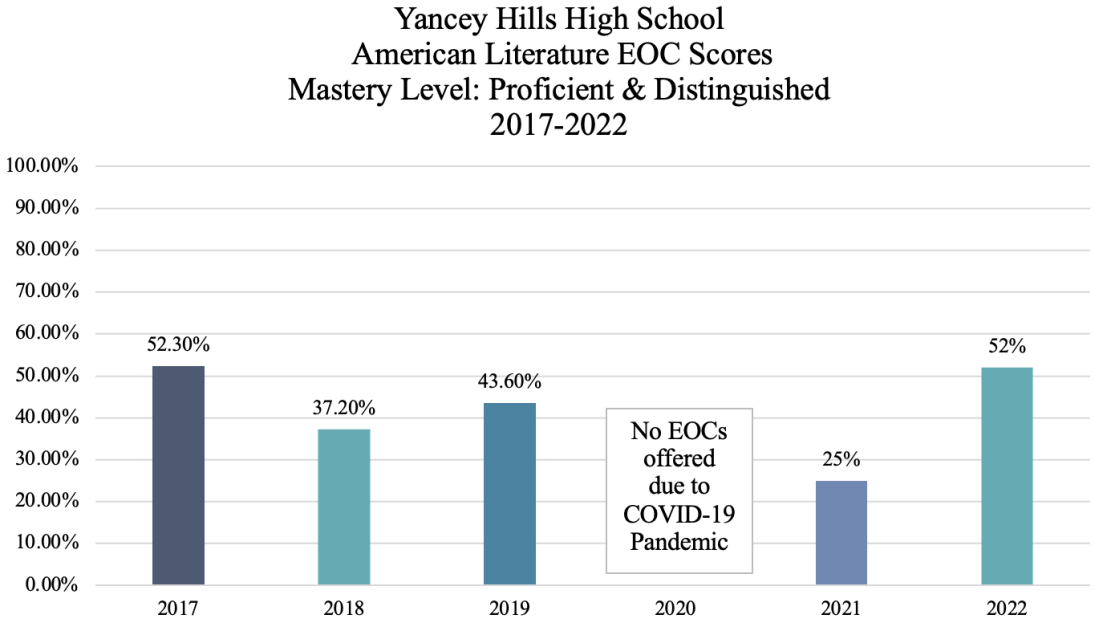
YHHS created course teams for some academic courses and provided the opportunity for most course teams to have common planning time three days a week. To assist teachers in meeting instructional expectations, English Course Teams were required to meet weekly. Furthermore, they participated in half-day release time four times a year to facilitate collaborative planning between the members of course teams and across grade levels in the English Department.

During the 2022-2023 school year, the master schedule intentionally prioritized collaboration as more English courses were taught by more than one teacher in the English Department and all English Course Teams had common planning three times each week. Additionally, district and building leaders emphasized using data to inform instruction. One of the attempts to restructure how data was analyzed was to reframe the analysis of EOC scores to look at trend data and to differentiate between students who were meeting GaDOE's definition of mastery of grade level standards. Previously, YHHS included scores in the developing range as meeting expectations of academic performance.

Reframing data analysis to include longitudinal data of student's performance in the distinguished and proficient categories helped teachers and leaders to be more reflective about the impact of classroom instructional practices in English classrooms. Since only 25% to 52% of YHHS students master grade level standards according to their performance on the American Literature End of Course Test, conversations began about how better to prepare students to demonstrate their knowledge of standards provided by the Georgia Department of Education. Figure 4.2 details student performance on the American Literature End of Course Test in the categories of Proficient and Distinguished, considered by the Georgia Department of Education to indicate mastery of grade level standards.

Figure 4.2

American Literature End of Course (EOC) Test Scores (Proficient and Distinguished): Yancey Hills High School



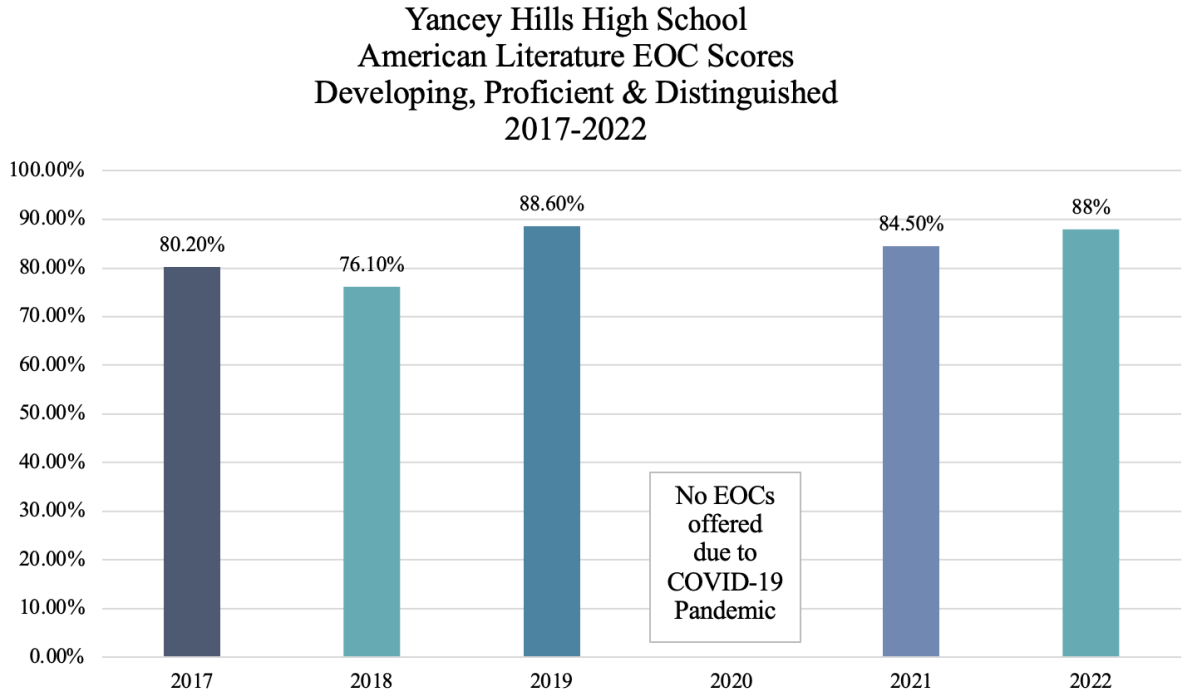
Note. As extrapolated from the Georgia Governor's Office of Student Achievement, 2017-2022.

Figure 4.3 illustrates student performance on the American Literature End of Course Test in the categories of Developing, Proficient and Distinguished. The Georgia Department of Education defines scores in the category of Developing as demonstrating partial proficiency in

the knowledge and skills specified in the standards. Additionally, students who score in this category will need additional academic support to ensure success in the next grade level and to be on track for college and career readiness.

Figure 4.3

American Literature End of Course (EOC) Test Scores (Developing, Proficient and Distinguished): *Yancey Hills High School*



Note. As extrapolated from the Georgia Governor's Office of Student Achievement, 2017-2022.

Teachers were provided the opportunity to look at longitudinal data and prioritize improving instructional practices to address lower than expected student performance. As a culture of collaboration was forming, teachers were more willing to analyze student data trends and what could be done to address lower performance levels. School and district leaders worked with teachers to define next steps, rather than blaming teachers for student performance on assessments. An integral component to studying the unlearning of habits of isolation and learning practices of collaboration at YHHS was the action research process. Perspectives were gathered from the Action Research Design Team (ARDT-Instructional Leadership Team) as they

developed and implemented interventions to increase collaboration. Additionally, perspectives were drawn from all six teachers in the English Department, configured into course teams based on the courses they taught.

Action Research Design Team (ARDT-Instructional Leadership Team)

The Action Research Design Team (ARDT-Instructional Leadership Team) was chosen for their leadership, instructional experiences, and varied roles within the school. During the first monthly meeting, the ARDT-Instructional Leadership Team participated in an initial orientation regarding the background of the study, action research, purpose of the study, research questions, and the roles of the action research teams (see Appendix D). The ARDT-Instructional Leadership Team worked to create and implement interventions to increase collaborative practices by unlearning habits of isolation.

The Action Research Design Team (ARDT-Instructional Leadership Team) included the primary researcher, the principal, the English Department Chair (Mrs. Cameron Waters), and an additional member of the English Department (Ms. Mary Thomas). The primary researcher served as an assistant principal for curriculum and instruction at YHHS and worked with other administrators to foster a school culture that encouraged collaborative practices. The principal served on the ARDT-Instructional Leadership Team because, as the school's instructional leader, he had been tasked by district leadership to use collaboration to improve instructional practices.

Mrs. Waters, the English Department Chair, is the primary instructional leader of the English Department. She began her teaching career 5 years ago after spending 25 years in the medical field. Although most of her experience with collaboration was beyond the confines of education, she contributed a unique perspective on developing interventions to encourage a collaborative culture at YHHS.

Ms. Mary Thomas, an English teacher, has more than 10 years of experience teaching high-school English courses. Additionally, she student taught at YHHS under the direction of another member of the English Department, who still teaches in the English Department at YHHS. After completing student teaching at YHHS, Ms. Thomas was hired and remained a member of the English Department. Table 4.1 lists the members of the Action Research Design Team (ARDT-Instructional Leadership Team) and their subsequent roles in this study.

Table 4.1

Action Research Design Team (ARDT-Instructional Leadership Team)

Team Member	Primary Role at Yancey Hills High School	Action Research Role
Primary Researcher	Assistant Principal, YHHS	Leads all research with the Action Research Design Team (ARDT-Instructional Leadership Team) for the purpose of analyzing data. Brings 20 years of teaching experience and 4 years of administrative experience.
Mr. Thomas Arlington	Principal, YHHS	Provides context and charge for school-wide instructional leadership, as well as perspective for action research. Brings 13 years of teaching experience and 7 years of administrative experience, including 4 as a principal.
Mrs. Cameron Waters	English Department Chair, YHHS	Provides 4 years of experience in teaching high school English courses. English Department Chair at YHHS. Also serves as a member of the 9th-Grade Lit/Comp and 10th-Grade Lit/Comp course teams

Team Member	Primary Role at Yancey Hills High School	Action Research Role
Ms. Mary Thomas	English Department Member, YHHS	Provides more than 10 years of teaching experience in high school English courses. Also serves as a member of the 10th-grade Literature/Comp, and Honors American Lit/Comp course teams

The Action Research Design Team (ARDT-Instructional Leadership Team) worked to develop interventions to help members of the Action Research Implementation Team (ARIT-English Course Teams) unlearn isolation practices that remained prevalent at Yancey Hills High School. Furthermore, the ARDT-Instructional Leadership Team worked with the ARIT-English Course Teams to develop interventions to promote collaboration.

Action Research Implementation Team: ARIT: English Course Teams

The Action Research Implementation Team was comprised of all six teachers in the English Department at YHHS. Members of the English Department were invited to participate in the study as they had varying degrees of experience and perceptions of the effectiveness of collaboration in increasing learning outcomes for students. Additionally, the members of the English Department had a previously established relationship of trust with the primary researcher.

The members of the English Department were configured into course teams based on the courses they taught. Given that YHHS is a small school, a unique feature of the Action Research Implementation Team is that two participants—Ms. Mary Thomas and Mrs. Cameron Waters—also served on the Action Research Design Team (ARDT-Instructional Leadership Team).

Teachers in the English Department had limited previous experience working collaboratively as a department and on course teams. Due to the department's small size, not all English courses have more than one teacher who teaches the course. Table 4.2 lists the members of the Action Research Implementation Team, the course team(s) on which they served, and their previous teaching experience.

Table 4.2

Action Research Implementation Team (ARIT-English Course Teams)

English Department Members	Course Team	Teaching Experience
Mrs. Amy Dobberstein	9th grade Lit/Comp Team Multicultural Lit Team	Provides experience from over 25 years of teaching high school English courses.
Ms. Jennifer Miller	9th grade Lit/Comp Team	Provides more than 20 years of experience in teaching high school English courses.
Mr. Rob Neighbors	10th grade Lit/Comp Team Honors Am. Lit/Comp Team Multicultural Lit Team	Provides more than 14 years of experience in teaching high school English courses.
Mrs. Hillary Rhodes	9th grade Lit/Comp Team	Provides more than 15 years of experience in teaching, 3 of which have been teaching high school English courses.
Ms. Mary Thomas	Honors Am. Lit/Comp Team	Provides more than 10 years of experience in teaching high-school English courses.
Mrs. Cameron Waters	9th grade Lit/Comp Team 10th grade Lit/Comp Team	English Department Chair at YHHS. Provides 4 years of experience in teaching high school English courses.

Members of the Action Research Implementation Team (ARIT-English Course Teams) identified which supports most facilitated unlearning habits of isolation and learning of practices of collaboration which guided the Action Research Design Team (ARDT-Instructional Leadership Team) as they developed interventions to intentionally foster a culture that encouraged teachers to unlearn habits of isolation and to learn practices of collaboration.

Findings from the Case

The purpose of this study was to examine the perspectives of an instructional leadership team as they fostered a culture that encouraged teachers to unlearn habits associated with isolation and to learn practices of collaboration. Specific interventions crafted to enhance the unlearning of habits of isolation and the learning of collaborative practices were implemented and analyzed.

The Action Research Design Team (ARDT-Instructional Leadership Team) developed and implemented interventions to increase collaboration with members of the English Department who served on the Action Research Implementation Team (ARIT-English Course Teams). The ARIT-English Course Teams identified which supports most facilitated unlearning habits of isolation and learning of practices of collaboration.

The data tells the story of how teachers must unlearn habits of isolation to learn collaborative practices. Findings for the study included:

1. The size of the school and the number of courses with one section (singleton) impeded collaboration since it was impossible to create course teams.
2. True collaboration is an endeavor that requires teachers to have the time to plan for instruction and analyze student work.

3. A culture of trust based on professional relationships is necessary for collaboration to occur.
4. Issues arising from the structure and schedules of schools can be mitigated by intentionally privileging collaborative practice.
5. Trust remains paramount to effective collaboration; however, when people feel micromanaged trust decreases.
6. Teachers began to view one another as instructional leaders, from whom they can learn.
7. Clear expectations and scaffolded support from instructional leaders buttress teacher collaborative practices.
8. Course teams characterized by trusting relationships erode habits of isolation.
9. Participating in collaborative planning increases teacher reflection and professional dialogue.

The findings of the action research cycles are detailed in the next sections and will illuminate these findings.

Action Research Cycle 1

Action Research Cycle 1 began in August of 2022, lasted approximately eight weeks, and concluded in late September of 2022. To enhance the examination of an instructional leadership team as they fostered a culture that encouraged teachers to unlearn habits of isolation and to learn practices of collaboration the first action research cycle included the following:

1. an orientation for the ARDT-Instructional Leadership Team;
2. individual interviews for members of the ARIT-English Course Teams;

3. a meeting with the ARDT-Instructional Leadership Team to analyze data from the individual interviews;
4. a professional learning exercise to promote team building; and,
5. an anonymous feedback questionnaire to assess the impact of professional learning

Orientation for Action Research Design Team (ARDT-Instructional Leadership Team)

After securing informed consent, the ADRT-Instructional Leadership Team met in August 2022 for an initial orientation meeting (see Appendix D). The purpose of the orientation meeting was to ensure that all members of the ARDT-Instructional Leadership Team understood the purpose of the study, how action research would guide the study, and the roles of the ARDT-Instructional Leadership Team and the researcher in the study. The meeting was conversational as the group discussed attempts to address isolation in the YHSD Strategic Plan and the YHHS School Improvement Plan. The researcher presented information on the purpose of action research and how the team would spiral through the cycles of action research using reflection and collaboration to guide the process.

Additionally, the ARDT-Instructional Leadership Team dissected the purpose of the study and how the research questions would direct our work. Finally, we reviewed the roles of the ARDT-Instructional Leadership Team to disaggregate and analyze the collected data and to develop and refine interventions based on the collected data. We also reviewed the roles of the primary researcher to provide data to highlight habits of isolation, facilitate brainstorming of possible interventions, implement and study agreed-upon interventions, and share data that highlighted the extent to which the interventions impacted unlearning habits of isolation and learning practices of collaboration. At the end of the orientation meeting, all members agreed to their role in the study.

Interviews for Action Research Implementation Team (ARIT-English Course Teams) #1

After informed consent was collected, the initial round of interviews for the ARIT-English Course Teams occurred in August 2022 following a semi-structured interview protocol (see Appendix E). All six English department members participated in the interviews, which were recorded using a transcription application. Each transcript was printed, and the researcher listened to each interview while correcting any transcription errors made by the application. The researcher then reread the transcripts and coded responses to the interview questions based on how the information related to the research questions identified in the study. Additionally, the interview transcripts used an inductive coding scheme to track the findings more systematically. Three overarching findings emerged throughout the initial interviews:

1. The size of the school and the number of courses with one section (singleton) impeded collaboration since it was impossible to create a course team.
2. True collaboration is an endeavor that requires teachers to have the time to plan for instruction and analyze student work.
3. A culture of trust based on professional relationships is necessary for collaboration to occur.

Four of the six teachers interviewed acknowledged that the size of the school, which significantly contributed to many courses only having one section of students, had historically impeded collaboration. One of the commonalities among the four teachers who acknowledged the number of singleton courses offered at YHHS was the length of employment at YHHS. All teachers who noted that the size of the student enrollment impacted the number of sections of a particular course, which subsequently impacted the ability to create collaborative course teams, have worked at YHHS for more than four years. In contrast, the two teachers that did not

mention how the number of singleton courses impacted the creation of course teams have worked at YHHS for less than two years. As student enrollment has increased at YHHS since 2018-2019, the number of sections of courses has increased, resulting in the ability to create more course teams.

Although several teachers acknowledged that the creation of course teams encouraged collaboration, Amy Dobberstein stressed the difficulty of once being the only teacher for a single course to now teaching the course with another teacher. Amy who characterized how long she had been working at YHHS by quipping "since God was a child," revealed how difficult the transition to teaching collaboratively had been for her.

> It's very hard to let go of the reins that you've been holding…It's really hard for you to get on board with how they do things, because you believe that you're correct. …You've been doing this long enough that this is just kind of what you do…Just the fact that everybody has been an island, and it's hard to, you know, add your island to somebody else's island.

Amy later emphasized that although collaboration had worked well for others, her transition to teaching a course in collaboration with another instructor remained challenging.

Rob Neighbors, a teacher who is new to YHHS this year, also acknowledged the difficulty in transitioning to teaching on a course team. Although he is new to YHHS, this is Rob's 4th year teaching. Previously, he had little experience teaching in an environment where teachers collaborated on instructional planning. Rob characterized his move to teaching collaboratively as a "dramatic adjustment." "It's been stressful…but stressful doesn't mean negative to me. It has actually made me a stronger teacher because I think we tend to get stuck in

our ways." Even though most of the teachers in the English Department observed that creating course teams increased collaboration, some experienced stress due to the change.

All six English teachers commented that having time to plan instruction and to analyze student work is imperative. During the 2022-2023 school year, all course teams had common planning three times a week, and expectations had been communicated that course teams must meet at least once a week. Mary Thomas provided an example of what she referred to as "true collaboration," requiring time. Mary provided a recent experience in the Honors American Literature Course Team writing narrative questions for an upcoming test. Although they began with some previously created questions, it took them 45 minutes to hone 3 questions that they eventually implemented in their unit assessment.

Cameron Waters mentioned the necessity of time to collaborate with the course team. She observed that even though the department is small, there was some intentionality regarding who was on what team. Cameron stated that although she primarily teaches 10th-grade literature, she also had a 9th-grade literature course, which helped to spark conversations about content expectations and skills through vertical collaboration. Jennifer Miller noted that not only do teachers need time to work on instructional planning for courses, but they also need opportunities for vertical alignment and longitudinal planning across the district to help increase student outcomes.

Hillary Rhodes reaffirmed the importance of time when she emphasized that "just having enough time for teachers to collaborate" was a significant challenge. Hillary has a unique position in the department as she is dually certified in Special Education and English. Hillary serves as the Special Education inclusion teacher for four of the six courses she teaches. Additionally, she teaches two 9th Grade Literature courses and is the English teacher. Given that

she needs to plan with the 9th-grade course team and work with regular education teachers to plan instruction for students receiving Special Education services in an inclusion setting, Hillary has significantly more planning to do with other teachers than any other teacher in the English Department.

All six interviewed English teachers also voiced that collaboration is more likely to occur in a supportive environment built on trusting relationships. Amy Dobberstein recognized the importance a trusting relationship played in collaboration when she asserted,

> You can't collaborate effectively with people that you don't know, or you don't like…It's really hard to say, I'm going to hand you all of this that I feel is really, really, really important when I don't trust you, or I don't think you're very good at what you do.

Hillary Rhodes corroborated Mrs. Dobberstein's view of the role that trust plays into working with other educators. Additionally, Hillary offered that when teachers understand it is more important to stay focused on student needs rather than getting credit for the instructional planning, students benefit from the work of collaboration.

Cameron Waters emphasized the importance of relationship-building outside of school hours. Her commitment to increasing trust among the department members is evident during her short time at YHHS. Cameron has organized dinners, holiday activities, and attending school functions together to foster a family atmosphere in the English Department. She believes that a family atmosphere helps students learn more and facilitates more effective professional conversations surrounding student learning.

Jennifer Miller provided insight into how navigating teaching students during the shelter-in-place requirements due to the COVID-19 pandemic increased trust among the department members.

> [W]e definitely had to become more reliant on each other because people got sick…I can give lots of examples of people who didn't have the benefits that I did. We met weekly and had discussions about kids…They were very helpful to make sure that we understood what was being communicated [from administration] because we didn't see anybody…I'm not saying we did it all well, but we did it together. That was the benefit [to teaching on a course team], whereas, if you were teaching a singleton, you just hoped for the best.

Specifically, Jennifer credited teachers participating in remote instruction during the COVID-19 pandemic as an important event in increasing trust and professional conversations regarding how to best meet student needs.

Action Research Design Team Meeting

In early September 2022, the ARDT-Instructional Leadership met to look at data from the interviews and to brainstorm possible interventions to support the unlearning habits of isolation and the learning of practices of collaboration. The meeting lasted almost two hours as the team poured over the data gleaned from the first round of interviews. Noting that those interviewed recognized trust as a necessary component to facilitate collaboration, the ARDT-Instructional Leadership Team decided that creating a professional learning opportunity to enhance trust in professional relationships in the English Department would be most appropriate. The ARDT-Instructional Leadership Team settled on using Don Clifton's book *Strengths Finder 2.0* in partnership with Gallup Press to help one another learn more about how they approach work.

Intervention for Research Cycle 1

The first intervention included a professional learning experience conducted by Laura Applegate, the director of a regional educational service association specializing in professional

learning for educators. Laura has more than 30 years of experience in education as a teacher, building and district leader, and director of professional learning throughout Georgia. First, all members of the ARDT-Instructional Leadership Team and ARIT-English Course Teams completed the CliftonStrengths® assessment and submitted their results to Laura to help her prepare a tailored professional learning experience for the group. All members of the ARDT-Instructional Leadership Team and the ARIT-English Course Teams participated in the professional learning experience. Throughout the professional learning experience, all participants were asked to engage with Laura and with one another to learn more about their strengths and how those strengths impact how they approach their work. The session promoted open dialogue among the participants.

The researcher noted in the journal she kept during the professional learning activity that the teachers were more open and willing to discuss their personal traits, how they approached work, and frustrations they had experienced in work environments than the researcher had previously witnessed. The conversation was lively. The participants willingly engaged with Laura Applegate, the facilitator, and with one another. Participants often encouraged one another to reveal information about themselves to help the group have insight into how each participant felt when their strengths weren't recognized by their co-workers. Additionally, during subsequent interviews with members of the ARIT-English Course Teams, they all noted how much they learned about themselves and one another through this team building activity.

Subsequently, each participant was asked to complete an anonymous questionnaire (see Appendix G) which detailed their learning from the experience. All participants stated that they learned something about themselves and one another regarding how they approach their work.

Additionally, when asked about what they needed from their team, commonalities among the answers included to “be heard,” “trust,” “support,” and “clear communication.”

Unexpected Collaborative Practices

The purpose of this study was to examine the perspectives of an instructional leadership team as they fostered a culture that encouraged teachers to unlearn habits associated with isolation and to learn practices of collaboration. An important insight that emerged during the study was that teachers typically spent their time on what they perceive to be valued by school administrators. The school’s administration team analyzed how teachers were being asked to spend extended collaborative planning time and realized that priority had been placed on logistical, rather than instructional goals.

To support unlearning habits of isolation and learning practices of collaboration, school administrators adjusted expectations of the work teachers undertook during half-day release time (extended collaborative planning). Although the English Department had been provided extended collaborative planning time during the previous school year, their work during this time was primarily logistical, rather than instructional. During the 2021-2022 school year the department used the extended collaborative planning time for logistical concerns like cleaning out the book room, creating an inventory of departmentally owned novels, collecting and finalizing budget requests, and working together to learn a new computer-based assessment program.

However, for the 2022-2023 school year, an agenda for the first part of extended collaborative planning time was provided to English Department which emphasized using the time for instructional goals. The English department relished the time and emphasis that school administration placed on using the extended collaborative planning for instructional goals.

During the extended collaborative planning time in late August of 2022, the English Department used their time to vertically plan writing instruction and the collection of longitudinal data on student performance on writing assessments. Additionally, the English Department aligned their personal and professional goals, as required by GaDOE, to instructional goals prioritized in the School Improvement Plan. Finally, they used the time to refine writing rubrics and create cohesive writing instruction and expectation across required English courses.

Action Research Cycle 2

Action Research Cycle 2, which began in October of 2022, lasted approximately 10 weeks and concluded in mid-December 2022. To trace how instructional leaders could foster a culture to facilitate unlearning habits of isolation and learning practices of collaboration, the second research cycle utilized the following:

1. ARDT-Instructional Leadership Team Meeting
2. individual interviews for members of the ARIT-English Course Teams;
3. an intervention of using meeting agendas to guide collaborative course team meetings;
4. anonymous feedback questionnaire which allowed teachers to provide information on the impact of agendas during collaborative meetings;
5. a final round of individual interviews for members of the ARIT-English Course Teams; and,
6. a focus group of the ARDT-Instructional Leadership Team at the conclusion of the study

Action Research Design Team Meeting

In October 2022, the ARDT-Instructional Leadership Team met to look at the data from the individual interviews and collaborative meeting agendas to deliberate on what support may be most helpful to unlearning habits of isolation and increasing collaborative practice. After a 30-minute meeting, the Action Research Design Team concluded that asking the ARIT-English Course Teams to keep more formal agendas of their collaborative course team meetings may help to increase the intentionality of collaborative decision making; thus, facilitating the unlearning of habits of isolation and practices of collaboration. It was noted that two of the members of the ARIT-English Course Teams in their individual interviews had specifically requested more detailed requirements for collaborative meeting agendas.

Interviews for Action Research Implementation Team (ARIT-English Course Teams) #2

A second round of individual interviews of members of the ARIT-English Course Teams occurred in October 2022. The second round of interviews followed a semi-structured interview protocol (see Appendix E). All six English department members participated in the interviews, which were recorded using a transcription application. After each transcript was printed, the researcher listened to each interview while correcting any transcription errors made by the application. The researcher then reread and coded the transcripts by how the responses informed the three research questions identified in the study. Once the interviews were deductively coded by research question, the researcher then used a systematic inductive coding scheme to trace emerging patterns in the findings. In the second round of individual interviews, three prominent patterns emerged:

1. Issues arising from the structure and schedules of schools can be mitigated by intentionally prioritizing collaborative practice.

2. Trust remains paramount to effective collaboration; however, when people feel micromanaged trust decreases.
3. Teachers began to view one another as instructional leaders, from whom they can learn.

One of the findings which emerged from the second round of interviews challenged a pervasive pattern in the first round of interviews. In the first round of interviews participants consistently mentioned that the small size of the school and the number of courses that had one section (singleton) prevented the creation of course teams, which impeded collaboration. However, in the second round of interviews, participants recognized that numerous steps had been taken at YHHS to prioritize collaboration when courses were scheduled for the 2022-2023 school year.

Specifically, Amy Dobberstein declared "I would say that we're doing a much better job of not teaching in isolation. There are at least two people teaching the same course except for some honors courses and AP Literature." She also predicted that if the collaborative teams established for the 2022-2023 school year could work together again in the 2023-2024 school year, it would help to promote more effective professional working relationships. Amy indicated that it takes time to learn one another's strengths and approaches to task management. Consequently, knowledge of one's teammates helps to build trust, which in turn leads to more effective collaboration. When asked what needed to happen next to promote collaboration, she retorted:

> I think right now it's back off and let us do it because for some of us this is so new. I've never had anybody to collaborate with [in Multicultural Literature], so it's very new. I just need to keep my groove and figure it out.

More than any other participant, Amy acknowledged how difficult unlearning habits of isolation and learning practices of collaboration had been for her. Although she emphasized the difficulty of making her teaching practices public, she also acknowledged that collaboration helped her to try new instructional strategies from which her students benefitted.

Mary Thomas also remarked how the master schedule had been crafted to promote collaboration for course teams. She commented that although the master schedule will "ebb and flow based off the student population" if teachers value collaboration they will find ways to collaborate. In addition, Mary remarked that the English Department was more likely to collaborate due to a common planning period three times a week and extended collaborative planning (half-day release time four times a year to facilitate collaborative planning between the members of course teams and across grade levels in each department). Furthermore, Mary observed that the decision to move American Literature to the 11th grade, when students also take United States History, also increased cross-curricular collaboration between those subjects.

Lastly, Mary mentioned that the composition of the course teams, which intentionally placed a teacher from the grade level above on collaborative course teams created more opportunities for vertical collaboration. Although these structural changes were in place when the initial round of interviews were conducted, teachers focused on the number of singleton courses which prevented collaboration. However, in the second round of interviews, teachers noted several opportunities created to increase collaboration.

Another finding which appeared throughout the second round of interviews was the construct of trust remaining paramount to effective collaboration; however, the teachers noted that when people feel micromanaged, trust erodes. Amy Dobberstein remarked that at times district initiatives to use specific programs have an unintended consequence of causing teachers

to feel as though their professional judgment is undermined, thereby eroding trust. Mary Thomas stressed that a collaborative culture cannot be maintained "if teacher voices are ignored". Jennifer Miller emphasized two important metrics to measure trust in schools. First, when administrators set expectations, but allow teachers to use their professional judgement to decide how to best meet those expectations. Secondly, when educators view student learning as everyone's success and a lack of student learning as everyone's failure.

Hillary Rhodes recounted a previous place of employment where she felt micromanaged. When asked what happened when administrators micromanage teachers, Hillary claimed that it "definitely undermined collaboration" and "made me find a somewhere else to work." Additionally, Hillary's observation corroborated Jennifer's view of allowing teachers to exercise professional judgement and recommended administrators provide clear expectations and "allow teachers to be professionals" and decide how to meet those expectations.

Similarly, Rob Neighbors reaffirmed Hargreaves' (2019) concept of "contrived congeniality" when he proposed that no matter how much administrators attempt to micromanage collaboration, teachers will only effectively collaborate when they are working in a trusting environment that values collaboration. Rob asserted,

> if we find usefulness in it [collaboration], then we will find a way to do it regardless of if we have the time or not. If we don't find the time, then we're going to say we did, when we really didn't. It's the buy-in…[Collaboration] has been a dramatic wakeup call [for me]. That's not a negative, it's a positive. It makes me a better teacher, but it also puts me out of my comfort zone, where I've done something for so long and I've seen really good results. Now I'm tasked with the premise that I need to get buy-in from other people.

More than any other department member, Rob expressed concern that teachers' professional judgment should be honored by building and district leaders. Each time he conveyed his apprehension regarding a lack of teacher autonomy, he recounted an experience from previous work environments where he witnessed what he believed to be de-professionalization of teachers. His initial apprehension toward collaboration was mitigated over time as his trust of his current school administrators and department members increased.

A third finding that emerged during the second round of interviews was that all six members of the English Department expressed their view of their team members as instructional leaders from whom they can learn. Mary Thomas celebrated the ability of learning from one another when she voiced "you can learn from one another because we are all knowledgeable. We can achieve greatness quicker when we combine our knowledge, rather than just me trying to figure it out." Jennifer Miller recounted that it is important to learn from other teachers regarding the effectiveness of instructional strategies previously used. She noted that when other teachers articulate that students you taught didn't master the content or skill that you attempted to teach, it should be a learning experience for you.

> It's a light bulb in my head going, so somehow last year I didn't do as great with this as I should have, for this particular group of students. Maybe I should focus on this [skill or content] a little more with my current group of students. Her (the student's next teacher) success is my success. So instead of thinking, I taught it so they should know it…it's that they didn't master it. It just means that whatever method to teach them wasn't widely effective.

When asked why some teachers may view their peers' expression of students not mastering a

specific skill or concept as an attack on the student's previous teachers teaching capacity, Jennifer asserted that when you work as a team help students learn, it takes away some of the pressure that individual teachers have to "get everything right."

Hillary Rhodes also commented that she learned from others because collaboration helped the course teams to "understand what we're doing and what we're supposed to be doing." Amy Dobberstein emphasized how much she has learned from one of her teammates. "I'm learning from someone who is much more technologically savvy than I am. He teaches me something new all the time…It's been really eye opening. I've learned all kinds of stuff that I've never used before." Cameron Waters confirmed Amy's view of learning from team members, and she emphasized:

> it doesn't matter who we are collaborating with…if we consider all of us instructional leaders. We need to be willing to learn from everyone. Otherwise, it just puts us right back into islands. Maybe not a deserted island, but it still puts us on an island. We have to build those bridges. We have to be able and willing to create bridges with people to learn from them.

Cameron credits her experience in the medical field prior to entering the teaching profession as having a profound impact on her view of collaboration. Her previous experiences with collaboration, which she deemed as positive, thoroughly influence how she approaches collaborative practice in her work.

Although she had only been teaching at Yancey Hills High School for one year, she was asked by the principal to serve as the chair for the English Department for the 2022-2023 school year. The principal's commitment to using collaboration as a method to improve instructional practices impacted his decision to ask Mrs. Waters to lead the English Department as they

unlearned habits of isolation and learned practices of collaboration. Mrs. Waters also served as a member of the ARDT-Instructional Leadership Team and was instrumental in helping to devise the intervention for second research cycle. She believed that having course teams follow teacher created agendas would help teachers to be able to trace their collaborative work more effectively.

Intervention for Research Cycle 2

The members of the ARIT-English course teams emphasized it was important for expectations to be clearly communicated, but how to meet the expectations should remain relegated to the professional judgment of teachers. Therefore, the ARDT-Instructional Leadership Team decided to clearly communicate that agendas should be created and maintained in a central location for all collaborative course team meetings. It was intentionally communicated that agendas for the collaborative course team meetings could be kept either electronically or by hand. Additionally, collaborative course team agendas should be uploaded to the departmental Google Classroom.

As the researcher attended collaborative course team meetings and monitored the collaborative course team agendas uploaded to the departmental Google Classroom, the following observations were recorded by the researcher in the researcher's journal:

1. Collaborative course teams with three or more teachers were most likely to keep more formal agendas when compared to content-teams with two teachers.
2. Collaborative course teams with formal agendas created prior to the collaborative meeting were more likely to include analysis of student work when compared to course teams which created the agenda during or after the meeting.
3. Collaborative course teams devote most of their time discussing either course pacing or the most appropriate instructional strategies to use.

4. Collaborative course team meetings include discussions of instructional strategies which are tied to larger school improvement goals (valuing student voice/choice, teacher clarity, increased rigor, effective feedback, collaborative analysis of student performance data).

In November 2022, the researcher asked members of the ARIT (English Course Teams) to complete an anonymous feedback questionnaire regarding the use of agendas for their course team meetings (see Appendix H). Participants were asked to identify which course team they referenced when completing the questionnaire; however, no individual identifying information was collected. Participants were able to complete a questionnaire for each collaborative course team of which they were a member.

Responses from the feedback questionnaire revealed two correlations. First, course teams which crafted agendas prior to the course team meetings were more likely to meet weekly. Secondly, teams who identified using agendas increased productivity during collaborative course team meetings were more likely to create agendas prior to the meeting and meet more consistently. Lastly, only one participant noted that creating and using an agenda did not have an impact on the productivity of the collaborative course team meetings.

Interviews for Action Research Implementation Team (ARIT-English Course Teams) #3

The final round of semi-structured interviews (see Appendix E) of the ARIT-English Course Teams occurred in December 2022. All six English department members participated in the interviews, which were recorded using a transcription application. Each transcript was printed, and the researcher listened to each interview while correcting any transcription errors made by the application. The researcher then reread the transcripts and deductively coded responses to the interview questions based on how the information related to the research

questions identified in the study. Additionally, the researcher used an inductive coding scheme to trace the findings more systematically. Three overarching findings emerged throughout the interviews:

1. Clear expectations and scaffolded support from instructional leaders buttress teacher collaborative practices.
2. Course teams characterized by trusting relationships erode habits of isolation.
3. Participating in collaborative planning increases teacher reflection and professional dialogue.

All six teachers in the English Department noted that to help increase collaborative practices, instructional leaders could either provide clear expectations or scaffold support of those expectations. As Amy Dobberstein reflected on what actions instructional leaders have taken to support collaborative practices, she noted that she would prefer the specificity of a checklist of items to be included in course team agendas. Even when the researcher attempted to assuage her concern by stating "the concept of collaboration is rooted in the idea that teachers are professionals who have vast amounts of knowledge … and that if you work together, professional learning will increase," Amy countered with "if there is something we have to do…I just want to make sure that I've done it right." Although Amy acknowledged that she believed instructional leaders should honor teacher professionalism, she remained concerned that the agendas of the Multicultural Literature course team were not meeting expectations.

Rob Neighbors, the other member of the Multicultural Literature course team, holds a different view on the clarity of expectations set by instructional leaders regarding collaboration at Yancey Hills High School. Although Rob has 14 years of experience teaching, he is in his first year at Yancey Hills High School. He relayed that he believed the expectations for collaboration

were clearly communicated prior to him beginning teaching at YHHS. When he investigated what the school culture was like before he interviewed for the job, he found that collaborating with course team members was an expectation. Before the school year started, the English Department went out to dinner as a team-building activity. Rob emphasized how effectively the members of the English Department communicated that collaboration was an expectation set forth by both administration and the members of the English Department. During his final interview, Rob continually stressed the importance of instructional leaders providing clear expectations but allowing teachers to meet those expectations in a manner that honored teachers' professional decision-making capacity and autonomy.

The researcher noted in her journal her perception of the seeming difference in Amy Dobberstein and Rob Neighbors views of expectations regarding collaboration. First, Amy and Rob have different personalities. From the researcher's perspective, it is very important to Amy that her work meets expectations, and she thrives in an environment where her supervisors provide her with consistent positive feedback. On the other hand, Rob has vocalized his confidence in his instructional practices. Additionally, he has expressed his belief that school administration will be forthright with him if they have concerns regarding his level of meeting expectations.

Secondly, Amy and Rob have different experiences with previous administrators. Amy often recounted stories of what she refers to as a "gotcha" culture with former administration teams, whereas Rob conveys more positive interactions with his previous administrators. Although both members of the Multicultural Literature course team had similar expectations provided to them, it is important to note their individual differences in perceptions. Instructional

leaders must provide the necessary scaffolding and support to teachers based on their individual needs.

Mary Thomas emphasized that the Strengths Finder assessment allowed her to meet the expectation of collaboration due more easily to her increased understanding of how her peers approach their work. She commented that:

> My new understanding of them, even their quirks, because of Strength's Finder helps give reason behind [their actions]. So, to me, that makes it [their quirks] less annoying. I still may not like their behavior, but I'm more tolerant because I know why. Working together is like a puzzle. Strength's Finder is just one-way of decoding that puzzle and working together more efficiently.

Again, a lesson to be learned is that understanding how people approach work helps instructional leaders to provide teachers with the necessary scaffolding and support based on their individual needs.

A second finding that emerged during the final round of interviews was that course teams whose trusting relationships allowed for honest dialogue eschewed habits of isolation. Jennifer Miller expressed her frustration when members of a course team didn't follow through with mutually agreed upon expectations. Just before her third interview, Jennifer discovered that two members of her course team were giving a different midterm to their students than what had been agreed upon in the course team meeting.

Jennifer referred to those who "grin and nod through the planning process" as "bobbleheads" who "defeat the purpose of quality bonding time [team building activities] when they don't implement mutually agreed upon decisions." Although she was frustrated with their actions, Jennifer later proposed that because there were only six members of the English

Department and they considered each other friends, they were probably more hesitant to express dissention than if they worked in a much larger department where the members did not view themselves as friends.

Cameron Waters reaffirmed Jennifer Miller's view that honest conversations built on trust could help to mitigate "personalities." She acknowledged:

> [w]hen you have all those personalities, and you are trying to work on a course team, it can be great because you get a lot of variety, but it can be difficult when you have teachers who want to keep it the way they have always done it.

Cameron further explained that building trusting relationships was part of a teacher's professional duty so that open, honest professional dialogue could occur to help teachers continue to grow and to hone their teaching skills.

Amy Dobberstein noted that developing trusting relationships where professionals could feel comfortable speaking to one another honestly takes time. Amy asserted that it took some time for her to trust someone enough to be "vulnerable" enough to admit that she was not perfect and that she could use some guidance in how to teach a concept or a skill better. Amy also advised that course teams comprised of groups of people that had not worked together very much, should have the opportunity to work together again the following school year. She reflected that her level of trust had increased a substantially over the past few months and she believed that as trust grows, more open and honest conversations can occur.

A third commonality in the findings of the final round of interviews was that participating in collaborative planning increases teacher reflection and professional dialogue. Jennifer Miller noted that the experience in collaborative planning facilitated more intentional conversations regarding student performance. One of the impacts that the COVID-19 Pandemic had on students

was a transition to remote, instead of face-to-face instruction. Educators are now tasked with identifying and mitigating learning gaps for students. Jennifer has often noted the role that collaboration can play in helping to identify students lacking content knowledge and underdeveloped skills. One of the benefits of collaborative planning is the possibility of analyzing student performance on assessments and tailoring future instruction based on those results.

Hillary Rhodes credits participating in collaborative planning with increasing her intentionality in teaching writing. She noted that writing instruction was more aligned across grade levels which helped students to be more successful in meeting writing expectations because "we take them step by step through the writing process."

Rob Neighbors expressed that one of the most profound changes that collaborative planning had on his instruction was the opportunity to collaboratively create summative assessments. His previous teaching experiences never provided the opportunity for him to work with peers on creating summative student assessments. He noted that the opportunity to create and analyze assessments helped to more effectively pair content and skills required by GaDOE standards for English courses and allowed increased analysis of appropriate levels of rigor for instruction and assessment.

Cameron Waters reaffirmed that participating in collaborative planning increased reflection and professional dialogue as she asserted:

> you've had the opportunity to run through it [teaching practices]. We tell our students to run their essays through multiple drafts, let someone else proof it. That's basically what we are doing when we are collaborating…We're creating it together. It's not just my way of thinking. There are other teachers saying, what about this or that?

Cameron's reflection on collaborative planning is that instructional practices are elevated because teachers provide feedback to one another which helps to refine their collective work.

Focus Group (ARDT-Instructional Design Team)

The ARDT-Instructional Leadership Team participated in a focus group at the end of the study which provided the opportunity to reflect on the extent to which the interventions addressed challenges to collaborative practice and to discuss possible implications for instructional leaders as they continue to encourage the unlearning of habits of isolation and the learning of practices of collaboration. The interview protocol is provided in Appendix F.

Although when interviewed, several teachers in the English Department commented that administrators cannot force collaboration, the ARDT-Instructional Leadership Team noted the important role instructional leaders at YHHS played in encouraging collaboration as a method of improving instructional strategies. All members agreed that having ARDT-Instructional Leadership Team meetings helped to maintain a consistent focus on collaborative practice, which was different from other school and district initiatives they had previously experienced.

Challenges to unlearning habits of isolation and learning collaborative practice at YHHS include constraints on the master schedule that prevents more than one teacher teaching a course, teacher commitment to collaboration, and the amount of time it takes to collaboratively design assessments and learning activities. Of note was a discussion surrounding teacher perception of how long it takes to collaboratively plan. One of the agreed upon analyses from the group was that collaboration had helped teachers more effectively incorporate a backwards design model, plan personalized and engaging lessons that valued student voice and choice, and create assessments aligned to the rigor of the standards. Given these elements of lesson design were not widely incorporated into lesson planning prior to the 2022-2023 school year, the ARDT-

Instructional Leadership Team supposed teachers may be conflating the time it takes to collaboratively plan with elements of lesson design that take time to incorporate, whether the planning is orchestrated by an individual or a team.

The ARDT-Instructional Leadership Team agreed that school culture which privileges continuous learning and honors teacher professionalism creates a culture of trust that encourages collaboration. Trust takes time to develop and leader actions which allow for the growth of trust encourage collaborative practice. Conversely, instructional leader actions which micromanage collaborative planning undermine trust and have the unexpected consequence of teachers spending time trying to prove that they met expectations, which they are actively working to not meet.

Collaborative planning encouraged teachers to intentionally plan for the courses they taught by aligning assessments and learning activities to the rigor of the standards. Teachers were more willing to create opportunities for students to engage in personalized learning activities. The teacher view of collaboration evolved over the course of the study to include not only course team collaboration, but also vertical, departmental, cross-curricular, special education co-teaching, and grade level collaboration. The ARDT-Instructional Leadership Team credited allowing teachers to have a voice in course team collaboration created a positive experience with collaboration. Therefore, teachers were more willing to work with other groups at YHHS to improve student learning.

A consistent view of collaboration was its ability to help mitigate student learning gaps caused in part by the impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic. Although several members of the ARDT-Instructional Leadership Team expressed fatigue with discussing the implications of the COVID-19 Pandemic. There seems to be a growing consensus among educators that students are

using their experiences with the COVID-19 Pandemic to justify not meeting expectations. A discussion did occur regarding state and national test scores, which indicate that students have more gaps in their content knowledge and skill development than prior to the COVID-19 Pandemic. Although the conversation surrounding how the COVID-19 Pandemic impacted collaborative practices was limited, it served as a reminder that the full extent of the implication of the COVID-19 Pandemic on students and educators is not fully understood.

Unexpected Collaborative Practices

The pattern of using extended collaborative planning to focus on instructional collaboration rather than logistical goals continued during the English Department's extended collaborative planning in October of 2022. The English Department spent most of their allotted time discussing and amassing evidence of how their work supported the instructional goals of the School Improvement Plan which included:

1. Using effective and engaging instructional strategies that value student voice and choice.
2. Incorporating Teacher Clarity/Clear and Compelling Product Standards on curriculum maps, rubrics, unit guides, and assignments/assessments.
3. Creating lessons that reflect the expected rigor from the GaDOE standards, are inviting, product-focused while valuing student voice/choice in PBL, labs, document analysis, speaking /listening, performances, service learning, and/or authentic real-world tasks that reflect deeper learning.
4. Supporting effective feedback to increase student sills and confidence/affirmation.
5. Collaboratively analyzing student data to improve student performance.

The researcher noted the profound change of how the members of the English Department chose to spend their allotted time. Instead of dividing and conquering the work to work in isolation, they chose to collaboratively work to provide examples of the requested evidence. They also engaged in professional dialogue of how the collective work of the department, rather than individual teachers, supported the school's instructional goals. Additionally, provocative conversations regarding vertically aligning expectations for student writing ensued.

Another example of unexpected collaboration occurred during an English department meeting in November of 2022. The primary item on the agenda was to reach a consensus of which academic elective the English Department would like to add to the 2023-2024 school year. Although administration had asked for rationale and funding implications of adding a new course offering, members of the department quickly worked together to check the current novel inventory, pull possible course offerings from GaDOE, look up GaDOE standards for academic electives, and discuss how the course would be "departmentally owned." The teachers quickly provided ideas about possible courses and unit structures. The consensus of the discussion was that the new academic elective would need to align with departmental goals for reading and writing.

The researcher noted in her journal the marked change in the type of discussion that occurred from previous discussions about new courses from prior years. Previously, possibilities of adding new courses centered around who would teach the course and that person would be tasked with working in isolation to complete the required preparation for the new course. From the researcher's perspective there was a stark contrast in the focus and tenor of the discussion

regarding the possibility of adding a new academic elective to the English Department's course offerings in comparison to prior conversations in previous years.

Chapter Summary

The purpose of this study was to examine the perspectives of an instructional leadership team as they fostered a culture that encouraged teachers to unlearn habits associated with isolation and to learn practices of collaboration. Perspectives were gathered in two complementary ways. First, views from the instructional team were compiled as they developed and implemented interventions to increase collaboration with this group of teachers. Secondly, perspectives were drawn from six English teachers configured into course teams based on the courses they taught. Members of the course teams identified which supports most facilitated unlearning habits of isolation and learning of practices of collaboration.

To facilitate a more comprehensive picture, the findings from this case study were presented through two action research cycles and from the perspectives of the Action Research Design Team (ARDT-Instructional Leadership Team) and the Action Research Implementation Team (ARIT-English Course Teams). The Action Research Design Team (ARDT-Instructional Leadership Team) was comprised of the principal, assistant principal, English Department Chair, and an additional English teacher who worked with members of the Action Research Implementation Team (ARIT-English Course Teams) to unlearn habits of isolation and to increase collaborative practices. The ARIT-English Course Teams identified the most effective supports that facilitated unlearning habits of isolation and learning of practices of collaboration

Data from members of the ARIT-English Course Teams were collected and analyzed to provide direction for the ARDT-Instructional Leadership Team to create interventions based on scholarly literature. The research cycle provided time for reflection for the ARDT-Instructional

Leadership Team and the ARIT-English Course Teams based on the results of implemented interventions. The findings reported in this chapter led to the development of emerging themes. The thematic findings are addressed in the next chapter as they relate to the purpose of the study, the research questions, the logic model, and the theoretical framework.

CHAPTER 5

ANALYSES OF THEMES FROM THE ACTION RESEARCH CASE

Qualitative research involves the researcher serving as the instrument of analysis, which may result in researcher bias unduly influencing the results. Thus, by adhering to coding and theme identification systems, researcher bias is reduced, trustworthiness is improved, and data triangulation is enhanced, thus strengthening the validity and reliability of the study (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019; Nowell et al., 2017; Williams & Moser, 2019). Using a thematic analysis structure reflects the high standards of ethical conduct for conveying research findings and interpretations (Peel, 2020). The researcher used an adaptation of Nowell et al.'s. (2017) phases of thematic analysis and establishing trustworthiness as a guide. The phases of thematic analysis included:

Phase 1: Familiarizing yourself with the data

Phase 2: Generating Initial Codes

Phase 3: Searching for Themes

Phase 4: Reviewing Themes

Phase 5: Defining and Naming Themes

Phase 6: Producing the Report

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine the perspectives of an instructional leadership team as they fostered a culture that encouraged teachers to unlearn habits associated with isolation and to learn practices of collaboration.

Research Questions

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

1. In what ways can instructional leaders support the unlearning of isolation by increasing collaborative practices in one semi-rural high school?
2. How can instructional leaders foster a culture that uses collaborative planning to make teaching practices public in one semi-rural high school?
3. To what extent does participating in collaborative planning impact teacher practices in one semi-rural high school?

Since isolation was deeply embedded into the culture of Yancey Hills High School, the isolation was deeply embedded into the culture of Yancey Hills High School, the theory of unlearning helped guide this study. The instructional leadership team worked with teachers to promote collaboration as a tool for improving instructional practices. The theory of unlearning asserts that organizations must first discard obsolete or misleading knowledge to create new understanding (Hedberg, 1981). The theoretical framework that guided the study broadly encompassed four types of interventions (parsing new practices into little steps, reducing the influence of outdated knowledge, embedding new practices in daily work, and creating feedback structures to improve practices). The theoretical framework assisted the ARIT-English Course Teams in unlearning isolation and learning collaborative teaching practices (Grisold et al., 2020).

This study, which examined instructional leadership in cycles of action research focused on unlearning habits of isolation and learning collaborative practices in a cycle of continuous improvement. Continuous improvement is a defined process that addresses specific problems in real contexts by engaging in systematic inquiry to improve procedures, policies, and practices

(Wang & Fabillar, 2019). The Plan-Do-Reflect-Adjust cycle depicted in Figure 5.2 provided a specific structure for the instructional leadership team to define the problem of isolation, implement interventions to unlearn isolation and promote collaboration, reflect on the gathered data, and adjust interventions based on feedback from the ARIT-English Course Teams (Bryk, 2020; Bryk et al., 2011; Hill et al., 2022).

Two action research cycles were completed in the fall semester of the 2022-2023 school year at Yancey Hills High School. The action research study involved instructional leaders who worked to foster a culture that encouraged teachers to unlearn habits associated with isolation and to learn practices of collaboration. The emerging themes and analysis relate to the purpose of the study, the research questions, the logic model and the theoretical framework. This chapter presents the findings and themes that emerged from data collection throughout the action research cycles.

The findings from the two research cycles were identified and explored in Chapter 4. The findings were analyzed through a systemic coding scheme of the collected data. The coding was deductively analyzed through the lens of the research questions and then inductively analyzed to construct meaning. The researcher's immersion in the study allowed for co-constructing meaning surrounding unlearning habits of isolation and learning practices of collaboration. The descriptive case study methodology provided an opportunity to explore how an instructional team fostered a culture that encouraged teachers to unlearn habits associated with isolation and to learn collaboration practices.

The data collected through the observations of Action Research Design Team (ARDT-Instructional Leadership Team) meetings, collaborative course team meetings, reflections on interviews, and reflections on data analysis served as a foundation for constructing meaning and

the subsequent rich description (Stringer, 2014). Qualitative research acknowledges the dual and complicated role of the researcher as participant and observer (Merriam & Grenier, 2019). However, observations provided a path to creating meaning surrounding the extent to which the interventions crafted by the Action Research Design Team (ARDT-Instructional Leadership Team) facilitated the unlearning of habits of isolation and the learning of collaborative practice.

A summary of the emergent themes connected to the research questions is presented in Table 5.1.

Table 5.1

Summary of Research Questions Connected to Findings and Themes

Research Questions	Findings	Themes
RQ1 In what ways can instructional leaders support the unlearning of isolation by increasing collaborative practices in one semi-rural high school?	• The size of the school and the number of courses with one section (singleton) impeded collaboration, since it was impossible to create course teams. • True collaboration is an endeavor that requires teachers to have the time to plan for instruction and analyze student work. • Issues arising from the structure and schedules of schools can be mitigated by intentionally privileging collaborative practice. • Clear expectations and scaffolded support from instructional leaders buttress teacher collaborative practice.	• Leader actions, including facilitating time to collaborate during the school day and providing clear expectations impacted teachers' attitude and approach toward collaboration.
RQ2 How can instructional leaders foster a culture that uses collaborative planning to make teaching practices public in one semi-rural high school?	• A culture of trust based on professional relationships is necessary for collaboration to occur. • Trust remains paramount to effective collaboration; however, when people feel micromanaged trust decreases. • Course teams characterized by trusting relationships erode habits of isolation.	• Intentional team building fosters a culture of trust that used collaborative planning to make teaching practice public.
RQ3 To what extent does participating in collaborative planning impact teacher practices in one semi-rural high school?	• Teachers began to view one another as instructional leaders, from whom they can learn. • Participating in collaborative planning increases teacher reflection and professional dialogue.	• Participating in collaborative planning increased experiential knowledge, which supported teacher reflection and professional dialogue.

Research Question 1

The first research question further articulated the purpose of the study. In what ways can instructional leaders support the unlearning of isolation by increasing collaborative practices in one semi-rural high school? Findings related to Research Question 1 included:

1. The size of the school and the number of courses with one section (singleton) impeded collaboration, since it was impossible to create a course team.
2. True collaboration is an endeavor that requires teachers to have the time to plan for instruction and analyze student work.
3. Issues arising from the structure and schedules of schools can be mitigated by intentionally privileging collaborative practice.
4. Clear expectations and scaffolded support from instructional leaders buttress collaborative teacher practice.

Theme 1: Leader actions, including facilitating time to collaborate during the school day and providing clear expectations, impacted teachers' attitude and approach toward collaboration.

At the beginning of the study, teachers focused on collaboration challenges, including the small size of Yancey Hills High School, which impacted the number of teachers in each department and the number of course teams that could be created. Mary Thomas, one of the members of the English Department who plays an instrumental role in creating the master schedule for YHHS, declared that "the schedule is the schedule."

However, as the study progressed, teachers began to focus more on the opportunities for collaboration rather than scheduling challenges to collaboration. The 2022-2023 school year saw a 15% jump in courses taught by more than one teacher from the previous school year, which provided more opportunities for teachers to collaborate. When leaders prioritized collaboration in

the master schedule, it helped to alter teacher attitudes and approaches to collaboration. Consistently, teachers noted the importance and benefit of leaders creating a master schedule that allowed course teams to work together. The teachers began to unlearn habits of isolation and learn practices of collaboration.

Cameron Waters commented on the intentionality of creating course teams in the English Department that could not only collaborate but also to promote vertical collaboration. Cameron elaborated:

> I don't know if it was done this way on purpose this year, but I think the way the English Department is currently scheduled, like 9th-grade isn't a silo. Although I mostly teach 10th grade, I also have a 9th-grade class, so collaboration between 9th and 10th-grade courses can occur…I think that is kindly forcing collaboration.

Cameron later acknowledged that YHHS's small size also has benefits because "we are small enough to make that [collaboration] work and to make it successful."

Hillary Rhodes, who teaches in the English and Special Education Departments, also noted that leader expectations of collaboration impacted the emphasis teachers placed on collaboration when she shared her observation, "content team collaboration has ramped up. It is a lot of meetings, but it also forced me to be on the same page." She also acknowledged that collaborative meetings "helped me to know what was going on, so that was helpful." Hillary lamented that she had significantly less planning time when she served as a special education co-teacher.

Hillary also mentioned that time during the school day to collaborate was imperative. She shared that having scheduled common planning during the school day was necessary because of her coaching duties, serving as a teacher in both the English Department and Special Education

Department, and familial demands on her time. Hillary expressed gratitude that the administration had emphasized content team collaboration as an expectation because she felt that she could be more organized and intentional in planning for her courses.

During the Focus Group at the end of the study, Mary Thomas reflected that "expectations bring focus and guard rails which facilitate effective and productive work." The conversation then turned to a summary of the historical view of accountability at YHHS from the teachers' perspective. Mary Thomas, who has worked at YHHS longer than any other member of the ARDT-Instructional Leadership Team, reminded the group that teachers had previously viewed accountability as a "gotcha" rather than as a professional duty to ensure the fidelity of continuous improvement. When asked why teachers were now more likely to see accountability measures to ensure student learning, she replied, "because you [administrators] don't go back on your word…You talk about learning and how the whole department can support learning. It's not just about test scores."

The researcher noted throughout her journal that teachers often seemed wary about the accountability expectations of sharing their Google calendar invitations with administrators and publishing their content team agendas in the English Department's Google Classroom. However, during the study, all but one teacher noted that having an agenda to guide the content team meetings helped ensure fidelity and focus. Some teachers' apprehension to accountability standards should be seen through their own experiences with them. It also serves as a reminder that clear communication and collaboration between teachers and administrators helps to increase trust.

During the study, teacher attitudes and approaches to collaboration became more positive. Amy Dobberstein, the teacher who initially was the most vocal in expressing her hesitation to

"move off her island," later acknowledged how collaboration helped improve her instructional practices. In her first interview, she summed up the difficulties she was facing with collaboration when she revealed:

> [i] t's very hard to let go of the reins that you've been holding… It's really hard for you to get on board with how they do things, because you believe that you're correct. … You've been doing this long enough that this is just kind of what you do…Just the fact that everybody has been an island, and it's hard to, you know, add your island to somebody else's island.

However, in Amy's last interview, she noted that teaching in isolation was not always as good as it seemed. The following quote explains her reasoning:

> I wouldn't say your island is a safe place because you get to do exactly what you want to do, when you want to and how you want to. You don't have anybody to talk to about it and if you're not doing a good job, then there's nobody there to help you figure out your purpose. I like it [collaboration], but it has taken a lot to get used to.

Although Amy noted the difficulty in moving from teaching in isolation, she revealed her new reflection that the benefits of collaboration outweighed the difficulties.

Mary Thomas noted that collaboration had made her more likely to think about how to approach members of her department when consensus was needed. She recounted an unpleasant experience creating common writing rubrics during the previous year. Mary then mentioned the departmental writing rubrics would need to be revised to meet the new GaDOE standards for English courses. Mary revealed her plan to break the work into manageable parts by approaching the expectation of collaboratively designing common writing rubrics differently than she would have in the past. Mary emphasized that the emphasis on collaboration by instructional leaders

helped her change how she approached collaboration tasks. When instructional leaders privilege collaboration, it positively impacts teachers' attitudes and approaches toward working together.

The theme which emerged from Research Question 1 was instructional leader actions, including facilitating time to collaborate during the school day and providing clear expectations, impacted teachers' attitude and approach toward collaboration. Leader actions played an instrumental role in the unlearning of habits of isolation and the learning of practices of collaboration. Research Question 1 investigated supports instructional leaders could provide; whereas Research Question 2 targeted how instructional leaders could foster a culture that would undergird collaborative practices.

Research Question 2

The second research question further explored the purpose of the study. How can instructional leaders foster a culture that uses collaborative planning to make teaching practices public in one semi-rural high school? Findings related to Research Question 2 included:

1. A culture of trust based on professional relationships is necessary for collaboration to occur.
2. Trust remains paramount to effective collaboration; however, when people feel micromanaged, trust decreases.
3. Course teams characterized by trusting relationships erode habits of isolation.

Theme 2: Intentional team building fosters a culture of trust that used collaborative planning to make teaching practice public.

Instructional leaders can facilitate a culture of trust by making decisions that prioritize team building. Intentional team building moves from a culture of isolation toward a culture of

collaboration. The professional relationships in which teachers engaged supported the unlearning of habits of isolation and the learning of practices of collaboration.

During the study, teachers emphasized the role of time in building an effective team. When reflecting on what steps support a culture that values collaboration, Amy Dobberstein advised that creating opportunities to build community was necessary. Her advice included:

> you feed people. You can't collaborate effectively with people that you don't know, or you don't like. It's really hard to say, I'm going to hand you all of this [instructional materials], that I feel is really, really, really important when I don't trust you…You have to have communion. That [communion] is the ability to share those things that are super important in a way that everyone feels comfortable with and in a way that encourages people to sit down and figure out why. You'll never figure out why, if you can't talk about it.

Amy attributed intentional teambuilding as a method to establish trusting relationships. She recognized trusting professional relationships as a prerequisite to effective collaboration.

Rob Neighbors affirmed that team building was a necessary step to creating trust. Additionally, he noted that time was an essential component of developing trust. Rob suggested:

> Collaboration takes time. It's just like trust. Students can memorize for me all day long, but they don't learn until they know me and feel comfortable with me. If I don't feel valued or know my team well enough, then I'm not willing to question what they are doing in their classrooms. A collaborative team is like a relationship. You have spats, you're going to get angry, you're not going to like what they did, so how are you going to deal with that in a professional setting? You [administration] have to give us a chance to work together because we need time to figure it out.

Amy Dobberstein stressed that time was necessary to developing trusting professional relationships. When asked what support was needed to further team building, she retorted,

> I think right now it's back off and let us do it because for some of us this is so new. I've never had anybody to collaborate with [in Multicultural Literature], so it's very new. I just need to keep my groove and figure it out.

Furthermore, Amy indicated allowing course teams to work together again in the following school year would help to continue to develop trusting professional relationships. She ultimately saw the value in collaborative course teams. However, Amy reiterated that relationships take time to develop. Therefore, to ensure continued collaborative practice, privileging course team composition to allow people to learn to grow professionally should be a priority.

Cameron Waters shared that she believed one of her roles as chair of the English Department was to encourage team building among department members. Citing that she had previously taught in a large department, where teachers often intentionally undermined one another, Cameron wanted to help foster a culture where teachers knew one another and would work together to promote student learning. Cameron proposed that administrators had to work to build a culture of trust. However, teachers could capitalize on a pre-existing culture of trust by getting to know one another and intentionally cultivating their relationships inside and outside of work.

Cameron referred to the culture in her department as a "relationship of family." She helped organize departmental gatherings at school events so teachers could support students in their extracurricular endeavors and department members' homes. When asked why she would organize events where department members could spend time together, Cameron replied so they

could trust one another. She noted that those trusting relationships would encourage teachers to talk to one another when they were having difficulties.

During the study, teachers often referenced time to develop relationships with their team as crucial to building trust. Members of the English Department shared that working as a team was paramount to encouraging collaborative practice. Therefore, a professional learning opportunity was designed to assist members of the ARIT-English Course Teams and ARDT-Instructional Leadership Team to increase their understanding of one another's strengths. Additionally, the emphasis would be placed on how those strengths could enhance their collaborative work. The premise for the professional learning was that teams shared a common purpose, were aware of one another's talents and gave one another opportunities to apply their talents.

Prior to the professional learning, all members of the ARIT-English Course Teams and ARDT-Instructional Leadership Team had completed the CliftonStrengths® assessment and submitted their results to help the facilitator tailor the professional learning experience for the group. The researcher took notes during the Strengths Finder professional learning opportunity and later reflected on what she witnessed in her researcher's journal. From the perspective of the researcher, the participants were willing to discuss their traits, how they approached work, and the frustrations of work environments they had experienced.

Participants often encouraged others to reveal information about themselves to help their team better understand their strengths. During subsequent follow-up interviews and an anonymous questionnaire, all participants revealed they found value in the professional learning experience because they learned about themselves and one another.

The anonymous questionnaire allowed participants to reveal what they learned about themselves regarding how they approach work through their strengths. Some of their revelations included:

- I work well with others and enjoy relationships on a daily basis.
- I'm focused on trying to make sure everything is going to work out in the long run, I'm not trying to be negative. I just want to ensure that everything is going to work out correctly.
- I learned why I format my lessons (and files) the way I do and why it can be overkill for those who don't see clutter the same way I do.
- Things I find important sometimes do not need to be shared or explained.
- I learned that all my strengths land in the relationship building and influencing categories.
- This makes me pretty easy to work with…It also explained some of the head-butting that may happen.

The participants communicated that learning about their strengths helped them better understand what was important to them, which in turn, would help them better understand how others view their work.

Participants also divulged what they learned about one another in the anonymous questionnaire and how that information helped them better understand their teammates. Some of the disclosures included:

- We are all different, but it is necessary to be successful.
- I understand a little better how they think.
- How they filter information.
- They all don't think how I think.

- Interesting mix in the ELA department.
- I understand better why some of us want to get the work done quickly and others of us procrastinate.

Finally, the participants communicated how what they learned could help them in their work with their teammates. Answers on the Strengths Finder questionnaire included:

- It helps you plan and structure for departmental goals and achieve more.
- I will better understand where some of my colleagues are coming from.
- It will help our team because we will be getting input from various types of personalities.
- It helps to better understand what motivates each person.
- I think it might help me be less upset when others are pushy.

Although what the teachers learned about themselves and each other varied, each of them indicated that what they learned would positively impact their collaborative work. Intentionally promoting team building helps to strengthen teams and to facilitate a culture in which participants trust one another and work together towards a common purpose.

In the focus group at the end of the study, members of the ARDT-Instructional Leadership Team discussed why teachers placed such importance on knowing one another. Mary Thomas summarized the conversation by noting, "it helps us to understand why people think and act the way they do so that you can understand their motives." The ARDT-Instructional Leadership Team supposed that if you can agree with someone's motives, even if you disagree with their actions, it is easier to work towards consensus. Cameron Waters analyzed the importance of trust in teamwork. She proposed, "[c]onflict is inevitable, but it is how you work

through the conflict that makes the team stronger. It's all about trust. Can you trust your team member's motivations? If you can do that, you can reach a consensus."

A culture based on trust allows teachers to make their teaching practices public. As trust increased in the content teams during the study, teachers were more likely to unlearn habits of isolation and learn practices of collaboration. Jennifer Miller extended her view of making teaching practice public, even to the future teachers of her students. She proposed that student learning should be the metric of the effectiveness of instructional strategies. She proposed a vital question when analyzing student learning when she stated:

> [i]f their current teacher tells me that the students don't understand the concept, it tells me is that whatever we did didn't make a profound enough connection to carry them through the summer. So, obviously… what we did needs to be revamped, redone in a different way because the students aren't getting it. We can blame the previous teachers, but really, it's just whatever method was used was not widely effective.

Jennifer's evolution in her thinking that student's future teachers should also evaluate a content team's teaching strategies, acknowledges her view that teaching practices should be made public. Two critical analyses can be derived from Jennifer's reflection for the researcher.

First, Jennifer noted that future teachers could measure the metric for the effectiveness of instructional strategies, meaning that teaching practices should be public, not only to the content team but to other English department members. Secondly, Jennifer used the pronoun "we" to confirm who did the work of developing instructional strategies. Jennifer's view that the content team was responsible for teaching and learning reaffirms her view that collaborative practices should drive instructional practice.

Amy Dobberstein shared a similar perspective on making teaching practices public when she posed:

> [w] e're better together than we are apart. You're only as good as what your students are able to produce. And so, if your students are unable to produce something based off of what you're doing with them, then it wouldn't be so much better to have somebody else to bounce ideas off of?

Amy's reflection of using student learning as the metric of successful instructional practices and being willing to admit that you could use the help of peers to become more effective is a marked change in her thinking over the course of the study.

At the beginning of the study, Amy lamented the requirements of collaboration. However, during her final interview, she revealed when she was in a trusting environment, she was more willing to share her successes and failures with her team. Amy credited having a trusting environment as a prerequisite to her willingness to listen to their ideas of how to reach students struggling to learn content and skills.

In Jennifer Miller's last interview, she revealed that she was frustrated because she felt that some of her teammates needed to honor a collaboratively designed assessment. The 9th-grade team had designed a common midterm exam in September 2022. However, she learned in December 2022 that two teachers modified the midterm exam for their students. He characterized this deviation as a violation of the trust the team had established. Jennifer articulated that she was most upset that they had not been willing to talk through the changes with the team, rather than the midterm exam had been changed.

When teaching practices are made public, teachers can hold one another more accountable in a culture of trust. However, trust when that trust is violated, it must be repaired.

Throughout the study, the teachers continually indicated that trust was essential to effective teamwork and that it took time to build trusting professional relationships. However, trust erodes when teachers refrain from abiding by collaboratively made decisions.

The theme which emerged from Research Question 2 brought forward that intentional team building fosters a culture of trust that used collaborative planning to make teaching practice public. The trust that developed supported a culture of continuous improvement in which teachers actively engaged in unlearning habits of isolation and learning practices of collaboration. Research Question 2 targeted how instructional leaders could foster a culture that would undergird collaborative practice, whereas Research Question 3 explored the extent to which participating in collaborative planning impacted teacher practices.

Research Question 3

The final research question also undergirded the purpose of the study. To what extent does participating in collaborative planning impact teacher practices in one semi-rural high school? Findings related to Research Question 3 included:

1. Teachers began to view one another as instructional leaders, from whom they can learn.
2. Participating in collaborative planning increases teacher reflection and professional dialogue.

Theme 3: Participating in collaborative planning increased experiential knowledge, which supported teacher reflection and professional dialogue.

Participating in collaborative planning increased the experiential knowledge of teachers. As teachers worked collaboratively, they unlearned habits of isolation and learned practices of collaboration. Amy Dobberstein noted that "I learn better from my colleagues than I do from an

outside source." When asked to further elaborate on why she believed her learning would be more directly impacted by the people with whom she works, Amy indicated that the trusting relationships they were building allowed her to be more vulnerable, as she was willing to admit to them that she needed assistance in certain areas. Amy described the culture in her content teams, by adding "[o]ur culture is built from trust, but it is also built on trust."

Cameron Waters recounted an example of how her experiential knowledge was developing. She was learning to incorporate different instructional strategies into her courses because of what she was learning through collaborative planning. Cameron also shared that the instructional strategies she learned and implemented due to her work with her peers also impacted courses where she was the only teacher. Cameron described an instructional strategy that was collaboratively developed with her content team. She believed that the strategy worked so well with her students that she also implemented the same instructional strategy into another course, where she was the only instructor and did not have peers with whom to collaborate. Cameron added that her increased experiential knowledge made her more confident as a classroom instructor. She explained, "[i] t's not like I decided, but rather we decided." From her perspective, having a group of teachers with whom to vet ideas and plans helped to support her knowledge and confidence.

> Hillary Rhodes also reflected on her growth in experiential knowledge. She revealed:
>
> [a] lot has changed. When you're able to collaborate with other people you get all sorts of different ideas. The biggest change has been the way we teach writing. Working with others has made teaching writing more structured and specific. Our expectations for what students need to accomplish has increased.

Hillary also commented that she felt more confident in using teaching strategies that her peers had vetted. She credited her new knowledge with increasing expectations of what students were able to produce.

As teachers' experiential knowledge increased, they were more likely to reflect on their work. Rob Neighbors reflected on how what he was learning impacted his teaching. He shared:

> How we learn impacts how we plan [for our classes]. I've created my own content for 14 years and there's an ownership. We like to own things…This has been a dramatic wake up call. It [Collaboration] makes me a better teacher... Collaboration is something that I've been missing. I think not having the collaboration allowed me not to grow."

Although Rob often referred to himself as a veteran teacher, he likened how much he had learned by collaborating to how much he learned during his first year of teaching.

As the newest addition to the English Department, Rob initially admitted that he felt uncomfortable with collaboration. His previous teaching experiences had prevented him from collaborating with his peers to develop instruction and assessment collaboratively. Although Rob was initially hesitant to make his teaching practices public, as his professional relationships became more trusting, he was more willing to collaborate. Rob noted that reflecting on the impact of instructional strategies on student learning with his content teams helped him to be more analytical.

Amy Dobberstein was initially cautious as she participated in content team meetings. She mentioned numerous reservations about collaborating with her peers. However, throughout the study, her view became more positive. When reflecting on how collaborative planning had impacted her teaching, she noted, “We kinda got forced into this...You can either turn it into a

positive or you can fight it. But if you fight it, it takes way more energy to fight something than to make it work."

Amy credited collaborative planning with increasing her teacher clarity. When asked what the most significant impact collaborative planning had on her, she reflected:

> I'm more intentional. What I am teaching is more custom and tailored to a specific element of the standard that I am teaching. It has made us stop and question what we are trying to do versus just teaching all these standards. It makes us think about how what we are using really teaches the students the standards.

Even though Amy's view remained that collaboration was somewhat forced on her, when asked if she could go back to a time when collaborative planning did not occur, she replied "no, I don't think so."

Mary Thomas also noted how her increase in experiential knowledge helped to increase her reflection on instructional practices. She recounted how working with the 10th-grade content team informed how she redesigned assessments in American Literature. When asked how collaborative planning had impacted her teaching practices, Mary noted that increasing rigor was a by-product, explaining:

> There are some 10th-grade products that are really awesome. I've seen how hard they'll work for more creative options. This makes me want to redo some of the projects in American Literature [11th-grade course]. I now know what 10th graders can do. Sometimes my concern about implementing creative projects is how much do I need to teach students to do the project in comparison to the content of what students need to learn. Seeing what 10th graders can already do has made me change what's asked of students in American Lit [11th grade course].

Mary's example demonstrated how collaborative planning increased experiential knowledge, which supported teacher reflection which increased the rigor and creativity in the student assessments she designed.

Participating in collaborative planning increased experiential knowledge, which supported increased professional dialogue. Once teachers began to engage with one another during collaborative planning, they began to view themselves and one another as instructional leaders with whom they could engage in professional dialogue. Therefore, teachers unlearned habits of isolation and learned practices collaboration. Amy Dobberstein noted her willingness to engage in professional dialogue to learn from her teammates. Amy reaffirmed that teachers have experiential knowledge from which others can learn when she offered that "professional development from teachers to teachers is much better than bringing in… somebody who wrote a book."

Amy also noted that professional dialogue is essential because you can intentionally leverage the strengths of your team to promote student learning. She noted that "[y]ou learn the strengths and weaknesses of whoever you're working with. You learn how to use their strengths to your advantage and hopefully they learn how to use yours." She credited collaborative planning with increasing her experiential knowledge, which in turn impacted her capacity to engage in professional dialogue.

Hillary Rhodes proposed that participating in collaborative planning increased professional dialogue because conversations were not limited to the allotted collaborative planning time. She recounted,

> [w]e talk all the time, like the in hallway. We touch base with one another more than once a day. Talking makes things better. It helps me stay on track and know where we are going. I'm more organized and I'm more intentional in what I'm teaching.

For Hillary, one of the most significant impacts of collaborative planning was increasing professional dialogue that helped increase her organization and intentionality.

Jennifer Miller stressed the importance of honesty in professional dialogue. She noted that professional dialogue is only productive if the participants are willing to be open and honest. She likened professional dialogue needing to be "like King Arthur's roundtable." She noted that those involved, to whom she referred to as stakeholders, should be supported by their team when they revealed that they did not agree with someone on the team. Jennifer explained that if people are not honest, then it undermines the purpose of professional dialogue because you were not having "real conversations."

Additionally, Jennifer cautioned that honesty should not supplant couching information in a way that would bring forth productive discussion. She advised:

> [i] t's how you present it. Lots of times you can tell teachers what their students do well. Then segue into an area where the students are struggling. Then ask their former teacher if they saw the students struggling in that same area when they taught them. Then you can ask for their advice on how to help the students. If you can work together to plan how to teach whatever it is that the students don't seem to be getting, then you can collaboratively create instruction that is consistent for the students.

Jennifer further explained that collaboration on the district writing committee allowed for honest, productive conversations that provided clarity to writing instruction. She predicted if

collaboration would continue to occur then professional dialogue could be extended across the district.

Chapter Summary

Three overall themes emerged from the collected data related to the research questions. Research Question 1 investigated the ways in which instructional leaders can support the unlearning of isolation by increasing collaborative practices. The data revealed leader actions, including facilitating time to collaborate during the school day and providing clear expectations, impacted teachers' attitude and approach toward collaboration. Throughout the study, teachers were more likely to recognize leader actions that privileged collaboration, which positively impacted their attitude and approach as the unlearned habits of isolation and learned collaboration practices.

Research Question 2 explored how instructional leaders can foster a culture that uses collaborative planning to make teaching practices public. After analyzing the data, a theme surfaced that emphasized trusting professional relationships as the foundation of a culture that prioritizes collaboration. Intentional team building fosters a culture of trust that used collaborative planning to make teaching practice public. During the study, teachers embraced planned team-building activities that further developed professional, trusting relationships and enhanced their willingness to view one another as instructional leaders from whom they could learn. A culture of trust buttresses the unlearning of habits of isolation and the learning of practices of collaboration.

Research Question 3 sought to inspect the extent to which participating in collaborative planning impacts teacher practices. The collected data divulged that participating in collaborative planning increased experiential knowledge, which supported teacher reflection and professional

dialogue. Teachers acknowledged that collaboration positively impacted their pedagogical knowledge, increased the extent to which they reflected on instructional practices, and promoted professional dialogue that positively impacted student learning. The unlearning of habits of isolation and the learning of practices of collaboration impacted teachers' participation in collaborative planning and their subsequent changes to their teaching practices. Chapter 6 presents the conclusions of the study in addition to a discussion of the implications and the connections to leadership practices.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS, AND CONNECTIONS TO LEADERSHIP PRACTICES

The purpose of this study was to examine the perspectives of an instructional leadership team as they fostered a culture that encouraged teachers to unlearn habits associated with isolation and to learn practices of collaboration. Perspectives were gathered in two complementary ways. First, views from the Action Research Design Team (ARDT-Instructional Leadership Team) were compiled as they developed and implemented interventions to increase collaboration with this group of teachers. Secondly, perspectives were drawn from six English teachers configured into course teams based on the courses they taught. Members of the Action Research Implementation Team (ARIT-English Course Teams) identified which supports facilitated the unlearning habits of isolation and learning of practices of collaboration.

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

1. In what ways can instructional leaders support the unlearning of isolation by increasing collaborative practices in one semi-rural high school?
2. How can instructional leaders foster a culture that uses collaborative planning to make teaching practices public in one semi-rural high school?
3. To what extent does participating in collaborative planning impact teacher practices in one semi-rural high school?

This chapter presents an overall conclusion for the study. First, a summary of the research design is presented. Secondly, the findings, as they relate to the guiding research questions are discussed. Next, limitations of the current study are explored. Then, implications for theory and practice are suggested. Finally, concluding thoughts are offered.

Summary of the Study

Because the culture of Yancey Hills High School was deeply rooted in isolation, the ARDT-Instructional Leadership Team used the theory of unlearning to guide the study as they worked with teachers to promote collaboration for improving instruction. Hedberg (1981) contends that organizations must discard outdated or misleading knowledge before creating new understanding (the theory of unlearning). As contextual factors impact the extent to which outdated knowledge has been embedded in the organization, the organizational context plays a crucial role in the unlearning process. Consequently, it is important to understand how established knowledge structures influence which outdated knowledge is more likely to be discarded (Grisold et al., 2020).

To understand the extent to which isolation was woven into the culture of Yancey Hills High School, the action research design team and the action research implementation team examined and analyzed habits of isolation to determine how unlearning habits of isolation could enhance collaborative practice in this specific setting. This case study provided a deeper understanding of practices and relationships at YHHS (Harrison et al., 2017). The rich description enabled thematic analysis to enhance understanding of the complexities of habits of isolation and practices of collaboration at YHHS (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019).

Many improvement efforts are not designed with educators but are delivered to them resulting in a lack of continuous improvement. Therefore, it was imperative that teachers were

included as participants on the ARDT-Instructional Leadership Team and the ARIT-English Course Teams in this study (Bryk, 2017). This study used the action research process to develop the necessary supports to facilitate unlearning isolation practices and engagement in collaborative planning in order to de-privatize instructional practices. This action research case study began in the first semester of the 2022-2023 school year at Yancey Hills High School (YHHS). The research was designed based on a qualitative case study approach to examine the perspectives of an instructional leadership team as they fostered a culture that encouraged teachers to unlearn habits associated with isolation and to learn practices of collaboration.

Action Research

The primary characteristic of action research is that it is a systematic, albeit iterative, process of investigating a problem of practice and potential solutions (Coghlan & Brannick, 2014; Glanz, 2014; Stringer & Aragón, 2020). The ARDT-Instructional Leadership Team devised, implemented, and studied the extent to which interventions affected the unlearning of habits of isolation and the learning of practices of collaboration. The steps of the action research process informed subsequent action research steps as the interventions of the action research process were implemented.

Action research asserts reality is socially, culturally, and historically constructed. (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019; Creswell, 2018; Tracy, 2019). Since meaning is constructed through personal experience, action researchers are more likely to gain a deeper understanding of how meaning is constructed when they are involved in a specific context with participants (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019; Merriam & Grenier, 2019). The co-constructed meaning of the experiences of the ARDT-Instructional Leadership Team and the ARIT-English Course Teams informed unlearning habits of isolation and learning practices of collaboration.

Furthermore, action research is participatory, collaborative, and designed to increase understanding of the participants' work (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019, Mertler, 2020; Stringer & Aragón, 2020). The Action Research Design Team (ARDT-Instructional Leadership Team) included the principal, the chair of the English Department, and another member of the department. The Action Research Implementation Team (ARIT-English Course Teams) comprised all six teachers in the English Department and were configured into course teams based on the courses they taught. A unique aspect of the Action Research Implementation Team is that two participants also serve on the ARDT-Instructional Leadership Team, since action research is participatory and collaborative. To help members of the ARIT-English Course Teams unlearn habits of isolation that remained prevalent at YHHS, the ARDT-Instructional Leadership Team developed interventions. Additionally, the ARDT-Instructional Leadership Team assisted the researcher in implementing the devised interventions and analyzing the data collected. They also served as a sounding board during the initial phases of the analysis of findings.

Theory of Change, Logic Model, and Theoretical Framework

Continuous improvement is a process for addressing specific problems in real contexts through systematic inquiry to enhance procedures, policies, and practices (Wang & Fabillar, 2019). This study examined instructional leadership within a cycle of continuous improvement focused on unlearning habits of isolation and learning collaborative practices. (Bryk et al., 2011).

The Plan-Do-Reflect-Adjust logic model served to frame and enact interventions, situate change, and bracket the scope of the study. For the ARDT-Instructional Leadership Team, the logic model provided a clear structure for defining isolation, implementing interventions to unlearn isolation to promote collaboration, reflecting on the data gathered, and adjusting interventions based on feedback from the ARIT-English Course Teams (Bryk 2020; Bryk et al.,

2011; Hill et al., 2022). The iterations of the Plan-Do-Reflect-Adjust phases of the action research cycles encouraged the researcher and participants to spiral through the phases of reflection to understand how isolation and isolationism are ingrained in the culture of Yancey Hills High School, and how unlearning can foster a culture of collaboration. Research cycles were defined by the logic model and provided a framework for the researcher and participants.

This study explored specific steps instructional leadership teams can take to promote the unlearning of isolation and the learning of collaborative practices, using the theory of organizational unlearning as a guiding theoretical framework. A culture that values and upholds collaborative practices results in better learning outcomes for students (Hargreaves, 2019; Tschannen-Moran & Constantino, 2021). Teacher leadership can be developed through increased collaborative practices (de Jong et al., 2019; Lefstein et al., 2020; Liebowitz & Porter, 2019; Lipscombe et al., 2020). ARIT-English Course Teams and the ARDT-Instructional Leadership Team worked together to de-privatize instructional practices, contributing to unlearning isolation habits and supporting a more collaborative school culture.

In this study, Grisold et al.'s (2020) model of unlearning was used as the primary intervention. As part of concrete interventions to unlearn isolation habits and to learn collaboration methods, new practices were segmented into manageable parts, outdated knowledge was reduced, clear expectations were communicated for the newly embedded structural changes, and effective feedback structures were created to support positive experiences with new learning.

Themes Related to the Research Questions and Scholarly Research Reviewed

Three research questions guided this study. The questions focused on how instructional leaders can support collaborative practices, foster a culture that uses collaborative planning to

make teaching practices public and the extent to which collaborative planning impacted teacher practices. Through analysis of the collected qualitative data, themes emerged which connected the scholarly literature, the framing of the study, and the research questions.

Theme from Research Question 1

Research Question 1: In what ways can instructional leaders support the unlearning of isolation by increasing collaborative practices in one semi-rural high school?

Theme 1: Leader actions, including facilitating time to collaborate during the school day and providing clear expectations, impacted teachers' attitude and approach toward collaboration.

Historically, collaboration at Yancey Hills High School has been hindered by the size of the school and the number of courses taught by one teacher. At the beginning of the study, teachers primarily focused on the challenges associated with collaboration. The participants frequently referred to YHHS's small size and the departmental model as factors that impacted the lack of establishment of course teams. One of the members of the English Department, Mary Thomas, who has played a significant role in creating YHHS' master schedule, stated that "the schedule is the schedule." Scholarly research confirms the fact that school structures and schedules perpetuate isolation. Considering the perennial nature of isolation in schools, Lortie (1975) proposed that it was necessary for teachers to undergo training experiences that would offset their individualistic and traditional experiences. In other words, teachers must unlearn habits of isolation to learn collaborative practices.

Issues arising from the structure and schedules of schools can be mitigated by intentionally fostering collaborative practice. By encouraging YHHS to form course teams, district and building leaders purposely attempted to limit the impact of isolation. In addition to their professional knowledge, teachers bring a wealth of experience to the classroom. When

isolation is a cultural norm, teachers may find collaborative work uncomfortable, but when principals model and provide structures to support collaboration, they are more likely to engage in collaborative practices (Carpenter, 2015; Luyten & Bazo, 2019; Spencer, 2016; Zepeda, 2020). To collaborate effectively, teachers must have time to plan instruction and analyze student work.

According to all six English teachers, it is essential to have time for planning instruction and analyzing students' work. There was common planning three times a week among all course teams, and the expectation was that teams should meet at least once a week. Mary Thomas noted that "true collaboration" meant delving into student assessments and tailoring instruction based on the results required much more time than teaching a course by herself and planning instruction alone. Managing time is one of the most significant responsibilities of principals when promoting collaborative practices (Lockton, 2019). Due to school schedule constraints, principals must find innovative ways to create regular opportunities for teachers to collaborate (Bae, 2017). The success of collaborative practice depends on educational leadership that effectively navigates the unique characteristics and cultural norms of a school (Vangrieken, 2015).

Clear expectations and scaffolded support from instructional leaders buttressed collaboration among teachers. Mary Thomas reflected that "expectations bring focus and guard rails that facilitate effective and productive work." When noting the intentionality of arranging members on course teams to help promote horizontal and vertical collaboration, Casey Waters commented that it was “kindly forcing collaboration”. Hillary Rhodes noted that leaders' expectations of collaboration positively influenced teachers' efforts to collaborate. The provision of clear expectations and scaffolded support, along with the encouragement of internal

collaboration, is an effective way of combining individual knowledge to generate new organizational knowledge (Antunes & Pinheiro, 2020; Feiz et al., 2019; McLeod et al., 2020; Park & Kim, 2020). Considering that organizational memories guide decision-making, unlearning requires intentionality (Lau et al., 2019; Tsang & Zahra, 2008; Wensley & Navarro, 2015). Furthermore, instructional leaders who provide expectations but allow learners to navigate collective learning are more likely to "reject earlier learning and engage in new learning" (Illeris, 2018, p. 73).

In Research Question 1, the theme which emerged was that leader actions, including facilitating time to collaborate during the school day and providing clear expectations, impacted teachers' attitudes and approach toward collaboration. Leadership actions played an instrumental role in unlearning habits of isolation and learning collaborative practices.

Theme from Research Question 2

Research Question 2*:* How can instructional leaders foster a culture that uses collaborative planning to make teaching practices public in one semi-rural high school?

Theme 2**:** Intentional team building fosters a culture of trust that used collaborative planning to make teaching practice public.

It is essential that trust is built through professional relationships for collaboration to take place. Leadership decisions that prioritize team building can foster trust. Creating opportunities for community building is crucial, according to Amy Dobberstein. Additionally, Rob Neighbors noted that for effective collaboration, trust in professional relationships is essential. To promote collaborative practice, English Department members stressed the importance of working as a team. To understand each other's strengths and approaches to work, ARIT-English Course Teams and ARDT-Instructional Leadership Teams were provided with a professional learning

opportunity. Participants said that learning about their strengths helped them better understand what was important to them, which led to a greater understanding of how others perceived their work.

Research has defined trust as a social construct that occurs when individuals fulfill their responsibilities in interpersonal relationships (Finnigan & Daly, 2017; Gümüş & Bellibaş, 2020; Tschannen-Moran, 2004). These interactions eventually become formal and informal networks; through these networks, educators exchange knowledge, advice, support, and form friendships (Finnigan and Daly, 2017). To build trust, members of a group need to be vulnerable to one another based on the assumption that others will exhibit traits of trust and will be willing to collaborate, learn, problem-solve, and share information to coordinate actions (Finnigan & Daly, 2017; Tschannen-Moran, 2004).).

To collaborate effectively, trust is paramount; however, when people feel micromanaged, trust is compromised. It is impossible to maintain a collaborative culture if teacher voices are ignored, according to Mary Thomas. Jennifer Miller highlighted two important metrics to assess trust in schools. First, when administrators set expectations but allow teachers to use their professional judgment to determine how best to meet them. Second, educators must view student learning as a mutual success and a lack of student learning as a mutual failure. Schools with a culture of trust, openness, and honesty have stronger relationships when educators work together consistently. As team members learn, work, and solve problems together, trusting professional relationships honor their expertise (Finnigan & Daly, 2017; Gümüş & Bellibaş, 2020). By committing and completing tasks together, team members realize they can count on each other (Rinio, 2018). It is at the heart of trust that teachers can be "deeply critical of one's assumptions and beliefs and to test them in public contexts, and in collaboration

with others" (Benade, 2018, p. 129). Collaborative cultures are built on a foundation of trust, not only because trust increases collaboration but also because collaboration increases trust.

The establishment of trusting relationships in course teams contributes to the eradication of isolation habits. According to Amy Dobberstein, it takes time to develop trusting relationships where professionals can communicate freely and honestly with one another. According to Amy, it took her some time to trust someone enough to admit that she was not perfect and needed guidance to teach a concept or skill more effectively. Amy also recommended that course teams composed of people who had not previously worked together should have the opportunity to work together again the following year. During the past few months, Amy noted that her level of trust had increased considerably and that as trust grows, more open and honest communication took place.

It is crucial to establish trust as the foundation of effective working relationships that prioritize collaboration (Antinluoma et al., 2018; Gümüş & Bellibaş, 2020; Rinio, 2018; Shakenova, 2017). It has been shown that a school culture based on trust increases collaboration among faculty as they investigate and mitigate learning barriers (Gregory, 2017; Gümüş & Bellibaş, 2020; Hallam et al., 2015, Yin et al., 2019). Trust among collaborative teams supports job-embedded professional learning and influences instructional practices more than merely having a trusting relationship with the principal (Tschannen-Moran, 2004; Wahlstrom & Louis, 2008; Yin et al., 2019; Yin & Zheng, 2018). A toxic school culture is characterized by isolation, while a positive school culture fosters collaboration (Liu et al., 2021; Ponnuswamy & Manohar, 2016). In schools with effective collaborative cultures, teachers are more likely to learn from and respect one another (Goddard et al., 2015).

Theme from Research Question 3

Research Question 3: To what extent does participating in collaborative planning impact teacher practices in one semi-rural high school?

Theme 3: Participating in collaborative planning increased experiential knowledge, which supported teacher reflection and professional dialogue.

Over the course of the study teachers realized they could learn from each other as instructional leaders. In stating that her teammates are knowledgeable, Mary Thomas recognized their role as instructional leaders. According to Mary, "we achieve greatness quicker when we combine our knowledge, rather than just me trying to figure it out." Jennifer Miller also stressed the importance of teachers learning from one another about effective instructional practices. Jennifer encouraged teachers to view conversations between teachers about students' lack of knowledge or skills as opportunities to improve instruction. By working together as a team, Jennifer argues, some pressure is removed from individual teachers, and we are more willing to learn from our peers, who we view as instructional leaders. Amy Dobberstein emphasized how much she has learned from her teammate's expertise in incorporating technology to increase student learning. Cameron Waters confirmed Amy's view of learning from team members, and she emphasized:

> it doesn't matter who we are collaborating with…if we consider all of us instructional leaders. We need to be willing to learn from everyone. Otherwise, it just puts us right back into islands. Maybe not a deserted island, but it still puts us on an island. We have to build those bridges. We have to be able and willing to create bridges with people to learn from them.

Job-embedded professional learning emphasizes the role of the teacher as a driving force in their own learning (Calvert, 2016; Svendsen, 2020).

To meet the needs of adult learners, professional development must be reconceptualized (Hunzicker, 2011; Svendsen, 2020; Zepeda, 2019). Adult learners typically maintain responsibility for their learning and construct meaning from their experiences (Hunzicker, 2011, Mews, 2020). A learning opportunity that gives adults the autonomy to create solutions to problems directly impacting their lives motivates them (Blaschke, 2019). By incorporating adult learning theory into professional development, participants are more likely to engage in authentic, relevant, open-ended learning activities that support their work (Knowles et al., 2020; Wozniak, 2020). When job-embedded professional learning is based on adult learning theory, teachers are more likely to develop as they continuously learn and improve (Zepeda, 2019).

It is through job-embedded professional learning that teachers can situate their work within social and professional networks where knowledge is socially constructed and negotiated (Coburn & Russell, 2008; Darling-Hammond et al., 2017; Smylie & Evans, 2006; Von Esch, 2021). Teachers become agents of their learning when they are supported and motivated by job-embedded professional learning (Loughland & Ryan, 2021). By engaging in continual conversations regarding teaching and learning, teachers benefit from the collective guidance of fellow educators (Pirtle & Tobia, 2014; Svendsen, 2020; Tam, 2015).

De-privatizing instructional practices through job-embedded professional learning cultivates teacher collaboration and reduces isolation habits (Croft et al., 2010; DuFour, 2004; Spencer, 2016). Since teachers play a significant role in student learning, educational leaders should ensure that teachers continue to learn and develop throughout their careers (Guskey, 2014; Loughland & Ryan, 2021; Tam, 2015). Loughland and Ryan found professional learning

most effective when teachers incorporated what they learned from professional development into their instructional practices (2021).

Collaboration with colleagues increased teachers' experiential knowledge. When teachers work collaboratively, they unlearn habits of isolation and learn practices of collaboration. "I am able to learn more from my colleagues than from outside sources," Amy Dobberstein said. When asked to elaborate on why she believed her learning would be more directly influenced by the people with whom she works, Amy stated that the trusting relationships they were building allowed her to be more vulnerable, as she was willing to admit to them that she needed assistance in certain areas.

An example of Cameron Waters' experiential knowledge was that she was learning to incorporate different instructional strategies into her courses due to the collaborative planning process. Cameron reflected that her increased experiential knowledge made her more confident as a classroom instructor. She explained, "[i] t's not like I decided, but rather we decided." For her, having a group of teachers to vet ideas and plans supported her confidence and knowledge.

Principal leadership that encourages teachers to engage in reflective and collaborative professional inquiry demonstrates the belief that instructors are professionals who embody the expertise to learn from one another (Goddard et al., 2015; Griffiths et al., 2021; Mwanza & Changwe, 2020). School cultures that advocate de-privatizing teaching practices and encourage reflective dialogue contribute to a culture that views student learning as a collective effort. In addition to selecting complex and challenging tasks, experimenting, and being more creative, teachers who believe they have the capacity to influence student learning positively are more likely to reflect and amend inspirational practices (Vanblaere & Devos, 2016).

Principal leadership that empowers teachers to hone their teaching craft encourages unlearning habits of isolation and learning collaborative practices.

Teachers were more likely to reflect on their work as their experiential knowledge increased. Rob Neighbors discussed how what he learned had affected his teaching. As Rob's professional relationships became more trusting, he became more willing to collaborate with others about his teaching practices. His content teams helped him become more analytical by reflecting on the impact of instructional strategies on student learning. Mary Thomas also noted how her increase in experiential knowledge helped to increase her reflection on instructional practices. When asked how collaborative planning had impacted her teaching practices, Mary noted that she was more intentional in increasing the rigor and creativity in the student assessments that were designed.

By engaging in professional discourse, empowered teachers can cultivate a collaborative culture that fosters collective understanding, vets instructional practices, quantifies student learning, and engages collective participation for continuous improvement (Martin et al., 2020). By empowering teachers to participate in collective decision-making with other professionals, principals can enhance collaborative practice. By addressing instructional issues collectively, teachers can unlearn the habits of isolation and learn collaborative practices.

Collaboration increased experiential knowledge, which increased professional dialogue. As a result of collaborative planning, teachers began viewing themselves as instructional leaders capable of engaging in professional dialogue. Amy Dobberstein noted that she is willing to learn from her teammates through professional dialogue. In addition to promoting student learning, Amy emphasized the importance of professional dialogue for maximizing the strengths of your

team to create more effective instructional strategies. Hillary Rhodes proposed that participating in collaborative planning increased professional dialogue because conversations were not limited to the allotted collaborative planning time. She recounted that one of the most significant impacts of collaborative planning on her was increasing professional dialogue, which helped increase her organization and intentionality.

Principals that restructure schools to empower teachers to share in the instructional decision-making processes facilitate collaboration (Tan, 2018). The emergent discourse encourages critique of instructional practices within a collaborative group of professionals who provide academic and emotional support to students (Blase & Blase, 2000). When teachers are empowered to solve problems through collective inquiry, it serves as a catalyst to increase collaborative practice (Carpenter, 2015). When teachers are empowered to address instructional issues collectively, they work together to unlearn the habits of isolation and learn collaborative practices.

Limitations of the Current Study

Limitations of the study arise from the nature of qualitative research. In the study, the researcher served as a participant-observer, who provided guidance and promoted collective sense-making (Merriam & Grenier, 2019). A participant-observer study increases researcher bias, and researchers must guard against undue influence (Mertler, 2020). Additionally, qualitative research may align reality with participants' perceptions of what is socially acceptable (Bergen & Labonté, 2020). Lastly, qualitative research emphasizes the specificity of the study context, making it difficult to generalize findings to other contexts (Carminati, 2018).

Other limitations were posed by the context in which the study was conducted. Due to the study's location in a semi-rural small high school, the number of participants was limited.

Additionally, the researcher may not have been aware of the impact the district's commitment to teacher collaboration may have had on the study. Finally, although the researcher did not have evaluative power over participants, the researcher was still a member of the administrative team. Participants may have felt pressure to only share information they deemed would support the perception of the researcher's perspective. However, since the researcher accepted a position in another district toward the end of the study, the participants may have been more likely to share their viewpoints honestly.

Additionally, the study's timing and length were limitations. As the study was conducted from August to December 2022, the number of interventions was limited, thus mitigating the diversity of experiences in the study. Furthermore, the researcher accepted and began transitioning to a different school district toward the end of the study, which necessitated completing two rather than three cycles of action research. Due to the pervasive nature of isolation at Yancey Hills High School, the researcher still questions if unlearning habits of isolation and learning practices of collaboration will continue without continued intentional interventions.

Implications and Recommendations for Practitioners

The following thematic findings emerged from the study: instructional leader actions, including facilitating time to collaborate during the school day and providing clear expectations, impacted teacher attitude and approach toward collaboration; intentional team building fostered a culture of trust that used collaborative planning to make teaching practice public; and, participating in collaborative planning increased experiential knowledge, which supported teacher reflection and professional dialogue.

Teachers' attitudes and approaches toward collaboration were impacted by instructional leaders who provided clear expectations and scaffolded support. Issues stemming from the structure and schedule of schools can be mitigated by intentionally fostering collaborative practices. Teachers were more likely to engage in collaborative practices in response to instructional leaders' modeling and providing structures to support collaboration (Luyten & Bazo, 2019; Zepeda, 2020). When promoting collaborative learning, time management is a crucial responsibility of principals (Lockton, 2019). Considering school schedule constraints, principals must find innovative ways to create collaborative opportunities for teachers (Bae, 2017). For collaborative practice to succeed, educational leadership must navigate a school's unique characteristics and cultural norms (Vangrieken, 2015). Providing clear expectations and scaffolded support, in addition to encouraging internal collaboration, is an effective method of combining individual knowledge to create new organizational knowledge (Antunes & Pinheiro, 2020; Feiz et al., 2019; McLeod et al., 2020; Park & Kim, 2020). Therefore, instructional leaders should provide clear expectations and scaffold support to increase collaboration and improve instructional practices.

Intentional team building fostered a culture of trust that used collaborative planning to make teaching practice public. Through intentional team building, an environment of trust can be created where teaching practices can be made public. To facilitate collaboration, building professional relationships based on trust is essential. It is important to recognize the expertise of team members when working together, learning from one another, and solving problems (Finnigan & Daly, 2017; Gümüş & Bellibaş, 2020). A culture of trust allows teachers to be critical of their assumptions and beliefs in public contexts and to examine them in collaboration

with others (Benade, 2018). Educational leaders must intentionally build a culture of trust to support collaboration.

Establishing trusting relationships within course teams is essential for eradicating habits of isolation. The foundation of an effective working relationship is trust (Gümüş & Bellibaş, 2020; Rinio, 2018). Building trust within collaborative teams is critical to the effectiveness of job-embedded professional learning (Yin et al., 2019; Yin & Zheng, 2018). When a school has an effective collaborative culture, teachers are more likely to learn from and respect each other (Goddard et al., 2015). Educational leaders who support change intentionally create trusting relationships to buttress improvement efforts.

Participating in collaborative planning increased experiential knowledge, which supported teacher reflection and professional dialogue. Education leaders who foster a culture of continual learning, trust, and collaboration support teachers' professional learning. In collaborative planning, job-embedded professional learning enabled teachers to construct and negotiate knowledge within social and professional networks (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017; Von Esch, 2021). Collaborating with colleagues facilitates job-embedded professional learning for teachers (Loughland & Ryan, 2021).

When educators engage in ongoing discussions about teaching and learning, they benefit from the collective guidance of their colleagues (Svendsen, 2020). Through job-embedded professional learning, teachers become committed to collaborative work and reduce habits of isolation by deprivatizing instructional practices (Croft et al., 2010; DuFour, 2004; Spencer, 2016). Hence, educational leaders who want to increase teacher reflection and professional dialogue must foster a culture that values and supports job-embedded learning.

Implications and Recommendations for Researchers

As a result of systematic inquiry, continuous improvement analyzes and reflects on procedures, policies, and practices in real-life contexts (Wang & Fabillar, 2019). Using the Plan-Do-Reflect-Adjust cycle, the ARDT-Instructional Leadership Team defined isolation as a problem of practice, implemented interventions to promote collaboration and unlearn isolation, analyzed the gathered data, and adjusted interventions based on participant feedback (Bryk 2020; Bryk et al., 2011; Hill et al., 2022).

This study used the theory of unlearning to guide the instructional leadership team as they worked with teachers to promote collaboration to improve instructional practices at Yancey Hills High School. Organizational learning requires discarding obsolete knowledge and creating new understandings, undergirded by the theory of unlearning (Hedberg, 1981). The process of unlearning must be intentional since organizations develop memories that store information and affect decisions (Tsang & Zahra, 2008; Walsh & Ungson, 1991). Schools are organizations. Therefore, the theory of unlearning is an appropriate theoretical framework for guiding learning. Additional research needs to be conducted on how the theory of unlearning can buttress learning in educational contexts.

Organizational context is fundamental to the theory of unlearning, which is profoundly relevant to school-based continuous improvement efforts. Contextual factors influence the extent to which outdated knowledge remains entrenched in the organization (Park & Kim, 2020). A culture with deeply embedded cultural norms makes it difficult to discard memories and routines, so intentional strategies must be used to increase acceptance of new learning (Grisold et al., 2020). On the other hand, organizations are more likely to incorporate new knowledge quickly when they create a culture that promotes learning (McGill & Slocum, 1993) or fashion networks

to broaden their understanding (Durst et al., 2020). As a result, further research is needed to understand the role unlearning can play in supporting continuous school improvement.

Although the focus of this study did not extend to unlearning isolation in the aftermath of the COVID-19 Pandemic, more research should be conducted to explore how the COVID-19 Pandemic may have impacted isolation and collaboration.

Concluding Thoughts

The purpose of this study was to examine the perspectives of an instructional leadership team as they fostered a culture that encouraged teachers to unlearn habits associated with isolation and to learn practices of collaboration. Throughout this study, lessons to guide school improvement emerged. First, Grisold et al.'s (2020) unlearning framework and an adaptation of Bryk et al.'s (2011) logic model successfully steered a continuous improvement plan tailored to the specified problem of practice (isolation) in a specific context (Yancey Hills High School). Secondly, the Plan-Do-Reflect-Adjust logic model (Bryk et al., 2011) for continuous school improvement highlighted the necessity of leadership to bolster improvement efforts.

Yancey Hills High School successfully implemented a continuous improvement plan designed to foster a culture in which teachers were encouraged to unlearn habits associated with isolation and to learn strategies for collaboration based on the theoretical framework of unlearning and the Plan-Do-Reflect-Adjust logic model (Grisold et al., 2020; Bryk et al., 2011). Since organizational context significantly impacts continuous improvement, schools and school districts should investigate how to unlearn outdated and misleading information and learn new information. Unlearning outdated knowledge requires a thorough understanding of the organization's context, as the organization's history and values influence how much-outdated

knowledge is discarded (Becker & Bish, 2021; Grisold et al., 2020; Matsuo, 2019; Park & Kim, 2020).

It is difficult for organizations to adapt to changes when outdated knowledge is deeply ingrained in their memory and culture (Eggers & Park, 2018; Grisold et al., 2020). However, organizations that continue to learn will foster new learning by building a collective capacity to integrate new knowledge into their organization (Durst et al., 2020; Park & Kim, 2020; Senge, 1990; Sheng et al., 2021). Although other schools and districts may not face the same problem of practice as Yancey Hills High School (isolation), the theoretical framework of unlearning may help to guide continuous improvement efforts.

Leadership matters. This study highlighted the necessity of leadership to sustain school improvement efforts. Leaders must intentionally build trusting relationships and facilitate trusting relationships among teachers. Building trust is the first step to creating effective working relationships that prioritize collaboration (Antinluoma et al., 2018; Gümüş & Bellibaş, 2020). A school culture based on trust increases collaboration among faculty as they investigate and mitigate barriers to student learning, thereby increasing student outcomes (Gregory, 2017; Gümüş & Bellibaş, 2020; Yin et al., 2019). Trust defines the extent to which teachers are effectively engaged in improvement efforts.

Additionally, the findings of this study underscored leadership matters when creating a collaborative culture. The success of collaborative practices depends on educational leadership that successfully navigates a school's unique characteristics and cultural norms (Vangrieken et al., 2015). Principals play a critical role in fostering collaboration (Leithwood, 2019, Liebowitz & Porter, 2019). Principal leadership practices that promote collaboration include empowering teachers to engage in collective professional inquiry (Griffiths et al., 2021; Mwanza & Changwe,

2020). Principals support a clear vision of collaboration and inspire a continuous learning environment when they promote job-embedded professional learning (Jones & Thessin, 2017; Zepeda, 2020). Principals must also manage the schedules and structures of the school to create time for teachers to engage in collaborative practice (Goddard et al., 2015; Tallman, 2020). Leadership that prioritizes and supports collaborative practices can positively impact student learning.

Calls for schools to engage in systematic inquiry to address specific problems of practice continue. Therefore, principals must incorporate the theory of unlearning as a framework to promote teacher collaboration to improve instructional practices. Moving from a culture of isolation to a culture of collaboration occurs when principals support teachers by providing targeted interventions, as they unlearn habits of isolation to be able to learn practices of collaboration.

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APPENDIX A

Action Research Design Team (ARDT-Instructional Leadership Team)

Team Member	Primary Role at Yancey Hills High School	Action Research Role
Primary Researcher	Assistant Principal, YHHS	Leads all research with the Action Research Design Team (ARDT-Instructional Leadership Team) for the purpose of analyzing data. Brings 20 years of teaching experience and 4 years of administrative experience
Mr. Thomas Arlington	Principal, YHHS	Provides context and charge for school-wide instructional leadership, as well as perspective for action research. Brings 13 years of teaching experience and 7 years of administrative experience, including 4 as a principal
Mrs. Cameron Waters	English Department Chair, YHHS	Provides experience from 25 years of teaching high school English courses. Also serves as a member of the 9th-grade and 10th-grade Literature/Comp course teams
Ms. Mary Thomas	English Department Member, YHHS	Provides more than 10 years of teaching experience in high school English courses. Also serves as a member of the 10th-grade Literature/Comp, and Honors American Lit/Comp course teams

APPENDIX B

Action Research Implementation Team (ARIT-English Course Teams)

English Department Members	Course Team	Teaching Experience
Mrs. Amy Dobberstein	9th grade Lit/Comp Team Multicultural Lit Team	Provides experience from over 25 years of teaching high school English courses.
Ms. Jennifer Miller	9th grade Lit/Comp Team	Provides more than 20 years of experience in teaching high school English courses.
Mr. Rob Neighbors	10th grade Lit/Comp Team Multicultural Lit Team Honors Am. Lit/Comp Team	Provides more than 14 years of experience in teaching high school English courses.
Mrs. Hillary Rhodes	9th grade Lit/Comp Team	Provides more than 15 years of experience in teaching, 3 of which have been teaching high school English courses.
Ms. Mary Thomas	10th grade Lit/Comp Team Honors Am. Lit/Comp Team	Provides more than 10 years of experience in teaching high-school English courses.
Mrs. Cameron Waters	9th grade Lit/Comp Team 10th grade Lit/Comp Team Honors Am. Lit/Comp Team	English Department Chair at YHHS. Provides 4 years of experience in teaching high school English courses.

APPENDIX C

Empirical Findings Table

Topic	Author(s)	Purpose, Methods, Data Sources, Findings
Logic Model: Plan-Do-Reflect-Adjust	Hill, K.L., Desimone, L., Wolford, T., Reitano, A & Porter, T (2022).	The purpose of Hill et al. *Inside school turnaround: What drives success?* (2002) was to propose an empirically grounded theory of how school reform relates to effectiveness and to assess how policymakers and implementers may leverage various aspects of implementation to create effective school improvements at scale. The mix-methods study was guided by a new framework that links Bryk et al.'s (2010) five essential supports (school leadership, parent-community ties, professional capacity, student-centered learning climate, instructional guidance, and Desimone's (2002) adaptation of Porter et al.'s (1986) policy attributes theory (specificity, authority, consistency, power, stability). Data sources included achievement data, administrative data, survey data, and interview data from the School District of Philadelphia and from the Shared Solutions Partnership. Data was collected during the 2014-2015 school year from 34 schools (17 treatment schools implementing specific improvement models and 17 matched comparison schools) in the School District of Philadelphia. Findings included that the relationships between the various approaches to school turnaround and academic achievement explained the essence of a school's approach to improvement. Additionally, the findings acknowledged the policy attributes of specificity, authority, and power were statistically significant in increasing student achievement in ELA grades three through eight. Finally, the findings indicated that the policy attributes have the strongest relationship with student achievement.
	Bryk, A. S. (2020)	Bryk's *Improvement in Action: Advancing Quality in America's Schools* (2020) is a sequel to *Learning to Improve: How American's Schools Can Get Better at Getting Better* (2011) and illustrates how educators across six various contexts have implemented the core principles of improvement in practice (be problem and user-focused, organize as networks, learn through disciplined inquiry, embrace measurement, see the system, attend to variability) and utilized the Plan-

		Do-Study-Act process to engage in iterative testing of changes in complex systems. The book highlights relevant examples of improvement work in districts, schools, and professional development networks across the country as the various contexts address inequitable outcomes in high school graduation rates, college readiness and absenteeism. Bryk describes how each of the contexts used select principles, tools, and methods to improve their specified problem. He added analytic reflections throughout the narratives and concluded each chapter with analysis informed by larger lessons informed by each organization's story. These examples offer educators a practical and comprehensive understanding of how effective the core principles of improvement practice can be when undertaking large-scale continuous improvement in education.
Theoretical Framework: Unlearning	Cegarra-Navarro, J.G., Sánchez-Vidal, M.E., & Cegarra-Leiva, D. (2016)	The purpose of Cegarra-Navarro et al. (2016) study was to develop a framework for modeling how unsuitable knowledge may be mitigated to strengthen a work–life balance culture. The study was based on the premise that unlearning is an essential component for organizations to discard outdated knowledge. The research model and hypothesized relationships were empirically tested using the structural equation modeling approach and validated by factor analysis. A sampling of 263 small to medium companies were analyzed through surveys, personal visits, and questionnaires. The findings demonstrated to support a work–life balance culture, it was necessary to develop an unlearning content to counteract the negative effects of the outdated knowledge in relevant areas and to facilitate the replacement of out–of–date or obsolete knowledge.
	Park, S., & Kim, E. J. (2020)	The purpose of Park and Kim's (2020) study was to review unlearning cases and to identify what roles human resource development have played and can play in the unlearning process. Park and Kim used within–case and across–case study approaches and adopted Cegarra-Navarro et al. (2014) unlearning process model (awareness, relinquishing, and relearning) as the framework for analysis of the four selected case studies. All case studies demonstrated that organizations engaged in the overall unlearning process initiated unlearning to promote necessary changes and reinforced new knowledge, skills, and routines employees needed to acquire after unlearning. The findings illustrate that human resource development can play a supportive role in the unlearning process as awareness for change develops and the process of discarding obsolete routines and promoting new knowledge occurs.
Isolation	Krakehl, R., Kelly, A. M., Sheppard, K.,	The purpose of the study was to perform an experimental and observational study that examined teacher-level and school-level predictors of student performance in physics, with a focus on isolated teachers. The overall data samples included 960 schools, 1,584 teachers, and 47,734 students enrolled

	& Palermo, M. (2020)	in physics courses across New York State public schools. The study accounted for teacher level variables including the content preparation and certification of physics teachers, physics course load, professional age (years of experience), whether the teacher was isolated, whether the teacher taught mathematics, and whether the teacher taught Advanced Placement Physics. The study also considered school-level variables including physics standardized test passing rates, school size, socioeconomic status, locale, and physics course taking ratio. Data were collected from a variety of publicly available sources that were verified by state education agencies. The findings of the study indicated a significant proportion (40%) of physics teachers were isolated and their students' performance scores were lower than students with non-isolated teachers. Isolated teachers were less likely hold a professional certification to teach physics, were more likely to have less experience than their non-isolated teaching peers and were more likely to teach in urban and rural schools with students from homes with lower socioeconomic levels than their suburban counterparts.
Learning	Martin, R., O'Hara, S., Bookmyer, J., & Newton., R (2020)	The purpose of Martin et al.'s (2020) study performed by the University of California, was to identify collaboratively derived, high-leverage practices that foster collective capacity for improvement of instructional practices. The study utilized the Delphi study method to establish a degree of empirical evidence for the initial set of collective practices and offer observable indicators of and strategies for developing those practices. Two focus groups were conducted with elementary coaches and teacher leaders. A semi-structed focus group protocol was used to elicit feedback on how to build the capacity of teachers to engage as learners in collaborative work. Qualitative data from the focus groups were analyzed through open coding and the emergent themes were categorized into 14 practices. These practices served as a basis for the Delphi study questionnaire. Consensus developed around the following four practices: 1. Acknowledge and build upon a diversity of perspectives and expertise to develop individual and collective understanding of content, pedagogy, instruction, assessment, and student learning. 2. Break down instructional practices into actionable instructional moves. 3. Select assessment tasks that generate evidence of student learning. 4. Use evidence of student learning as part of a continuous improvement process. The researchers suggest that these findings should be used to move beyond the paradigm of expert-driven professional learning to teacher-driven models that develop group practices for collective growth as means of cultivating best practices.

School Culture - Trust	Gümüş, S., & Bellibaş, M.Ş (2020)	Gümüş and Bellibaş (2020) investigate the effects of principal leadership and teacher trust on teacher professional learning in Turkey, by controlling for school and teacher characteristics. Over the course of the 2018-2019 school year, they implore the use of teacher and principal survey data from all principals and 1,070 teachers across 85 elementary and secondary schools. The study used hierarchical linear modeling to investigate whether and to what extent principals' learning-centered leadership and teacher trust predict teachers' engagement in professional learning. The findings indicate that only a small proportion of variation in teacher professional learning and principals' learning-centered leadership is not associated with teacher learning. However, individual and school level trust among teachers provides a better explanation of the largest variation in teacher professional learning. Therefore, the research suggests that organizational trust, guided most effectively by the principal, is necessary to promote teacher professional learning.
The Principal's Critical Role in Promoting Collaboration	Hallinger, P., Gümüş, S., & Bellibaş, M.Ş. (2020)	The purpose of the Hallinger et al. (2020) study was to conduct a review of research aimed at tracing the evolution of global scholarship on instructional leadership. To collect relevant scholarship, the study utilized PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analysis) guidelines and subsequently collected 1,206 articles across 241 journals focusing on educational leadership, educational policy, and general education to review. The review employed science mapping to synthesize features of instructional leadership. The findings of the review include that instructional leadership remains a pervasive expectation for school leaders as they focus on student learning outcomes. Additionally, the review highlights longitudinal studies that assess how leadership effects unfold over time.
Empowering Teachers to Engage in Collaborative and Reflective Professional Inquiry	Svendsen, B. (2020)	Svendsen (2020) engaged in a review of related scholarly literature from 39 sources to address the aspects which influence teacher professional development. The guiding question for the study was: How can collaborative inquiry between teachers influence teachers` professional development? Findings from the study include that professional learning for teachers must 1. have sustainability over time; 2. consider contextual factors as the focus remains on enhancing learning rather than delivering content to develop teachers, 3. encourage participation in effective professional learning communities that promote collaboration and reflection, 4. seek to build professional relationships based on trust; and 5. have devoted time during the school day for teachers to learn collaboratively.

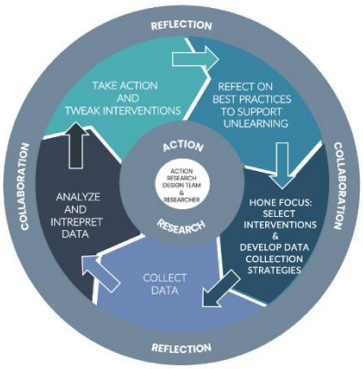
Leading Job-Embedded Professional Learning to Inspire a Learning Environment & to Support a Vision of Collaboration	Liebowitz, D. D., & Porter, L. (2019)	Liebowitz and Porter (2019) sought to understating the leadership strategies which principals use to improve outcomes. In their review of the empirical literature from 51 studies of principal behaviors on student, teacher, and school outcomes, they asserted the following: 1. Direct evidence of the relationship between principal behaviors and student achievement, teacher well-being, teacher instructional practices, and school organizational health; 2. The importance of principal behaviors beyond instructional management as potential tools to improve student achievement outcomes; and 3. The preceding findings are based almost entirely on observational studies because the causal evidence base on school leadership behaviors is nonexistent. The researchers further propose that value exists in investing in school leadership capacities and call for future research to examine the relationship between principal behaviors and student, teacher and school outcomes.
Principal Management of School Schedules/Structures to Support Collaborative Practices	Luyten, H., & Bazo, M. (2019)	Luyten and Bazo's (2019) study sought to examine the ways in which transformational leadership, professional learning communities and teacher learning lead to more learner centered teaching practices. They utilized a structural equation modeling (path analysis with latent variables), a conceptual model, and questionnaire data from 518 teachers across 95 Mozambican primary schools. Their findings include that the impact of professional learning communities is particularly strong in impacting teacher learning. However, the effect of transformational leadership is substantial, as it includes managing resources to support collaborative practice.

APPENDIX D

Action Research Design Team (ARDT-Instructional Leadership Team): Orientation Agenda

Topic	Information
Welcome	
Title	Unlearning Isolation: An Action Research Study of an Instructional Leadership Team and its Work to Promote Collaborative Practices

Why is this study important?
 	
How has SCCS/SCHS attempted to address isolation?
	Yancey School District is a small district in which teacher isolation persisted. New district leadership intentionally facilitated unlearning the habits of isolation by encouraging collaboration as a way in which teachers could reflect on instructional practices.
	• 2019-2020: Strategic Plan-
	  ○ Stakeholders redefined vision/mission & created goals/core values informed by community values.
	  ○ District encouragement of collaborative teacher teams
	  ○ Professional Learning to increase leadership capacity to lead collaborative teacher teams.
	• 2020-2021: School Improvement Plan Created (Tier 1 Instruction, SEL, Equity)
	  ○ School Improvement Plan situated within the broader framework of the district goals and prioritized teacher collaboration to improve instructional practices.
	• 2021-2022: School Improvement Plan Implemented (Tier 1 Instruction, SEL, Equity)
	  ○ Course Teams/Extended Collaborative Planning
	• 2022-2023: Action Research to study the work of our instructional leadership team

Action Research	
Purpose of the Study	The purpose of this study was to examine the perspectives of an instructional leadership team as they fostered a culture that encouraged teachers to unlearn habits associated with isolation and to learn practices of collaboration. Perspectives were gathered in two complementary ways. First, views from the instructional team were compiled as they developed and implemented interventions to increase collaboration with this group of teachers. Secondly, perspectives were drawn from six English teachers configured into course teams based on the courses they taught. Members of the course teams identified which supports most facilitated unlearning habits of isolation and learning of practices of collaboration.
Research Questions	To address the purpose of this action research study, the following research questions guided this inquiry: 1. In what ways can instructional leaders support the unlearning of isolation by increasing collaborative practices in one semi-rural high school? 2. How can instructional leaders foster a culture that uses collaborative planning to make teaching practices public in one semi-rural high school? 3. To what extent does participating in collaborative planning impact teacher practices in one semi-rural high school?
Role of Action Research Design Team	1. Development of Interventions 2. Co-study data results from interventions (intentional strategies to increase teacher collaboration) 3. Refine interventions 4. Review data results
Role of Researcher	1. Provide data to highlight habits of isolation 2. Facilitate brainstorming of possible interventions to support teachers as they unlearn habits of isolation and learn collaborative practices. 3. Implement the agreed-upon interventions for the English teachers.

	4. Study the implementation of the agreed-upon interventions for the English teachers. 5. Provide data highlighting the extent to which the interventions impacted collaborative practices.
Frequency of Meetings	Once a month (30-60 minutes)
Questions	

APPENDIX E

Action Research Implementation Team (ARIT-English Course Teams): Individual Interview Protocols

Title	Unlearning Isolation: An Action Research Study of an Instructional Leadership Team and its Work to Promote Collaborative Practices
Research Questions	1. In what ways can instructional leaders support the unlearning of isolation by increasing collaborative practices in one semi-rural high school? 2. How can instructional leaders foster a culture that uses collaborative planning to make teaching practices public in one semi-rural high school 3. To what extent does participating in collaborative planning impact teacher practices in one semi-rural high school?
Round 1	1. What challenges at our school exist in decreasing isolation and implementing collaborative practices? (RQ1) 2. What challenges exist for you in decreasing isolation and implementing collaborative practices? (RQ1) 3. From your experience at our school, what actions by instructional leaders supported collaborative practices? (RQ1) 4. From your experience at our school, what actions by instructional leaders have undermined collaborative practices? (RQ1) 5. Which attributes of our school's culture support isolation? (RQ2) 6. Which attributes of our school's culture support collaborative practice? (RQ2) 7. What can instructional leaders in our school do to foster a culture that supports collaboration? (RQ2) 8. From your perspective how has the COVID-19 Pandemic impacted isolation and/or collaboration?
Round 2	1. What challenges remain at our school to decreasing isolation and implementing collaborative practices? (RQ1). Have those challenges been addressed? (RQ3) 2. What challenges remain for you in decreasing isolation and implementing collaborative practices? (RQ1) Have those challenges been addressed? (RQ3)

	3. From your experience this year at our school, what actions by instructional leaders support collaborative practices? (RQ1) 4. From your experience this year at our school, what actions by instructional leaders undermines collaborative practices? (RQ1) 5. What can instructional leaders in our school do to foster a culture that supports collaboration? (RQ2) 6. How has participating in collaborative planning changed your instructional practices? (RQ3)
Round 3	1. What challenges remain at our school to decreasing isolation and implementing collaborative practices? (RQ1). Have those challenges been addressed? (RQ3) 2. What challenges remain for you in decreasing isolation and implementing collaborative practices? (RQ1) Have those challenges been addressed? (RQ3) 3. From your experience at our school, what actions by instructional leaders this year support collaborative practices? (RQ1) 4. From your experience at our school, what actions by instructional leaders this year undermines collaborative practices? (RQ1) 5. What can instructional leaders in our school do to foster a culture that supports collaboration? (RQ2) 6. Which attributes of our school's culture support isolation? (RQ2) 7. Which attributes of our school's culture support collaborative practice? (RQ2) 8. How has participating in collaborative planning changed your instructional practices? (RQ3)

APPENDIX F

Action Research Design Team (ARDT-Instructional Leadership Team): Focus Group Protocol

Title of the Study	Unlearning Isolation: An Action Research study of an Instructional Leadership Team and its work to promote collaborative practices.
Research Questions	1. In what ways can instructional leaders support the unlearning of isolation by increasing collaborative practices in one semi-rural high school? 2. How can instructional leaders foster a culture that uses collaborative planning to make teaching practices public in one semi-rural high school? 3. To what extent does participating in collaborative planning impact teacher practices in one semi-rural high school?
Focus Group Protocol	1. How do you as an instructional leader support collaborative practice? (RQ1) 2. From your perspective, what challenges do teachers have as they unlearn habits of isolation and implement collaborative practice? (RQ1). Have those challenges been addressed? (RQ3) 3. What attributes of a school's culture support isolation? (RQ2) 4. What attributes of a school's culture support collaborative practice? (RQ2) 5. How can instructional leaders foster a collaborative planning culture to make teaching practices public? (RQ2) 6. How has participating in collaborative planning changed instructional practices in the English department? (RQ3) 7. From your perspective, how has the COVID-19 Pandemic impacted collaboration and/ or isolation? (RQ 1, RQ2, RQ3)

APPENDIX G

Action Research Implementation Team (ARIT-English Course Teams): Strengths Finder Professional Learning Questionnaire

Question 1	What did you learn about yourself in terms of your working relationships at YHHS?
Question 2	What did you learn about some/any of the people you work with at YHHS?
Question 3	How will the information you learned help to improve your work in your course team(s)?
Question 4	When do you give your best work at YHHS?
Question 5	When do you not give your best work at YHHS?
Question 6	What do you need from your team?

APPENDIX H

Action Research Implementation Team (ARIT-English Course Teams): Use of Agendas in Collaborative Course Team Meetings Questionnaire

Question 1	For the purpose of this questionnaire, I am referencing the • 9th Grade Literature Course team • 10th Grade Literature Course team • Honors American Literature Course team • Multicultural Literature Course team
Question 2	Out of the 15 weeks of the semester, how many weeks has your team met (minimum of 30 minutes to be considered a meeting)?
Question 3	Out of the 15 weeks of the semester, how many of the meetings listed above have an agenda (typed or handwritten) that accompanies the meeting?
Question 4	When are agendas for the course team meetings created? • Before the meeting • During the meeting • After the meeting
Question 5	Who creates the agenda for the course team meetings? • One member of the course team creates the agenda • More than one member of the course team creates the agenda • All members of the course team can contribute to the agenda
Question 6	Which of the following collaborative meetings are more productive? • Collaborative meetings with agendas • Collaborative meetings without agendas • Having an agenda doesn't change productivity during a collaborative meeting