ADDRESSING THE IMPACT OF LITERACY AND LANGUAGE-FOCUSED PROFESSIONAL LEARNING

by

KANESHIA DORSAN

(Under the Direction of Karen Bryant)

ABSTRACT

The number of English Language Learners in the United States continues to increase, yet the number of teachers trained to support ELLs does not. The lack of expertise in this area could have a negative impact on academic achievement. Teachers across the nation, including those at Driscoll Middle, a mid-size suburban middle school in the Southeastern United States, could benefit from training focused on strategies to support this learning group. Research indicates that effective professional learning holds the potential to positively impact on teacher efficacy. Teacher efficacy is directly related to teacher performance and student achievement.

This qualitative study examined educators' perceptions of the possible impact of professional learning on the efficacy of teachers of English Language Learners (ELLs). Participants in this study included teachers, school leaders, and district instructional coaches. Three specific questions guided this research:

1) How do teachers perceive their preparedness to deliver effective instruction to English Language Learners?
2) What specific professional learning will teachers require to be equipped?
3) What does an AR team learn as members collaborate to equip teachers

with literacy and language-focused professional learning?

In order to examine the research questions, an AR team worked through the steps of planning, action, observation, and reflection of the implementation of a professional learning program

Data was collected through stakeholder interviews, surveys, assessments, and observations (professional learning communities, classroom instructions, etc.). Previous literature suggested that as the English Language Learner population increases nationwide, public school systems must effectively develop their teachers to deliver instruction that meets the needs of all learners. Conclusions about this action research demonstrated that implementation of specific, targeted professional learning can positively impact teacher efficacy. This work contributes to research surrounding teacher effectiveness in working with diverse populations and offers recommendations for delivering an effective professional learning plan to build capacity.

Keywords: professional learning, English language learners, teacher capacity, action research

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KANESHIA DORSAN

B.S., Georgia Southern University, 2004

M.S., Nova Southeastern University, 2007

Ed.S., The University of Georgia, 2014

A Dissertation Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of The University of Georgia in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree

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KANESHIA DORSAN

Major Professor:	Karen Bryant
Committee:	Jami Berry
	Sally Zepeda

Electronic Version Approved:

Ron Walcott
Vice Provost for Graduate Education and Dean of the Graduate School
The University of Georgia
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DEDICATION

To my husband—**Miguel Dorsan**—for your motivation, understanding, and love

To my parents—**Mary and Norman**—for teaching that I could accomplish anything

To my siblings—**Kaitlin, Krista, and Norman**—for your constant encouragement and support

To my aunt—**Debra Frazier**—for always pushing me forward

To my village—**Riceboro, GA**—for the establishment of firm roots

To my grandma—**Eloise Robinson**—for all of the lessons on life and love

May I always make you all proud.

I can do all things through Him who strengthens me. —Philippians 4:13

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CHAPTER 1

The Introduction

As a first-year principal, I immediately set out to get to know our new staff, students, and context. I was familiar with the demographic and preliminary data of the school, but as a new leader, I knew the importance of learning about the true needs of our school. Those first few weeks I held one-on-one conferences with each staff member, attended collaborative planning sessions, and simply just listened. I noticed certain words kept surfacing. “Meeting the needs of our ELLs,” “strategies needed to support,” and “achievement gap” were a few of the common phrases that emerged rather quickly.

A review of date for our school further supported what the teachers were stating. Our English Language Learners (ELLs) were not performing well academically. Grades and assessment data indicated a major achievement gap, which needed to be addressed. Teachers were speaking loudly and clearly. “Our school is an EL [English learner] school, yet we don’t have the tools and strategies to support their learning.” As a principal, I knew I had to act quickly. Our school’s vision for success included all students, and our ELLs were not getting what they needed. There was a need for specific, targeted professional learning to build teacher capacity.

For many of our teachers, this type of formal training was not offered during their undergraduate studies or via local school professional learning. A lack of training resulted in teachers doing independent research to identify strategies that could help ELLs. My appointment as a new principal coincided with my doctoral work and the need to identify an action research

topic. I knew that it was time to seize this opportunity to work collaboratively with stakeholders to develop a plan of action. If done correctly, this work would directly impact our teachers, students, and school.

The Problem

In K-12 education, there continues to be a persistent gap between the achievement of ELLs and native English speakers. Language barriers pose challenges for delivering instruction that is on grade level, with a focus on rigorous, academic standards. This issue negatively impacts ELLs because they are, in turn, unable to demonstrate proficiency on grade level tasks and assessments. A possible element of this problem is teacher efficacy and preparedness for instructing this diverse population. This study investigated the impact of professional learning on teacher practice.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to assess the impact of professional learning on increasing the efficacy of teachers of ELLs.

Research Questions

1. How do teachers perceive their preparedness to deliver effective instruction to ELLs?
2. What specific professional learning will teachers require to effectively instruct ELLs?
3. What does an action research team learn as members collaborate to equip teachers with literacy and language-focused professional learning?

Definition of Terms

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

- **teacher capacity**: the perceived abilities, skills, and expertise of teachers and their efforts to teach more effectively. According to Datnow and Hubbard (2016), the capacity

of a teacher is impacted by involvement in professional communities and training sessions, and by interactions with coaches, consultants, and principals. In this action research, professional learning communities are used as an implementation activity.

- **teacher efficacy:** a teacher's belief in his or her ability to impact student learning. Bray-Clark and Bates (2003) have indicated that teacher effectiveness is largely dependent on one's sense of efficacy. Professional learning is one agent that may be used to develop efficacy.
- **professional learning community** (PLC)**:** a team whose members regularly collaborate with a focus on continued improvement in meeting learner needs. Aspects of this collaboration include: supportive leadership and structural conditions, reflection on instructional practices and experiences, and team decisions on intervention (Reichstetter, 2006). The members of the AR team serves as the PLC for this study.

These key terms help to describe the details of the action research approach of this study.

Theoretical Framework

Based on the principles from the Center for Educational Leadership (2019), the theory of action asserts that if certain actions and environments occur, then particular outcomes will emerge. Much of this research centered on strategic steps a leader must take in order to set the stage for change. The theory "prompts the principal to consider…problems of practice — problems in what people throughout the system do day-to-day and how they think about their work — that contribute to results for students" (Center for Educational Leadership, 2019, p.1). Because leaders are poised to make decisions that impact the teaching and learning in their buildings, principals are encouraged to use local school PLCs as a vehicle for continuous improvement as a learning organization, establishing a vision for the

future based on data trends (Jones & Thessin, 2017).

In this study, the theory of action (Figure 1) began with the principal. The initial step involved the creation of a PLC, which sought to allow teachers of ELLs to collaborate with peers and experts in the field. Calvert (2016) recommended establishing learning communities in which educators share responsibility for colleague and student success. As part of the work of this study, the PLC identified the professional learning needs of teachers of this student group. Leaders played a critical role by providing the space and time for the PLC as well as by inviting English to Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) experts to participate. Additionally, there were opportunities for professional learning, observation, monitoring, and feedback.

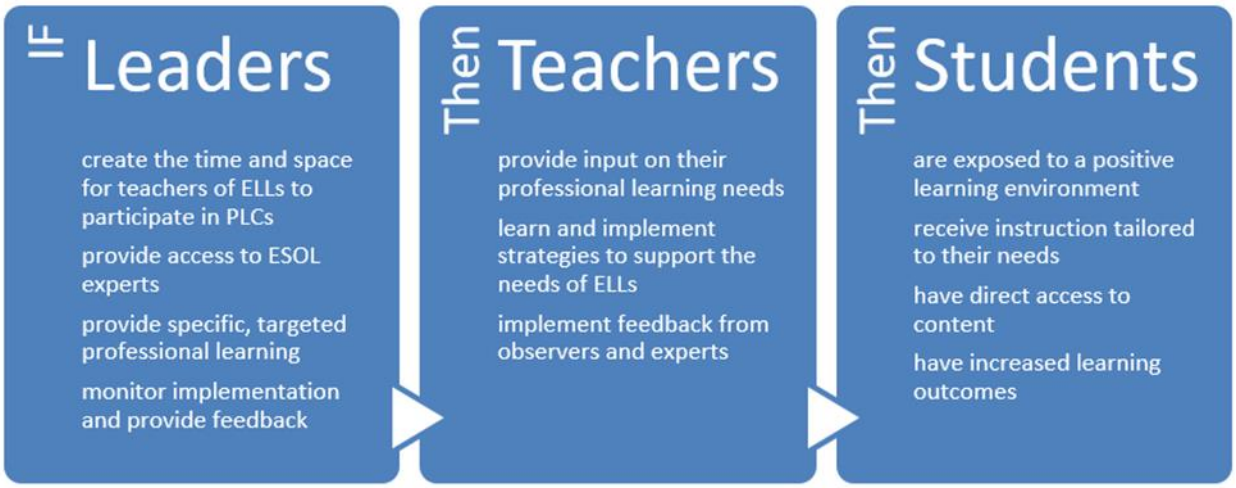
If leaders took these actions, educators would be equipped with relevant and meaningful learning experiences. The educators' role was to fully engage in the process. by being transparent about their needs since this feedback drove the professional learning offerings. Additionally, teachers participated in these offerings, implemented learning with fidelity, and observed peers in action. If a strategy worked, the teacher shared how and why. If it did not work, they explored why not. Finally, yet just as importantly, participants agreed to be open to feedback which was used to modify instructional practices.

The last part of this theory focused on intended outcomes. The goal of this research was to make a positive impact on teacher efficacy. If leaders and teachers took the identified actions, teachers would be equipped with strategies to meet the literacy needs of ELLs. They would acquire a variety of strategies to use on an ongoing and consistent basis. Increased use of targeted, effective strategies would create a positive learning environment for students as the barriers to learning content decreased. Unhindered exposure to content set the stage for

improved learning outcomes for ELLs.

Figure 1

Theoretical Framework for Teacher Efficacy



Conceptual Framework

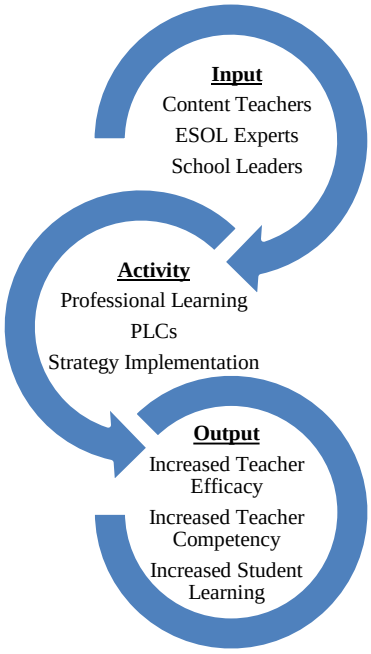
The purpose of this study was to determine if strategic, professional learning focused on language and literacy development would impact teacher efficacy in terms of instructing ELLs. Because many teachers had not received the training needed to instruct ELLs, they felt inadequately prepared and unsuccessful. The goal of this study was to provide them with tools and strategies designed for ELLs, increasing teachers' sense of effectiveness and adequacy. By assessing teachers' current practices and identifying intended practices, this action research study sought to address their needs and to provide them with specific professional learning. Conducting learning walks is one of the six insights shared for implementing effective PLCs (Pirtle and Tobia, 2014). During this process, a small team participated in walkthroughs to observe how PLC decisions were implemented in the classrooms. This was a crucial part of the implementation design of our PLC.

This action research was based on the conceptual framework detailed in Figure 1.2. By delivering ongoing, strategic professional learning, the team sought to build the capacity of teachers of ELLs and to increase their efficacy in the classroom. Many of the teachers at Driscoll Middle School (DMS) had not received formal training in this area. Using this conceptual framework, we addressed their needs for support through professional learning and the development of a PLC. Effective PLCs have the power to change a school's culture and to improve student-learning outcomes, a power that resides in collaboration focused on instructional practice. Throughout the process, steps were taken to help teachers acquire and implement new learning through creating, evaluating, analyzing, applying, understanding, and remembering (Pappas, 2010).

A powerful component of this action research PLC was the inclusion of ESOL experts. These individuals had received specific, formal training focused on the instruction of ELL students. In addition, they had years of experience with teaching this student group. These experts shared their knowledge as they trained teachers who need support. Additionally, participants received strategic, ongoing professional learning focused on literacy and language acquisition. The professional learning sessions explored and modeled strategies for teachers, who then had the opportunity to implement the strategies in a classroom setting. Peer observations provided teachers with immediate and timely feedback, which was critical in refining instruction. The end goal was greater teacher efficacy in instructing ELLs using effective strategies, creating an impact of higher achievement. "The powerful ability for high teacher efficacy to transfer to the student, changing ability perceptions, is support for the belief that teacher efficacy is a factor that positively influences student's achievement" (Fraser, 2014).

Figure 1.2

Conceptual Framework for Teacher Efficacy



Overview of the Methodology

Action Research

Coghlan and Brannick (2005) have defined action research as "an approach to research which aims at both taking action and creating knowledge or theory about that action." (p. 4). Through the cyclical steps of planning, acting, and evaluating, a team works collaboratively to solve a problem through inquiry. In the field of education, action research is used as "a method of systematically investigating classroom procedures and practices with an eye toward improving the quality of action in the schools" (Tomlinson, 1995, p. 467). Teachers and leaders have employed this methodology to address an issue within their schools through inquiry, collaboration, and action. "Action research is fundamentally about change" (Coghlan & Brannick, 2005, p. 12). Participants seek to bring positive change to their organizations.

As principal of DMS, I had reviewed data, participated in collaborative planning sessions, and spoken with teachers collectively and individually. Doing so provided a full picture of our instructional strengths and needs. An academic achievement gap existed between our ELLs and those whose primary home language is English. Local school, district, and state data reflected this gap. Furthermore, our teachers voiced the need for more strategies and training to meet the needs of all students. As the primary instructional leader, I was personally invested in this work because I was responsible for providing support and direction.

A variety of stakeholders were impacted by this research:. first and foremost, our ELL students, who had a right to an education that prepares them for their futures, and along with them, their parents, who entrusted the school to provide students with quality teaching and learning experiences. Other stakeholders critical to this research included teachers, administrators, and district leaders. Teachers wanted the professional learning needed to develop and build their capacity. Administrators and district leaders worked alongside them to provide these opportunities. Without this work, the achievement gap could have continued to persist and possibly widen. This study sought to determine the impact professional learning may have on increasing teacher efficacy when instructing ELLs.

During this process, DMS worked closely with the district's ELL Programs Office, whose role was to support the academic achievement of ELLs. Within Urban Public School System [1](UPSS), the population of ELLs continued to grow and had garnered the attention of stakeholders at the local and district level. Staffed with a director and program specialists devoted to various schools, the office had personnel committed to working with schools to support teaching and learning. The ELL Programs Office's goal was to help the district provide

[1] Name is a pseudonym

effective instruction that allows ELL students to expediently 1) attain proficiency in English and 2) perform at or above grade level in academics. This philosophy drove the mission and vision of the program and aligned with the relevance of this work. Specifically, we worked with Denise Harrison[2], district EL Programs Specialist, who supported targeted professional development, observation, and feedback opportunities.

Identification of the AR team

The AR team included eight individuals: the researcher, two assistant principals who supported the ESOL department, one UPSS EL Program Specialist, one veteran ESOL teacher, and three grade level teachers. In the creation of the team, the goal was to create a balance of those with ESOL expertise and those without it. The veteran ESOL teacher had earned degrees and training specific to working with ELLs, and the three grade level teachers had not received any formal training in the field. The aim was to make sure the voices of teachers who do not have ESOL training were heard and to work with experts in the field to address their needs.

Initial steps for the AR team

Coghlan and Brannick (2014) defined action research as "an approach to research that is based on a collaborative problem-solving relationship between researcher and client, which aims both to solve a problem and to generate new knowledge" (p.43). The action research (AR) team used a collaborative approach to solve the problem presented by this research. Meeting on a monthly basis, the team began by reviewing our local school data with a laser-like focus on ELL achievement data using the ATLAS protocol (School Reform Initiative, 2020). Following this data analysis, we reviewed current national and local statistics focused on ELLs and teacher preparation.

[2] Names is a Pseudonym

Next, the team conducted a review of the literature surrounding the topic, with an intentional focus on professional learning and its ability to increase teacher efficacy. Using all of the above, the team conducted a needs assessment to assess our current professional learning practices and to analyze their effectiveness. This needs assessment included the administration of a teacher efficacy rating scale and use of a focus group. All of the above helped the team identify strengths, gaps, and areas of focus as we begin our work.

Survey Methods

This action research study used collected both quantitative and qualitative data. Quantitative data was gathered through the use of a Teacher Self Efficacy Scale (TSES) (Appendix D) to determine teacher beliefs about efficacy and their impact on the academic achievement of ELLs. "Teacher efficacy has proven to be powerfully related to many meaningful educational outcomes such as teacher persistence, enthusiasm, commitment, and instructional behavior, as well as student outcomes such as achievement, motivation, and self-efficacy beliefs" (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2001, p. 783). TSES results allowed the AR team to draw inferences about individual teacher beliefs and to make correlations between these beliefs and the impact on teacher effectiveness.

The TSES was administered before, during, and near the conclusion of the action research process because teacher beliefs were subject to change throughout this process. The results of each administration helped the team to analyze initial teacher beliefs and the impact professional learning had on both participants' beliefs and practices. Using results, we made necessary adjustments to the plan of action throughout the process.

Focus Group Interviews

In addition to collecting quantitative data from the efficacy scale, I conducted focus group interviews to obtain qualitative data. Focus groups drew upon the attitudes, feelings, beliefs, and experiences of respondents. Morgan and Kreuger (1993) explained that the researcher is able to gather data in a way that would not be possible through methods such as observations and surveys. Interviews in this study allowed the AR team to ascertain a better understanding of the views, attitudes, and behaviors of participants. "The benefits of focus group research include gaining insights into people's shared understandings of everyday life and the ways in which individuals are influenced by others in a group situation" (Gibbs, 1997, para 1). By employing this method, I gathered a consensus of the group's needs, which ultimately impacted the plan of action.

Due to the nature of my role as the school's principal, I had to create a safe space for participants. To do so, I gave a consent form to participants to note the potential risks associated with participation in this study. The form noted that they would not be subject to any unfair and/or unethical treatment due to their participation in this action research. Prior to the beginning of the focus group interviews, I took additional measures to assure the absence of bias or retaliation as a result of honest responses and feedback. Interviews were conducted via a collaborative group format to create an added layer of support as participants will be able to share and add to the responses of one another other.

As the interviewer, I reiterated the purpose of the focus group and the importance of hearing from all participants. Similar to most PLCs, we established norms for responding to and interacting with one another. The use of agreed upon norms helped facilitate conversation and ensured that all voices were heard. I asked open-ended questions to elicit detailed responses

about individual or collective training and experiences. The use of follow-up questions provided clarity or additional detail. As the facilitator, I provided clear explanations of the purpose, helped people feel at ease, and facilitated interaction (Gibbs, 1997).

For this research, all focus group interviews were recorded and transcribed. As interviews were conducted, I recorded responses via both handwritten notes and a digital recorder. Upon completion of each interview, I transcribed responses. Each participant was designated a title, such as “Participant 1”, to maintain anonymity. No one else involved in the study had access to this naming process.

Data Collection & Analysis

This action research was informed by both quantitative and qualitative measures. This approach involved “collecting, analyzing, and interpreting quantitative and qualitative data in a single study or in a series of studies that investigate the same underlying phenomenon” (Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2009, p. 265). By employing both qualitative and quantitative methods, this study sought to ascertain a thorough view of how professional learning may impact teacher self-efficacy.

This research followed three cycles of action research as it identified ways to improve the current experiences of ELL students and their teachers. During each cycle, the team worked to design, implement, and revise literacy and language-focused professional learning experiences. Using the Plan, Act, Observe, Reflect action research cycle (Kemmis & McTaggart, 1998), the team identified ways to support content area teachers of ELL students through the implementation of specific professional learning opportunities to address their needs. Through the utilization of a PLC, the team researched and implemented literacy and language-focused strategies. A district instructional coach and professional learning sessions provided additional support. Throughout the cycle, adjustments and refinements were made based on feedback and

observation. The AR team compared the efficacy levels of teachers before, during, and near the conclusion of the action research study.

The team began by analyzing the results of the initial TSES and focus group discussion. Using this information, the team designed professional learning opportunities tailored to meet the language and literacy needs of teachers of ELLs. Strategies were gathered from sites such as Colorin Colorado, a bilingual site for families and educators of ELLs (2019). After review, the team modeled and practiced selected strategies within the PLC. Then, teachers implemented the strategies within the classroom and provided feedback to the PLC. This feedback focused on perceived effectiveness, ease of implementation and delivery, and student response. All members engaged in peer observations and feedback sessions to analyze the effectiveness of learned strategies and to tweak their implementation.

Following the implementation of the first cycle, the AR team reviewed feedback gathered from the administration of the TSES, focus group interviews, and classroom observations. This information informed the design of the second cycle of action research. During the second cycle, the process of planning, acting, observing, and reflecting continued. Upon the conclusion of the second cycle, the data collected from the interim administration of the TSES, focus group interviews, and classroom observations informed the design of the third cycle.

Intervention

The primary interventions of this study were the professional learning activities designed to build the capacity of teachers of ELL students. These activities were created and implemented by the AR team, which included the researcher, district personnel, school leaders, and teachers of ELLs. The AR team designed interventions based on the needs of the teachers during planning sessions. Each cycle featured the implementation of a particular type of intervention, which provided the team with opportunities to review teacher progress and make necessary

adjustments.

Professional learning opportunities included training focused on literacy and language, PLCs, and classroom observation. Focus group interviews and PLC debriefs provided the team with feedback on interventions and next steps for future cycles. AR team members participated in all aspects of the planning and implementation to facilitate a collaborative approach to professional learning.

Significance

The population of ELLs continues to grow within the United States (US). As this population has grown, the number of teachers trained to address the needs of ELLs has not. By 2030, forty percent of the K-12 population is expected to consist of ELLs. (Crawford, 2000), yet researchers find that the majority of teachers from exemplary preparation programs would consider themselves "less well prepared" to work with ELL students (Darling-Hammond, 2006). Teachers' confidence in themselves to help students achieve educational goals, known as teacher efficacy, plays an important role in the potential for student success (Garver et al., 2018). In order to ensure educational equity for all students, school districts and leaders must develop the capacity of teachers to effectively meet the needs of all students. Implementing language and literacy-focused professional learning has the potential to lead to increased teacher efficacy, which could result in an increase in student achievement for ELLs throughout the country.

This research will be significant to the field of education because it may have implications for local school districts, state boards of education, national education agencies, and international education agencies. Rural, urban, and suburban areas are faced with the need to equip teachers to meet the language and literacy needs of those learning English. Fraser (2014, p. 1) asserts the following:

English Language Learners are taught by general education teachers, English as a Second Language / English to Speakers of Other Languages (ESL /ESOL), as well as bilingual teachers; however, with the shortage of bilingual teachers, general monolingual education teachers are responsible for the education of the ELL most of the time.

To meet the needs of content-area teachers of ELLs, this research seeks to detail specific components needed for a PLC. Current programs may leave teachers feeling ill equipped to meet students' needs, thus affecting their overall sense of efficacy and performance. Outside of the US, this study could inform global education systems as they plan to meet the needs of any language learner.

Organization of the Dissertation

Chapter 1 provides an overview of this dissertation and gives an overview of the research questions, the problem of practice, and methods for the study. Chapter 2 details a review of the related literature for the study with a focus on characteristics and growth of the ELL students, academic achievement, and the need for ESOL-trained teachers. Chapter 3 describes the research design and methodology of this work. Chapter 4 provides a description of the case and its context. Chapter 5 details the findings of each action research cycle as related to the research questions of this study. Chapter 6 provides a summary of the major findings and provides implications of the research for practitioners, researchers, and policy makers.

CHAPTER 2

Review of the Related Literature

The purpose of the study was to examine the impact of professional learning on the efficacy of teachers of ELLs. To address the purpose of this study, the following research questions guided the work:

1. How do teachers perceive their preparedness to deliver effective instruction to ELLs?
2. What specific professional learning will teachers require to effectively instruct ELLs?
3. What does an AR team learn as members collaborate to equip teachers with literacy and language-focused professional learning?

This chapter includes the research questions and a review of the related literature on ELLs, academic achievement, teacher efficacy, and professional learning.

Overview of the Literature

Much of the existing literature focused on ELLs and achievement focuses on particular themes. These works illustrate the increasing growth of this learner population, the diversity of this student group, the academic needs, and the need for training to support teachers of ELLs. The literature indicates that all schools should devote attention to professional learning designed to increase the capacity of teachers who instruct ELLs. Doing so has a direct impact on student achievement.

English Language Learners in Context

Each year, the number of ELLs in the US continues to increase. By definition, ELLs are students whose native language is not English. In the year 2020, there were 4.9 million ELL

public school students in the US. As this population grows, a persistent gap between the achievement of ELLs and native English speakers continues to exist. Language barriers pose challenges for delivering instruction that is on grade level, with a focus on rigorous, academic standards. In turn, many ELLs are unable to demonstrate mastery on grade level tasks and assessments, illustrating a direct impact on academic achievement.

One of the largest and most diverse systems in the nation, UPSS currently serves over 40,000 ELLs. These students and their families represent a variety of native languages (French, Spanish, Chinese, Korean, Vietnamese, Creole, etc.). The commonality lies in the fact that English is a second language, and while students are learning academic content, they are also learning a new language, which creates challenges for both the learner and the educator. Each year, the district's ELL population continues to increase.

Located in UPSS, the student population of DMS is nearly 50% ELL. The majority of this percentage includes students from Spanish-speaking countries; however, other languages, such as Creole, Vietnamese, Chinese Mandarin, Farsi, Hindi, Romanian, and Arabic are also represented. The variability of English-speaking skills ranges for students; however, for teachers, it does not. Currently, DMS has 15 of 81 teachers who speak another language fluently. Even fewer teachers have received professional training for working with ELLs. Prior to this study, four individuals had training specific to teaching students who were learning English.

The literature compels K-12 leaders to prepare to address the needs of teachers of ELLs. There is now an even greater demand to support the needs of this growing population. Since it is possible that teachers have not received training and/or professional learning, leaders should determine ways to build the capacity of staff. One way to do so is to offer professional learning with a focus on literacy and language strategies. Teachers would need opportunities to identify

their needs, implement learned strategies, reflect on their effectiveness, and offer feedback. Without this part of the improvement cycle, the achievement gap between the ELL population and native English speakers could continue to widen. This study investigated the impact of professional learning on teacher practice and its potential to remedy the situation through the exploration of three themes: ELLs and achievement, delivering effective literacy instruction to ELLs, and the impact of tailored professional learning on teacher efficacy with ELLs.

Diversity of the ELL Population

While the term ELL is singularly used to identify a particular student group, it is important to note the diversity represented within the whole. As with any other student group, ELL is not a one-size fits all label; it is more of an umbrella. Currently, the ELL student group represents 10% of the K-12 population in the US. In 2014-15, seventy-five percent of ELLs were Hispanic, and eleven percent were Asian (Our Nation's ELL Learners, 2017). However, depending on the specific region of the country, primary languages differ. The most widely spoken non-English languages in the United States were Spanish, Chinese, French, German, Tagalog, Vietnamese, Italian, Korean, Russian, Polish, and Arabic" (Lucas, 2017). Within any one school or district, a multitude of languages could be spoken, supporting the need for effective strategies that translate to a speaker of any language.

ELL students in the US come from over 400 different language backgrounds and while many students were born in this country, the majority of their parents were not (Our Nation's English Learners, 2017). A vast majority of ELLs are children of immigrants. Parent background increases variability since immigration status may directly impact socioeconomic status (Goldenburg, 2008). Parents who came to the US from countries where education was not easily accessible may have entered the US without a high school diploma, making it difficult to obtain

jobs/careers with higher pay. ELL students who come from lower socioeconomic backgrounds may live in communities and attend schools that further impact academic achievement. Where a student lives has a direct influence on success due to available, resources, quality of environment, and school performance. By studying more than seven million families who moved across commuting zones and counties in the US, researchers showed that the neighborhoods in which children grow up impact their earnings, college attendance rates, and fertility and marriage patterns (Chetty & Hendren, 2017).

Furthermore, a parent's lack of English-speaking skill may result in discomfort in participating in the educational process. A study which involved interviews with a parent liaison found that "parents' challenges were numerous as well. Many Latinx ELL parents lack confidence and the perceived social capital to confront teachers. They often fear English-speaking institutions and "leave teaching to the teachers" instead of speaking up and advocating for their children" (Wall & Musetti 2018 p. 5). Parents who do not speak English fluently may feel alienated or out of place when visiting schools that do not offer inviting environments or translators to assist in communication. In some cultures, parents are taught to respect the role of the teacher as educator, which results in supporting their child's progress from afar. To teachers who lack cultural awareness or training, this approach may be viewed as a lack of parental involvement.

This element of the professional literature has implications for schools as they develop school to home communication. In schools with high ELL populations, it is ineffective to send home documents in one language. Teachers and leaders are encouraged to ensure that documents are translated into languages that families understand. If not, critical school information may not be delivered. Additionally, interpreters should be present for school-wide meetings and parent

conferences. Delivering messages only in English also delivers another unintended message that may causeparents to feel alienated or disconnected from the school.

In addition to language, socioeconomic status, parent background, and origin, the ELL population is also diverse when it comes to the level of English proficiency. Often, ELL is used to describe students who have limited English vocabulary; however, school ELL populations feature a range, including those who have never been exposed to English to those who have previously received or are receiving English instruction. Developed by the United States Department of Education, the WIDA (World-Class Instructional Design and Assessment) system identifies five levels of English proficiency: *entering*, *beginning*, *developing*, *expanding*, *bridging*, and *reaching* as the (WIDA, 2018). Based on performance in the domains of speaking, listening, reading, and writing, an ELL student may fall within each of the identified levels. The varying WIDA levels call for a variety of instructional strategies from using pictoral representations only to using technical, content area language.

Growth of the ELL Population

"The demographics of US elementary and secondary schools are changing rapidly as a result of record-high immigration" (Capps et al., 2005, p. 1). The number of immigrants has increased substantially since the 1990s, and at the time of this study, one in five students were children of immigrants. In particular, areas of the US, ELLs has comprised a significant part of the population, and this student group continues to grow rapidly. "In 2015, the states with the highest ELL populations were Alaska, California, Colorado, Kansas, Nevada, New Mexico, Texas, and Washington, and the percentage of students who were ELLs was higher for school districts in more urbanized areas than for those in less urbanized areas" (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2018, para. 2). This data reflects overall national trends. It is important to

note that urbanized and industrialized areas may exist in any area or state, increasing the potential for immigration to more desired areas.

In the year 2016, over a million of the residents in Georgia were foreign-born individuals, accounting for over 10% of the state's population (Sugarman & Geary, 2018). Of that number, school-age children accounted for 21% of the population, significantly close to the overall national percentage of 26%. Each year, this population increases, particularly for larger school districts. While the state's ELL numbers may be smaller than some, the ELL population in suburban districts like Lewis is comparable to those of larger states. "ELL students constituted an average of 14.0 percent of total public school enrollment in cities, 9.1 percent in suburban areas, 6.5 percent in towns, and 3.6 percent in rural areas" (National Center for Education Statistics, 2018, para. 2). By the year 2030, 40% of the school population in the US is expected to consist of ELLs (Roseberry-McKibbin & Brice, 1999). While areas of the country may have a range of ELLs, educators must be prepared to address the specific needs of the ELLs who are in their schools. It is not a question of if, but when and how.

Academic Achievement of ELLs

The academic achievement of ELLs should be an area of focus for those entering the field of education:

> Unfortunately, the rapid growth in the ELL population has not been matched by sufficient growth in teachers' understanding of how to effectively educate these students. As a result, many districts across the country are buckling under the weight of having to meet the needs of ELL students who are not demonstrating proficiency in academic areas such as reading, writing, and math. (Samson & Collins, 2012, p.5)

No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation caused educators to examine the needs of the ELL student. “In the early 1990s, the era of standards and accountability coincided with a dramatic increase in the immigrant population and raised questions about test reliability for ELLs” (What Research Says About Preparing ELLs for Academic Success, 2007, p. 3). Other than assessing them with measures designed for speakers of English, what steps were schools taking to develop the language and academic skills of these learners?

When reviewing the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), Murphy (2014) identified key findings: (a) an achievement gap between ELL and non-ELL students—about 40 percentage points in both fourth-grade reading and eighth-grade math—that has remained constant from 2000 to 2013; (b) considerable state-level variation in the percentage of ELL students achieving at the “basic or above” levels; and (c) a significant lag of ELLs behind non-ELLs on the eighth-grade math measure. “The variability in state-level performance overall and in the size of the gap between ELL and non-ELL students, suggests that there may be modifiable factors related to the academic achievement of ELL students.” (Murphy, 2014, p. 4). The data indicated the need for an analysis of why this achievement gap has persisted and what steps were needed to begin to close it.

The need to close the gap is critical because academic performance has a far-reaching impact. Scores and grades on assessments may determine promotion decisions as well as other academic placements. For instance, in one state, eighth grade students take a series of content-area focused assessments that measure student proficiency (Downloadable Data, 2021). All eighth grade students take this assessment, which means an ELL student, regardless of language proficiency, will be administered the same material. In UPSS, performance on this assessment is

one factor used to determine promotion or retention. Additionally, performance data and other assessments may limit ELLs to certain classes or academic tracks.

In addition to the gap represented by NAEP results, further data have indicated that ELL students take fewer advanced courses than non-ELLs, and only 59% of ELLs graduate from high school in four years (Murphy, 2014). “Only 63 percent graduate from high school, compared with the overall national rate of 82 percent” (Sanchez, 2017, para. 18). In Georgia, the overall graduation rate is 72.5% compared to 43.9% for ELLs. When it comes to gifted identification, only 2%of ELLs are enrolled in gifted programs compared with 7.3%of non-ELL students (Sanchez, 2017). All of the above illustrate an existing educational debt within schools; ELLs have not reached the same levels of proficiency and have not received the same opportunities as others. Disparities exist between white students and those who have immigrated to the US (Ladson-Billings, 2006).

> In order to see improvements in ELL achievement outcomes, greater continuity in how general education teachers are prepared by teacher-education programs, certified by states, and evaluated by local education agencies or LEAs, is essential. By making sure that the special needs of ELLs are addressed at multiple stages of the teacher-preparation process, schools may gain higher quality teachers of ELLs and more importantly, higher outcomes for ELLs.
>
> (Samson & Collins, 2012, p. 9)

The ELL group is diverse and has diverse needs in terms of instruction. Various research studies have found a positive correlation between language acquisition and academic achievement. A study conducted in Nigeria examined the impact of language proficiency on the overall academic achievement of seniors (Fakeye & Ogunsiji, 2009). Student success in

academic classes taught in English varied based on their ability to speak, read, and write the language. Those who were unable to do so undoubtedly struggled with content that was not presented in their native language. Similarly, a research study conducted with 8th grade Filipino students yielded similar results; language proficiency had a direct, positive impact on student achievement (Robelle & Ronald, 2015). Students who learned the language of instruction were able to more successfully engage with the content, leading to an increase in achievement. A positive correlation existed between understanding the new language and interacting successfully with the material.

While English is a second language for many, it remains a medium for global communication due to its usage in a variety of fields (Jeraltin & Ramganesh, 2013). "Many non-English speaking countries view English as a necessary working language and have adopted it as a second language" (Ozowuba, 2018, p. 1). While honoring the primary language of students, teachers must be prepared to help them develop the literacy skills needed to engage with the English language. The language barrier has the potential to have a negative impact if specific, targeted strategies are not used. "Those identified strategies include teaching academic vocabulary in multiple ways, small group instruction and intervention, and integrating oral and written English into content area" (Zepeda, 2017, p. 40). Because language has a direct impact on literacy, studies have increased the call to train teachers to support the academic needs of ELLs.

Teacher Efficacy

As the ELL population increases, public school systems must identify ways to equip teachers with the tools and skills to be effective. Population trends have indicated that the majority of teachers will teach an EL student at some point during their careers. "At the turn of

the 21st century, a national survey reported 41 percent of public school teachers in a variety of locales taught students with limited English proficiency. Fewer than a third of those teachers had even a modest level of training to support ELs" (Quintero & Hanson, 2017, para. 10). Without a level of training, teachers are often required to figure out their own methods for teaching this student population, and these methods may not be research-based.

A teacher's sense of self-efficacy has been directly linked to student achievement. The work of Bandura (1997) indicated that teachers with high self-efficacy work to implement effective instructional strategies for their students, fostering their development, while teachers with low self-efficacy beliefs create classroom environments that weaken students' progress. Bandura's work indicated the need to build and develop teacher efficacy to affect lesson planning, delivery, and implementation. This would set the stage for positive student learning outcomes.

A qualitative case study conducted in Kentucky found that teacher views on preparation for teaching ELLS had a direct impact on instructional practices. "Teachers with perceptions of lower levels of preparation rarely provided alternative forms of assessment, ensured comprehension, or implemented scaffolding" (Correll, 2016, p. 186). On the other hand, the teacher who "perceived that she was extremely well prepared by her teacher education program often modeled learning tasks, utilized varied strategies to facilitate comprehensible input, and provided options for alternative assessments" (Correll, 2016, p. 186). The study provided implications for both university pre-service education programs and school leaders. Specifically, the study suggested that pre-service programs should provide all educators experiences with teaching linguistically diverse students. Participants need opportunities to observe and to acquire strategies for use in their own classrooms. This work should continue beyond the college

experience; school leaders should design professional learning experiences to develop the skill set of in-service teachers.

Professional Learning for Teachers

Professional learning opportunities may take on a variety of forms, and approaches may include activities such as teacher support groups, peer observation, peer coaching, and action research (Richards & Farrell, 2005). Most importantly, the process should be ongoing and lead to professional growth for teachers. Professional learning is a central part of the role of educators (Richards & Farrell, 2005). Findings have indicated the importance of providing teachers with both formal and informal learning opportunities. Examples include explicit instruction in teaching strategies as well as opportunities to observe, share, and learn from others.

In a study conducted with English language teachers in Saudi Arabia, researchers found that teachers prefer professional learning opportunities that allow for collaboration with peers and benefit from both formal and informal experiences (Ahmed et al., 2018). Participants conducted peer observations to learn from each other and to identify strategies for immediate use in their classrooms. Immediately after observations, observees met with the observed to discuss the lesson and to share feedback. Doing so allowed both teachers a chance to self-reflect and to learn from others who were teaching similar student populations. A continual cycle of learning by doing was the end result.

Professional literature has indicated that PLCs are powerful tools when used to allow teachers to “engage in constructive dialogue, reflect on and improve instruction, and learn how to become more effective in the classroom to improve student learning” (Pirtle & Tobia, 2014, p. 1). With the appropriate structures in place, teachers have used PLCs to collaborate around studying standards, planning and implementing lessons, reviewing data, analyzing student work,

and adjusting instruction as needed. These components are all critical for delivering effective instruction and growing as a professional. As a result, teacher self-efficacy has been shown to increase when teachers "know they can bring any instructional challenges to their colleagues and receive help in addressing the concerns" (Pirtle & Tobia, 2014, p. 6). There is strength and safety in collaboration.

A study conducted with pre-service teachers further supported this research. In a review of teachers' lesson plans, Gonzalez (2016) discovered the use of a one-size fits all approach when instructing ELLs, which were defined as. tasks heavily focused on speaking and writing and less on listening and reading. Even though participants completed three courses focused on teaching ELLs, they had not explicitly been taught how to use language proficiency data to design instruction that was effective for individual students. Effective professional development holds the potential to help teachers recognize and address variation in the proficiency of ELLs and to design learning activities accordingly. Because many universities do not require or offer ESOL coursework completion, local schools can meet this need by delivering training to new and veteran teachers alike. Literature has indicated that teachers feel they can be powerful predictors of ELL achievement and feel "less efficacious in their training to deal with any ELL problem" (Fraser, 2014, p. 14). This finding suggests an additional facet of teacher training. Building teacher efficacy in supporting the various needs of ELLs will ultimately impact teaching and learning.

Heineke et al. (2019) focused on teachers as the central component of change for ELLs. Their work focused on providing teachers with tools for selecting culturally relevant materials, communicating with families of ELLs, and using strategies to promote academic language. Participants in these professional learning offerings reported increased confidence in their

abilities to teach ELLs and to share their learning with colleagues. This self-efficacy was "attributed to stronger understandings of (a) linguistic and educational research, (b) the connection between policy, practice, and research on ELs, and (c) how to use this knowledge to advocate for students." (Heineke et al., 2019, para. 21). The findings of this study supported the need for specific, targeted professional learning to increase capacity and efficacy of teachers of ELLs.

To promote ELL learning in schools, content area teachers will need support with three general teaching principles: "sustaining academic rigour, engaging students in sustained, quality interactions (with teacher and students), and teaching with a pedagogical language focus" (Gleeson & Davison, 2016, paras. 5-7). Students should be engaged in higher order thinking about key concepts, exposed to rigorous texts, and provided opportunities to collaborate while building knowledge. "Mainstream teachers need 'deep content knowledge that is pedagogical in nature'" (Santos et al., 2012, p. 3), but also "substantial theoretical knowledge about how to contextualize language teaching within their subject" (Hammond, 2014, p. 527). Professional learning experiences for teachers should include a combination of the above.

Conclusion

In order to address the academic needs of ELLs, it is helpful for educators to have an understanding of the population, its diversity, and needs. Having a thorough picture of the students served and the families from which they come is essential and helps schools to develop a plan of action. ELLs are a diverse group, and the plan to support them requires the inclusion of different facets. A crucial part of this plan will be providing teachers with the support needed to effectively instruct ELLs. Currently, the gap in teacher preparation mirrors the gap in academic achievement for this student group. Teachers are exiting college preparatory programs with

limited exposure to strategies to reach the needs of the ELLs who will be in their classrooms. Research indicates that effective strategies include vocabulary, literacy, and small group instruction. Although these strategies have been identified, many teachers have not received targeted instruction on how to implement them. Therefore, they feel unprepared to support students, and achievement reflects this lack of support. Partnering with university programs, districts and schools must implement high-quality professional learning to increase teacher efficacy. The next chapter illustrates the design and methodology of this action research.

CHAPTER 3

Research Design and Methodology

The purpose of the study was to examine the impact of professional learning on the efficacy of teachers of ELLs. To address the purpose of this study, the following research questions guided the work:

1. How do teachers perceive their preparedness to deliver effective instruction to ELLs?
2. What specific professional learning will teachers require to effectively instruct ELLs?
3. What does an AR team learn as members collaborate to equip teachers with literacy and language-focused professional learning?

This chapter outlines the theoretical and conceptual frameworks of this work, along with an explanation of the research design, data collection methods, data analysis, and a discussion of the reliability and validity.

Theoretical Framework

This study was guided by the theory of action, which asserts that if certain actions and environments occur, then particular outcomes will emerge. For this action research, the theory began with the principal who was also the primary researcher. Through creation of the AR team, I as the researcher created a PLC. I created time and space for teachers of ELLs to collaborate and to have access to ESOL experts. The work of this PLC focused solely on collaboration and the acquisition of specific, targeted literacy and language-focused professional learning.

Members of the AR team included teachers, leaders, and district experts. Because

teachers were a part of the team, they had direct influence on the design of the professional learning activities and were able to provide input on the offerings and the process. They were invested in the professional learning as they learned new strategies to implement in their classrooms. Lastly, teachers were able to utilize the strategies and to receive non-evaluative feedback from AR team members. This feedback ultimately influenced the design of professional learning activities as participants gave voice to effectiveness and ease of implementation.

The last part of the theory focused on expected outcomes. As teachers learned and implemented new strategies, the desired outcome was increased efficacy and competency. By focusing on the professional learning of teachers, this work sought to impact views on preparedness and effectiveness. Since ELLs were the direct recipients of techniques designed to meet their learning needs, improved student learning was also an expected outcome.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework of this action research focused on an input, activity, output flow. The input stage of the framework consisted of teachers, district leaders/ESOL experts, and school leaders. Together, these individuals formed both an AR team and a PLC. The activity stage included ongoing professional learning, PLC collaboration, and the implementation of literacy and language-focused strategies. For the output, this action research sought to see increased teacher efficacy and competency and increased student-learning outcomes.

This action research featured three cycles, and the conceptual framework was cyclical in nature. For each cycle, the input and activity stages were implemented, and the output stage was evaluated. Using this framework, the team addressed teachers' needs for support through professional learning and the development of a PLC.

Action Research

Action research was the method employed for this study. Glanz (2003) defined the term as "an invaluable tool that allows educational leaders to reflect upon their practices, programs, and procedures" (p. 27). Johnson explained the process as "a planned, methodical observation related to one's teaching" (Johnson, 2002, p. 1). For educational practitioners, action research allows for the study of a contextual program and the exploration of ways to address or improve learning conditions.

The action research utilized in this study supported the goals of DMS as it facilitated the collaboration of teachers, district personnel, and leaders to support the professional learning and growth of teachers of ELLs and to positively impact teacher efficacy. Improved teacher efficacy has a direct impact on teacher effectiveness, which ultimately impacts academic achievement. Action research is critical to the development of the school and the professional practices of teachers of ELLs.

AR team

Following full institutional review board (IRB) approval, I began soliciting members for my AR team. I sent an interest email to a group of grade level teachers, detailing the need for individuals who worked closely with ELLs and who had the desire to build their instructional capacity. Our school's context provided an impetus for this study because the population of ELLs increases each year. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, schools in this district provided families with choice in terms of a preferred instructional format. Sixty percent of students at DMS elected to learn via a virtual format. This change had implications for our work since teachers had to be equipped to meet the needs of all learners, including ELLs, in a virtual format. The goal of this action research was to investigate a problem in real time in conjunction with

those who were directly impacted by the research. Working alongside educators who had a vested interest in this work and its implications was an important part of this study.

The AR design and implementation team consisted of seven individuals, including the researcher. Three members were grade content area teachers of ELLs. Ms. Kerry was a sixth-grade teacher in her second year of teaching. She joined the teaching force via a traditional program of study but did not receive formal training for instructing ELLs. The second teacher was Ms. Roberts, a seventh-grade teacher, who was in her second year of teaching. The third teacher was Ms. Gray, an ELA teacher with five years of experience total. Of the three content area teachers, she was the only one who had received formal training via a university teacher preparatory program. Ms. Braxton and Ms. Carollton, ESOL assistant principals, were also on the team. Ms. Carrrollton brought five years of expertise in supporting teachers of ELLs while Ms. Braxton, a novice administrator, was new to the role. Mr. Ricketts was a veteran ESOL teacher with more than ten years of experience. The final member was Ms. Harrison, UPSS ELL Instructional Coach; her background included graduate work in the field of ESOL as well as local school experiences. Staffing changes impacted the plan to include a district mentor in the work.

Each member of the AR team was dedicated to the work of improving experiences for ELLs. While the content area teachers were novice in the work, they brought an honest view of classroom experiences as well as teacher and student needs. Their novelty was met with the veteran experiences of the ESOL veteran teacher, ESOL assistant principals, and ELL instructional coach who worked to support teachers of ELLs. The diversity of this team helped to provide varied insight as well as feedback, which aided in a tailored professional development experience to address the needs of teachers of ELLs.

Action Research Timeline

Initial Steps for the AR team

The AR team began with a review of the purpose of this research. This process included an in-depth analysis of the problem and each of the study's research questions. Following this review, the team worked to establish norms for the collaboration that occurred within the PLC. "Norms can play a powerful role in eliciting the breadth of perspectives that is needed for a group of educators to tackle hard problems" (Boudett & Lockwood, 2018, para. 1). Using norms helped to ensure that the voices of all team members were heard and different perspectives were represented.

Lastly, members reviewed the action research process to be used for this study. The team worked through the meaning of the steps and their application to this research. The study employed three cycles focused on the work of Kemmis & McTaggert (1988). The four steps of each cycle included planning, action, observation, and reflection. Through inquiry and collaboration, the team identified a problem, implemented potential strategies, and noticed and evaluated outcomes.

The AR team committed to meeting once a month for 60 minutes each time. The first meeting occurred on July 31, 2020. During this initial meeting, we reviewed the purpose of the study and how our work would impact the ELL program at our school and potentially in the field of education. Using the ATLAS protocol (School Reform Initiative, 2020), the team reviewed different data sets such as final exam data, CCRPI results, GMAS data, and ACCESS test scores. The protocol led the team through the steps of interpreting, describing, and identifying implications. Following completion of the protocol, the team reviewed the action research process and the steps the team would take to conduct its work. Upon the conclusion of the

meeting, team members signed their consent forms, confirming membership on the AR team (See Appendix F for agenda*)*. I recorded and transcribed audio from the meeting.

During our second meeting on August 7, 2020, the team began to prepare for implementation of our first cycle of interventions for content area teachers of ELLs (See Appendix F for agenda). The team began by reviewing literature focused on the needs of ELLs, the lack of teacher preparation, and the potential impact on academic achievement. Focus group conversation confirmed teachers' need for increased capacity and efficacy. Individuals shared their own personal experiences with teaching ELLs and the need for targeted professional learning. Many shared they often felt ill prepared to address both the needs of ELLs and the grade-level academic standards. Without the strategies needed to address student needs, teachers often felt discouraged when test scores reflected low levels of mastery.

During this meeting, the team reviewed data from the original administration of the TSES. This analysis allowed us to hone in on teachers' perceptions of their effectiveness and gave us an overall view of their experiences in the classroom. Finally, the team reviewed the minutes from the previous AR meeting. After this review, we reviewed additional literature that focused on specific literacy and language strategies to support ELLs. Using all of the information gathered, we discussed our first intervention cycle and shared our feedback about the plan.

Teachers of ELLs PLC. The AR team formed a PLC. In addition to me as the primary researcher, this team included the three grade-level content area teachers of ELLs, two ESOL assistant principals, the veteran ESOL teacher, and an ELL program specialist. Meeting on a monthly basis, the PLC reviewed literature to identify literacy and language-focused strategies. Additionally, members modeled the strategies, conducted peer observations, and provided

feedback. The meetings were facilitated by either the ELL program specialist or the veteran ESOL teacher.

Literacy and Language-Focused Professional Learning. During the 2020-2021 school year, professional learning was provided by the district and local school. “Many studies have indicated that teachers who receive specialized instructional training for teaching ELL make significant differences on their students’ learning; however, few teachers actually receive this type of specialized support” (Fraser, 2014). In fact, many teachers reported that once in the classroom, there were limited if not few opportunities for professional development on teaching ELLs. For this action research, specific strategies to address literacy and language were presented. Content area teachers implemented these strategies and provided feedback on their experiences via the PLC collaboration and focus group interviews. Participants had the opportunity to conduct peer observations of the strategies in action and to offer feedback to their peers.

Intervention

The purpose of this action research was to examine how literacy and language-focused professional learning impacted teacher efficacy. The goal of the work was to equip teachers with strategies that would develop capacity and increase efficacy. In preparation, I researched literacy and language strategies that were supported by the professional research literature. Common threads pointed to the need for cultural responsiveness, peer interaction, and academic vocabulary (Perez & Holmes, 2010) as well as cognition and metacognition (Proctor et al., 2007). Acquisition of effective strategies had the potential to both build teacher capacity and efficacy. Increased efficacy had the potential to lead to increased academic achievement.

This action research was comprised of three cycles and based on the Plan, Act, Observe, and Reflect action research cycle as defined by Kemmis & McTaggert (1988). During the initial meeting held on July 31, the AR team began the planning phase. We identified and analyzed the issues related to teacher efficacy and capacity related to ELL instruction. During the second meeting, we continued the planning phase by designing a set of interventions to be implemented throughout the fall 2020 semester or the acting stage. During the final phases of observing and reflecting, the AR team evaluated the effectiveness of our interventions by analyzing responses to the TSES, focus group interview, and observation data.

Due to changes in the 2020-20201 school year schedule, planning for the first action research cycle began in late July 2020, and cycle implementation began in August. The team worked through the Planning, Acting, Observing, and Reflecting phases. The second action research cycle began in September 2020 and featured a series of interventions based on the findings of cycle 1 (focus group results, TSES surveys, and observational data). Upon conclusion of the second cycle, the team analyzed data to determine if and how professional development influenced teacher self-efficacy. In December 2020, the AR team prepared to implement the third and final cycle based on the results of cycle 2.

Table 1

The Intervention Plan

Intervention	AR Team Activities	Outcomes	Connection to Problem/ Theoretical Framework	Timeline	Data Collection
Teachers of ELLs PLC	Create purpose and format Conduct Needs Assessment Respond to PLC Feedback and Needs	This PLC will identify and address the support needed to build the efficacy and capacity of	This intervention provides space, time, and opportunity for teachers of ELLs to collaborate and provide input on	Ongoing throughout Cycles 1, 2, and 3	TSES Results Notes from PLC Meetings Focus group responses

		content-area teachers of ELLs	their instructional needs		
Literacy and Language Focused Professional Learning Sessions	Arrange a date/time for sessions Work with the ESOL Instructional Coach to co-facilitate the workshop	Learning how to effectively implement 1-2 literacy and language focused strategies to improve the quality of content-area instruction of ELLs	With the support of an ESOL Instructional Coach, content-area teachers will learn appropriate literacy and language-focused strategies to use during instruction, leading to increased efficacy	Ongoing through Cycles I, II, and III **Cycle I:** One day in August 2020 **Cycle II:** One day in September 2020 **Cycle III:** One day in November 2020	TSES results Focus group responses to the question of effectiveness of the language and literacy focused strategies
Observations & Feedback from EL Program Specialist, Peers, & Administrators	Instructional coaches, teachers, & administrators will offer feedback after teacher implementation of literacy and language-focused strategies.	Feedback will guide the work of teachers as they implement literacy and language-focused strategies	Participants will have the opportunity to gain on-demand feedback, which may be used to adjust instruction	A brief (no more than 20 minute) observation of the literacy and/or language-focused strategy in action	TSES Results Focus group responses on the effectiveness of the experience

The implementation plan was designed by the AR team and was influenced by both conceptual and theoretical frameworks. Table 1 outlines specific interventions, anticipated outcomes, and connections to the conceptual and theoretical framework. It also includes a timeline and plan for data collection. The AR team reviewed data and offered additional interventions to address the needs of study participants.

Research Design

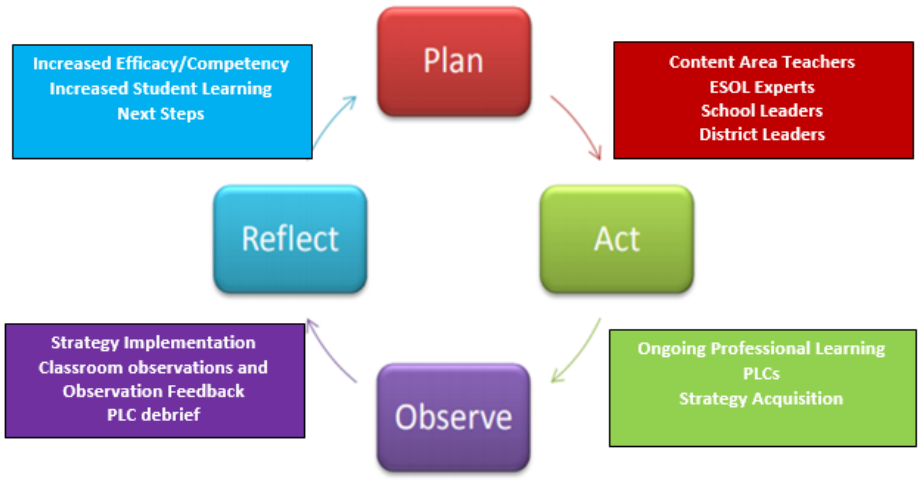
The action research study follows a cyclical learning approach based on the work of

Kemmis and McTaggart (1988). The process is a spiral of self-reflective cycles consisting of planning, acting, observing, and reflecting. In this approach, each cycle informs the next, so the four stages should not be viewed as singular actions but instead as a set of intertwined actions. During the process, the stages overlap as participants learn and reflect. The reflection leads to an analysis of current practices. The overall goal of action research is to help participants understand their practices and their contexts as they evolve.

For this action research study, each of the four stages centered on the implementation of language and literacy-focused professional learning for teachers of ELLs. The methodology was implemented by the AR team and led by the AR facilitator. After each cycle, the reflections of the AR team influenced the planning and design of the subsequent cycle. Throughout the process, AR team members had opportunities to reflect on their practice and learning as a result of participation in the action research.

Figure 3

Action Research Cycle: Adapted from Kemmis and McTaggart (1988).



Contextual Setting

This action research centered on providing targeted, specific language and literacy-

focused professional learning to teachers of ELLs. The research took place at DMS, which serves 1200 students. Of those 1200 students, over 50% of learners are ELLs. DMS is a high needs school, featuring a significant number of ELLs, a high number of students with disabilities, and a high number of students who qualify for free and reduced lunch. Additional information about this action research site may be found in Chapter 4.

Selection

The participants in this action research study included three teachers with experience levels ranging from 2-5 years. Although each participant taught a different grade level, they shared the commonality of instructing primarily ELLs. One of the three teachers received formal training to support ELLs. The other two had received occasional district professional learning. For the aforementioned, this year marked their second year instructing ELLs.

An initial email was sent to grade level teachers of ELLs inviting them to attend an informational meeting on July 31, 2020 (Appendix D). The meeting outlined the purpose of the study, procedures, privacy/confidentiality measures, and possible risks, discomforts, and benefits. Participants were given an opportunity to ask any questions. Those who were interested in participating were presented with two copies of an informed consent form. Interested parties were asked to submit the completed form by Friday and were encouraged to follow up with any questions that surfaced. All forms were collected; participants kept a copy for their records. A follow-up email was sent to interested parties after the meeting; this message reinforced the purpose of the study and thanked them for their voluntary participation (Appendix E).

Table 1.2

The Research Plan

Research Question	Anticipated Data to be Collected	Analysis Approach	Timeline
1. How do teachers perceive their preparedness to deliver effective instruction to ELLs?	Teacher Sense of Self-Efficacy Scale (Pre, Interim, and Post Administration)	TSES data will be compiled using Excel; the mean will be determined for each participant's response to individual items	Pre-Administration: August 2020 Interim Administration: October 2020 Post Administration: December 2020
	Focus Group Interviews	Transcribed by researcher Coding system will be used to identify themes	Ongoing from July 2020 to January 2021
2. What specific professional learning will teachers require to be equipped?	Teacher Sense of Self-Efficacy Scale (Pre, Interim, and Post Administration)	TSES data will be compiled using Excel; the mean will be determined for each participant's response to individual items	Pre-Administration: August 2020 Interim Administration: October 2020 Post Administration: December 2020
	Focus Group Interviews	Recorded and transcribed by researcher Coding system will be used to identify themes	Ongoing from July 2020 to January 2021
	PLC Meeting Notes	Observational notes recorded and transcribed by the researcher	Ongoing form July 2020 to January 2021
3. What does an action research team learn as members collaborate to equip teachers with literacy and language-focused professional learning?	Transcription of Team Meetings	Recorded and transcribed by researcher	Ongoing from July 2020 – January 2021
	Focus Group Interviews	Coding system will be used to identify themes	January 2021

Data Collection Methods

This action research was informed by both qualitative and quantitative measures. Using this approach, a researcher collects both quantitative and qualitative data, analyzes them separately, and then compares the results. Next, one determines if the findings confirm or disconfirm each other (Creswell, 2013). By using both measures, the researcher was able to analyze different but complementary data thus providing a more thorough understanding. For this action research, TSES was used to collect quantitative data. Focus group interviews, meeting notes, and classroom observations provided qualitative data. Table 1.2 illustrates how each method was used to address the research questions of this research.

Teacher Sense of Self-Efficacy Scale

To address the first research question, "How do teachers perceive their preparedness to deliver effective instruction to ELLs?" the researcher implemented an assessment approach by using a modified version of the TSES. Coined in the 1970s, the term self-efficacy refers to the ability of a person to evaluate his/her influence on the outcome of a situation (Bandura, 1997). Experiences and training may impact an educator's belief in his/her ability to perform. Tschannen-Moran and Woolfolk Hoy (2007) developed the TSES for the purposes of measuring the level of teacher self-efficacy beliefs. Their work related a teacher's judgment of his or capability to impact student outcomes to teacher behavior, student attitudes, and student achievement.

For this research, the survey asked questions related to general teaching practices, the instruction of ELLs, preparedness for instructing ELLs, and instructional challenges. The survey was administered to participants in August 2020, October 2020, and December 2020.

Conducting the survey in a pre, interim, and post administration format allowed the team to determine the effectiveness of the interventions during each cycle.

Survey data was compiled and analyzed via use of an Excel spreadsheet. For each question and teacher, a mathematical mean was computed for the Likert-scale questions. Comparisons were made using the data from each administration, and this data influenced the next steps of the AR team.

Focus Group Interviews

Focus group interviews served as one qualitative data source for this research. The researcher began by asking specific questions and followed up with probing questions as participants responded. For research questions #1 and #2, a focus group interview was conducted prior to and during cycle 1. This approach provided the researcher with a before and after the intervention perspective and provided a thorough overview of the effectiveness of interventions. Interviews provided insights on teacher preparedness, efficacy, and the impact of the professional learning program. A semi-structured interview approach was used. It consists of "several key questions that help to define the areas to be explored, but also allow the interviewer or interviewee to diverge" (Gill et al., 2008, para. 5). As interview questions were asked, additional themes and topics surfaced, which informed the research. The semi-structured interview "allows for the discovery or elaboration of information that is important to participants but may not have previously been thought of as pertinent by the research team" (Gill et al., 2008, para. 5).

I audio recorded and transcribed all interviews in preparation for analysis by the AR team. Coding was used to identify major themes that surfaced from the interviews and that connect with literature on this topic. As the researcher, I anticipated certain themes to emerge;

however, I anticipated that additional themes would surface due to the unstructured format of the interviews. Data from focus group interviews supported the team as it continued to design and refine interventions for cycles 2 and 3.

Meeting Notes

For research questions 2 and 3, notes from the PLC meetings and AR team meetings served as data. I recorded notes from all meetings using a Google document. This was done for all three cycles from August 2020-January 2021. Data was used to analyze learning experiences from both the PLC and AR team and was also used to help the team refine its implementation plan. These notes were observational in nature, providing an overview of discussed topics. When necessary, I had a question or two prepared to guide the conversation. All notes were analyzed for common themes.

Observations

Peer observations were an additional component of this action research. As teachers learned new literacy and language-focused strategies, they had an opportunity to practice them with the PLC and to then implement them in the classroom. Part of this implementation process included peer observations conducted by members of the PLC. Observees had an opportunity to view specific strategies in action and to evaluate their effectiveness. The team used a look-fors observation tool loosely based on the Multilingual Learner/ELL (MLL/ELL) Classroom Observation Tool (New York State Education Department, 2019) to facilitate these observations (Appendix G). This tool honed in on student actions and experiences in the classroom. The practice of peer observations allows teachers to identify goals and observe colleagues in order to expand knowledge, practice and pedagogy (Hamilton, 2013). Feedback from the observations

helped the AR team assess the effectiveness of the professional learning and to make any necessary adjustments from cycle to cycle.

Data Analysis

Quantitative Data

The use of the Teacher Sense of Self-Efficacy Scale resulted in quantitative data. Point values were assigned to each statement, allowing participants to select from a range of scores (1: Strongly Agree, 2: Moderately Agree, 3: Agree slightly more than disagree, 4: Disagree slightly more than agree, 5: Moderately Disagree, 6: Strongly Disagree). Following each administration of the TSES, scores for each statement were used to calculate the average response. This data was analyzed to determine the overall responses of participants. By using this data, the researcher was able to summarize the overall views, beliefs, and perceptions of participants for each statement. These generalizations helped to inform the direction of the action research cycles.

Data analysis provided specific answers to research questions 1 and 2: How do teachers perceive their preparedness to deliver effective instruction to ELLs? What specific professional learning will teachers require to effectively instruct ELLs? Statements from the TSES directly correlated with these questions, and participants responses before, during, and after the implementation process provided the researcher with concrete information.

Measures of Central Tendency. To analyze quantitative data from the TSES, the researcher used measures of central tendency, "a single value that attempts to describe a set of data by identifying the central position within that set of data" (Laird Statistics, 2020, para. 1). Using an Excel spreadsheet, the researcher analyzed and described this data using mean, median, and mode. Participants' responses for each statement were categorized to determine average

responses (mean), to identify outliers (median), and to determine frequency of themes (mode). This analysis provided a generalization of the participant group's attitudes, thoughts, and beliefs.

Qualitative Data

Qualitative data was collected via the focus group interviews, classroom observations, and meeting notes (PLC and AR team collaboration). Coding was used to analyze data and to inform research questions 1, 2, and 3: How prepared do teachers perceive their preparedness to deliver effective instruction to ELLs? What specific professional learning will teachers require to effectively instruct ELL? What does an AR team learn as members collaborate to equip teachers with literacy and language-focused professional learning?

As defined by Creswell (2013), coding involves organizing data into chunks and using words to represent categories. The researcher reviewed transcripts from interview questions, collaborative meetings, and classroom observations in order to sort information into themes.

Coding

Themes for this action research were identified using inductive analysis of the data. After each focus group interview, the researcher transcribed the recordings. Using a line by line coding process, responses were analyzed and compared to identify emerging themes. Creswell (2013, p. 75) describes the coding process "at the simplest level, you are searching for categories and their attributes—figuring out what things go together." For this work, each response was broken down into smaller codes or themes and assigned to a specific research question category. Common themes were identified as the major areas of focus.

Reliability and Validity

The validity of action research speaks to whether or not the study's implications are trustworthy. Noble & Smith (2015, para. 3) define the term as "the precision in which the

findings accurately reflect the data." In any field, particularly education, truthfulness and precision are both imperative. The implications of this work have an impact on a variety of contexts as it provides information about the work of educators. As Feldman (2007, para. 36) noted, "There must be reason for other teachers, students, administrators, policy-makers and parents to believe and trust that knowledge."

For the purposes of this study, the researcher focused on internal validity with a future interest in external validity. Internal validity focuses on how well the research works in a particular setting, such as DMS while external validity focuses on whether or not this study's findings could be applied to other contexts. At the onset, this action research speaks more to internal validity. As the cycles of action research were conducted, validity was measured through the quantitative and qualitative data. Collecting qualitative and quantitative data supported triangulation, and doing so helped to produce more comprehensive findings (Noble & Smith, 2015). Both data sets provided information on the impact of professional learning on teacher efficacy within our current setting. The teacher participants of this study were representative of the school's teaching force in terms of years of experience and training as it pertains to instructing ELLs. Therefore, their experiences provided insight into the overall needs of the school.

The goal of this work was also to provide an intervention plan could be replicated in a variety of settings. As schools across the nation are faced with equipping teachers with the professional knowledge needed to instruct ELLs, this research could prove useful in other locations. The action research cycles are defined and ready for implementation in additional school settings. This work hopes to inform the processes of neighboring schools with similar

ELL populations. The support of the district specialist enhanced the opportunity for the above to occur. Potential replication will lead to confirmation of the work's external validity.

Triangulation

According to Patton (1999, p. 1193), in qualitative research, the purpose of triangulation is to "test for consistency". In order to ensure consistency, researchers should vary their methods and not rely on a single source of data (Mills, 2018). For this action research, multiple data sets included focus group interviews, notes from the PLC and AR team meetings, TSES results, and classroom observational data. By using varied approaches, the researcher was able to collect both quantitative and qualitative data. Doing so allowed for the identification and analysis of varying perspectives as they pertain to the action research cycles and their effectiveness.

Chapter Summary

This chapter detailed methods of data collection and analysis for this action research. Because the purpose of this study was to assess the impact of professional learning on increasing the efficacy for teachers of ELLs, the researcher used TSES survey results, observation data, and focus group interviews to gather information. Focus groups also aided in the identification of the learning of the AR team during the study. This qualitative data provided findings for each of the study's research questions.

The next chapter of this dissertation presents the context of DMS, situates the problem in the context and on the site, and details the story of the AR team and its activities.

CHAPTER 4

Case Study

The Context

The context of this action research case study was DMS, one of 29 middle schools in the UPSS. The AR team was comprised of teachers, assistant principals, the principal, and a district ESOL instructional coach.

Driscoll Middle School

The number of ELLs continues to grow in the US and so does the need for highly skilled and qualified teachers to support them. Over four million students in the US are ELLs, and each year, this number continues to increase, creating a need for a well-developed skill set for instructing this student group. The challenge of meeting this need directly impacts many school systems, especially large, diverse ones like UPSS . Located in Lewis County[2], UPSS is a large school district in and is also one of its state's most diverse, currently serving over one hundred thousand students. Students in the district come from a variety of backgrounds, locations, and socioeconomic contexts. Fifty-five percent of students receive free and/or reduced lunch, and over twenty percent of the students in the district are ELLs. Over the years, the population of UPSS has grown rapidly, and along with it, demographics have changed from the 1980s and 1990s, when there was less diversity and the majority of citizens and students were White. The reputation of schools and the wide availability for industry has brought many people from different backgrounds to the county. Changes in the student population have required the district

to identify the instructional needs of students and the strategies and practices teachers need to support them.

A major reason for this identification is the district's commitment to excellence. UPSS has a reputation as a high-performing system and historically has been the recipient of many accolades, including an award given to systems that have "demonstrated greatest overall performance and improvement in student achievement while narrowing achievement gaps among low-income students and students of color" (Broad Prize for Urban Education, 2019, para. 1). As its population grows and changes, UPSS must continue to focus on practices to close achievement gaps, meet the needs of diverse learners, and prepare educators for the task at hand. Specifically, because research has shown poverty and language acquisition may have a direct impact on achievement, educators must be prepared to support the learning of students of these backgrounds.

Located in Lewis County, Lucerne[3] is a city of over 12,000 people with a median household income of $54,276, which is slightly less than the state average. The poverty rate is 13.1% compared to the state's 14.9%. Lucerne's ethnic composition is as follows: 31.1% White, 28.3% Hispanic, 19.6% Asian, and 17.4% African-American. The most commonly spoken languages in the area are Spanish, Hindi, and Urdu (Data USA, 2017) (Figure 4). Population maps indicate variety in living patterns of citizens. For instance, when considering language, the areas in the southern portion of the city include heavier populations of Spanish-speaking families than the northern portion. When comparing race, the while northern parts of the city have heavier populations of White families than the southern portion. Figure 4.1 details the percentages of people age five and older who were non-English speaking between the years 2013-2017. Lucerne

is located in the darkest shaded area of the map, with over 20% of its population identified as non-English speaking, the majority of those with Spanish as a primary language.

Located in these darker shaded areas is DMS, one of 29 middle schools in UPSS. Serving approximately 1200 students, DMS's demographics are: 66% Hispanic, 20% African-American, 8% Asian, and 3% White. Over 500 of the students are ELLs, which is over 40% of the school's population. Over the years, there in the population of students who qualify for free and reduced lunch (FRL) at DMS has increased steadily, earning it designation as a Title I school in 2019. Currently, ninety percent of students receive free or reduced lunch. The school's 2019 demographics, indicated in Table 4 and Figure 4.2, are similar to the other two middle schools located in this portion of Lucerne; all three schools have high ELL and FRL populations.

Because DMS has a high percentage of students who have a Primary Home Language other than English (PHLOTE), research has implications for the Local School Plan for Improvement (LSPI) as the school seeks strategies to support the literacy achievement of all students, especially those who may not have exposure to literacy rich environments outside of the context of the school day. Schools are measured by academic progress on state assessments, and Driscoll's plan focuses on increasing the percentages of students who are Proficient and/or Distinguished in all content areas. Using this criteria, along with other factors, UPSS ranks school performance on its Weighted School Assessment (WSA). As a whole, DMS is a high needs school performing better than expected. The school currently ranks 11 out of 29 of the district's middle schools on performance and is the only high poverty school to be in that position. However, discrepancies between the performance of ELLs and non-ELLs continue to be a cause for concern when it comes to the school's efforts in closing achievement gaps.

Figure 4

Demographics of the City of Lucerne

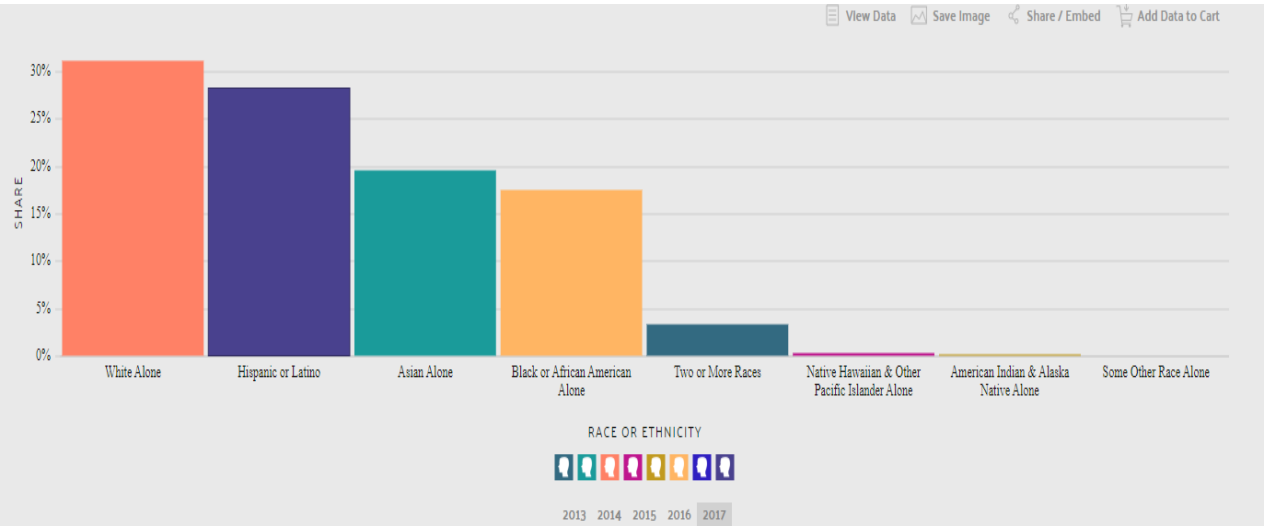


Figure 4.1

Estimated Percent of Non-English Speaking Citizens in Lucerne

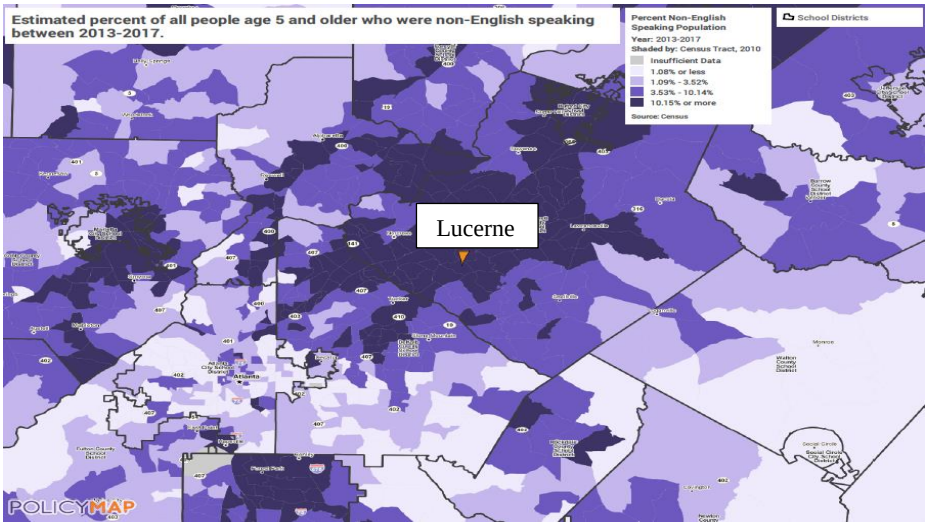


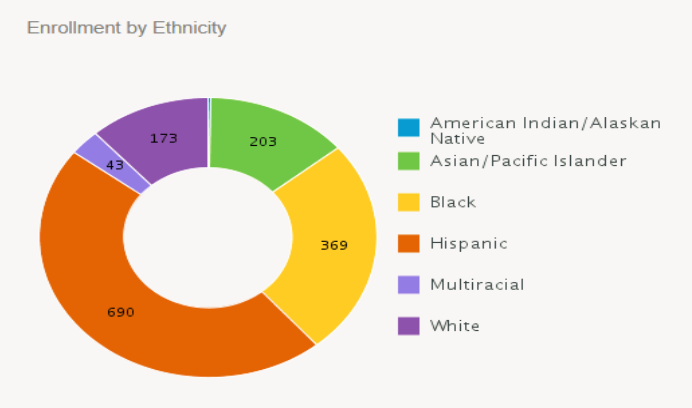
Table 4

2019 School and District Demographics

	FRL	ELL	SpEd	Gifted
DMS	90%	46%	20%	10%
UPSS	56%	22%	16%	16%

Figure 4.2

2019 DMS Enrollment by Ethnicity



In late November of 2019, I became the principal of DMS. Prior to my new role, I served as an assistant principal in a nearby school in the district with slightly different demographics and needs (lower FRL percentage and growing ELL population). As the primary instructional leader, it was my responsibility to keep the focus on teaching and learning and to engage others in realizing the school's vision: to provide students with quality, rigorous instruction that would develop critical and creative thinkers who would take ownership of their learning. Doing so required supporting school-wide instructional initiatives and ensuring that staff implemented the LSPI. The LSPI outlined a clear, concrete plan for supporting the learning needs of all students, including those who are ELLs and those who have learning disabilities.

This action research study attempted to understand the potential impact of professional learning on the instruction of ELLs. As a leader responsible for implementing initiatives that directly impact achievement, my role enabled me to lead this study. The work included close collaboration with instructional leaders, content area teachers, community partners, and parents. Through these partnerships, I was able to offer professional development opportunities that focused on using literacy strategies as a foundational skill. Additionally, I was able to develop

partnerships with district literacy specialists, allowing them to collaborate with teachers and share best literacy practices for use in various content areas. The intent of this action research was to build teachers' capacity and efficacy by providing them with resources to address the literacy needs of all students, especially those from low socioeconomic backgrounds.

Problem Framing in the Context

During the time of this study, 46% of the DMS student population consisted of ELLs, and five percent of its teachers were formally trained to address the needs of this student group. This data alone indicated a major imbalance. As the school's ELL population continued to grow, achievement data indicated a need for more support for teachers and students. The population was growing, but the number of teachers endorsed and trained to teach them was not. Out of 80 teachers, four teachers held an ESOL endorsement and were highly qualified to support the needs of these learners. The remaining teachers worked to implement strategies and often expressed feeling unqualified to deliver instruction that impacts growth. They had either never received explicit instruction on implementing ESOL strategies or had attended a one-time professional development sporadically. At the time, two pathways existed to achieve ESOL endorsement: 1) completion of a college-style training course followed by completion of the state assessments for the certification of educators or 2) successful completion of the ESOL assessment alone. Both routes to endorsement required time, commitment, and sometimes funds on the part of educators who pursued it. Therefore, many educators who went without training and preparation were teachers of ELLs, a misalignment evident in the data of many schools with high ELL populations.

Understanding this issue, school leaders often sought teachers with an ESOL endorsement when recruiting new candidates. When reviewing resumes, it was an area of focus

that could enhance a candidate's desirability. However, the majority of applicants did not possess the skills or training. While "research indicates that it is beneficial for ELLs if states require *all* general classroom teachers to have some form of ELL training, over 30 states do not require ELL training for general classroom teachers beyond the federal requirements," (Education Commission of the States, 2014, para. 1). The state in which the study took place did not require teacher-preparation programs to provide training in working with ELLs. Because this training was not mandated, many new teachers entered the field without the knowledge, tools, and strategies to address the needs of this student population. As a result, districts and schools with high ELL populations sought ways to develop the skill sets of their teachers. Otherwise, an achievement gap would continue to persist between ELLs and non-ELLs.

The fact that ELLs were required to take the same assessments as their non-ELL counterparts added to the discrepancy in student achievement results. Along with other schools in the district and state, DMS students participated in assessments to measure learning throughout the year. Each year, pretests, interims, and final exams were administered to measure student progress and growth. Final exam scores demonstrated whether students had learned the academic standards taught each semester, with the ultimate goal of proficiency. Data from the 1st and 2nd semester final exams reflected low levels of proficiency for ELLs in every content area. For example, during second semester, in the area of English language Arts (ELA), the proficiency level was zero, meaning not one ELL demonstrated proficiency on the assessment. Because 6th grade is a foundational year for middle school, students who did not master basic proficiency skills continued to struggle in 7th and 8th grades, resulting in continually lower achievement scores.

Table 4.1

2018 District Assessment Final Exam Scores 6th Grade: Percent Proficient

	1st Semester	2nd Semester
ELA	4.9	0
Math	2.4	16.5
Science	7.3	7.8
Social Studies	4.9	9.9

Furthermore, ELLs were held to the same standards for state assessments designed to provide information about how well students were mastering the state-adopted content standards in the core content areas. Typically given in April, these End of Grade (EOG) and End of Course (EOC) assessments measured one-year's worth of learning. Differentiated tasks did not exist for ELLs; they were administered the same tasks, and critical decisions were made based on their performance. For instance, in UPSS, performance on these assessments was one factor in promotion/retention decisions. Students who are unable to demonstrate mastery may face a retest or summer school intervention. A look at 2018 data indicates an achievement gap in each content area. The majority of ELLs' scores fell in the range of beginning and developing, and fewer were in the proficient and distinguished ranges (Table 4.2). This data had specific implications for teaching and learning.

Table 4.2

2018 State Assessment Achievement Levels for ELLs (Percentages)

	Beginning	Developing	Proficient	Distinguished
ELA	43.05	35.99	18.91	2.05
Math	33.26	40.32	21.41	5.01
Science	43.33	30	25	1.67
Social Studies	47.46	35.59	13.56	3.39

Historically, on all assessments (state, district, and local), high percentages of DMS'sELLs scored in the beginning and developing ranges. When growth was considered, students were making progress, but the aim was to increase the number who finished the year proficient and/or distinguished. The school's focus had been on offering some training to those who teach high numbers of ELLs; however, demographics indicated the high probability that the majority of teachers would have ELLs in their classrooms. With few teachers having the expertise to meet the needs of this student group and a lack of comprehensive training for others, teachers expressed feeling unprepared to effectively teach content. This sometimes resulted in negative thoughts about both self-efficacy and student ability.

UPSS has a department devoted to providing support for schools who serve ELLs. During the school year, the department offered district-wide training and local school training by request. Additionally, specialists provided teachers with opportunities to receive ESOL endorsement via classes that helped prepare for the GACE. With all of these offerings, representatives from the district office expressed difficulty in gathering teachers to take advantage of opportunities due to the time commitment. Session attendance was relatively low compared to the high volume of educators employed by the district. A possible reason was the time of the session offerings, which were typically after school or during the summer. In terms of local school training, it was up to schools to express their needs and to make it a priority by offering the time and space for teachers to learn and to develop. Doing so required the forward thinking and commitment of the leadership team to set a calendar and adhere to the work. In the past, DMS offered these opportunities to a small subset of teachers rather than to the entire staff. Observations suggested that the training had not been ongoing or frequent enough to impact practice.

Problem Framing Based on the Site

As a new principal of DMS, I realized there was a need to address the achievement gap persisting between ELLs and non-ELLs. In one-on-one sessions, teachers often expressed a lack of training and preparedness to instruct ELLs. As this student population continued to grow at DMS, there was an increasing need to develop the capacity of teachers as the number of ELLs. The goal was to provide teachers with specific, targeted professional learning focused on literacy and language. These two areas are foundational skills and would support student learning in all content areas. For these reasons, professional learning and teacher efficacy were selected as focus areas for this action research study.

The Story and Outcomes

The timeline of this action research study spanned from July 2020 through January 2021. During the summer of 2020, I sent an interest meeting invitation to all teachers of ELLs. Six teachers and two administrators attended the interest meeting. During the meeting, I framed the problem in the context of DMS, placing an emphasis on the current percentage of ELLs, the number of teachers who held ESOL endorsement, and the number of teachers who had received official training to support ELLs. I also shared a summary of the research study, expectations for the AR team and provided each teacher two copies of the AR consent form. The district ESOL specialist attended a one-on-one meeting with the researcher. She made an instant decision to join the team as the work aligned with her support of the school. A week later, the researcher received consent forms from three of the teachers and from the administrator who attended. A summary of the AR core team members is provided in Table 4.3. All names are pseudonyms.

Ms. Kerry was a 6th grade content area teacher in her fifth year of teaching. She completed a traditional teacher certification program and began her teaching career in rural

county. This marked her second year at DMS; teaching at our school was her first experience teaching a high ESOL population. Ms. Kerry indicated that she had little to no formal training with teaching ELLs. The second teacher participant, Ms. Roberts, was also a content area teacher who taught 7th grade. This marked her second full year of teaching, and all of her teaching experience was at DMS. She indicated that she had received minimal on the job training. Ms. Gray was the next participant. This school year marked her third year teaching at DMS but her first year as a content area teacher. Ms. Gray instructed 8th grade students and also indicated little to no formal training in this area. The final member was Mr. Ricketts, a veteran ESOL teacher, with more than ten years of experience and formal training in the area of supporting ELLs. His role was to support the professional learning needs of the content area teachers.

Non-teacher participants included Ms. Braxton and Ms. Carollton, ESOL assistant principals. Ms. Carrolton had five years of expertise in supporting ELLs at a previous middle school. In her role, she worked to support teachers with completing instructional plans for students and with monitoring progress. The second assistant principal, Ms. Braxton, had three years of experience in the role, and all of the years have been at DMS. This year marked her first year in an ESOL support role. The final member was Ms. Harrison, UPSS ELL instructional coach. Ms. Harrison completed graduate work in the field of ESOL, and she was a deliverer of professional learning to the teachers of the group.

Table 4.3

Members of the AR Team

Members[5]	Role/Title
Ms. Kerry	Teacher
Ms. Roberts	Teacher
Ms. Gray	Teacher
Mr. Ricketts	ESOL Teacher
Ms. Carrolton	ESOL Assistant Principal

Ms. Braxton	ESOL Assistant Principal
Ms. Harrison	UPSS ESOL Instructional Coach

[5]Pseudonyms

For the purposes of this study, the AR team met monthly from July 2020 through January 2021.

Initial Steps of the AR team

Utilizing Coghlan and Brannicks's four phases of action research (2015), the team set out to complete cycle 1 during the month of August. The first step was the "constructing" phase, which included a review of the literature surrounding ELLs and teacher efficacy and a review of the current school context (ELL academic achievement, teacher endorsement, and professional learning). During this phase, the researcher administered the initial TSES to the teacher participants. Next, the team moved into the "planning" phase, determining our interventions and a timeline as indicated in Table 4.4.

Table 4.4

Timeline of Interventions

Intervention	**Action Research Team Activities**	**Anticipated Outcomes**	**Timeline**	**Data Collection**
Action Research Team Meetings	Monthly Meetings	Action Research Team Learning	July 2020 – January 2021	TSES Focus Group Interviews
Professional Learning	Focus on Literacy and Language Strategies	Increased Teacher Efficacy	August 2020-January 2021	TSES Focus Group Interviews Classroom Observations
Professional Learning Community	Monthly Meetings	Increased Teacher Efficacy	July 2020 – January 2021	TSES Focus Group Interviews Classroom Observations

The team entered and moved throughout the "taking action" and "evaluating action" phases during the months of August 2020-January 2021. We implemented interventions and convened to assess their effectiveness as we continued with the AR cycles. These assessments

influenced the next AR cycle and continued until we concluded the action research in January 2021. At that time, we conducted the final evaluation phase. Our action research cycles were on a continual loop as we planned, observed, and reflected during our monthly AR team meetings.

Cycles of Action Research

Cycle 1. For the first cycle, our first professional learning session was held on August 17th. All AR team members were present for this session. Training centered around three literacy and language-focused strategies: cause and effect, Venn diagram, and the T-Chart. Each strategy was modeled, and participants had opportunities to ask questions. After the training, the PLC debriefed the training and set the third week of August as the timeline for implementation. All teacher participants selected one of the three strategies and indicated a date that would be best for classroom observation. The next step included the members visiting classrooms on the identified dates to conduct non-evaluative observations. For the observation process, the team used the look-for observation tool (Appendix N). Teacher participants received copies of the instrument, providing them with feedback on the implementation of the strategy.

During the next AR team meeting on September 7th, the team debriefed cycle 1. Teacher participants shared their experiences with strategy implementation. Focus group interview questions were designed to facilitate the conversation. Responses indicated ease of implementation and the perceived positive impact on student achievement. One teacher commented:

> Using the Venn diagram seemed to really support my students reading comprehension as we worked to compare and contrast two texts. Visually, they were able to see the purpose. We were analyzing each individual texts and also looking for similarities. The strategies were so easy to use and did not require much prep time. For these reasons, I

> can see myself using them again.

Another participant shared how she felt empowered to use more of the strategies shared during the initial training.

> Honestly, using the first strategy was so easy. I am planning to use the other two this month as well. I'll let you'll know how it goes.

When asked about perceived student engagement, participants shared they observed a positive impact on student performance.

> Using these graphic organizers seemed to support my students' writing. Students who tended to write very little were able to give me a response of a paragraph or more. The organizers provided a scaffold for them…an anchor on which to build their thoughts.

The non-teacher participants shared their observations. The general consensus was that teachers seemed to deliver the strategies seamlessly and that students seemed engaged. The team closed the meeting by developing a plan for cycle 2 and setting a date for the second professional learning training session.

Cycle 2. On September 14th, the team participated in the second professional learning session. During this session, three more literacy and language-focused strategies were introduced: sentence frames, read-alouds, and picture walks. The PLC debriefed and set the third week of September as the timeline for implementation. Each teacher participant selected one of the three strategies and indicated a date for classroom observation. The team used look-for tools to conduct observations on the identified dates. Similar to phase one, teacher participants received copies of the instrument, providing them with feedback on the implementation of the strategy.

The team met on October 5th to debrief the implementation of the second set of strategies. Participant shared their experiences and observations. The researcher asked a set of prepared questions to guide the conversation. Responses were recorded as qualitative data. The team's conversation centered on the benefits of the strategies. One teacher commented:

> The picture walks.Wow! To be honest, it is such a simple concept.When we learned about it, I thought to myself, "You should have been doing this all along." We just began an informational unit, and before, during, and after reading, I utilized images to help students construct meaning.

During this meeting, teacher participants were given the interim TSES and asked to complete it by October 9th. The team set a meeting date for the fourth AR team meeting to be held on November 2nd.

Prior to the beginning of the Cycle 3, teacher participants completed the interim TSES. The researcher entered results for each question into an Excel spreadsheet and determined the mean for each question for each participant. The Excel spreadsheet now included data for the pre and interim TSES, allowing for a comparison of the data. I prepared to share this data with the team during the meeting in November.

Cycle 3. On November 2nd, the AR team gathered to review the current TSES data. Data indicated a slight positive improvement in teacher self-efficacy from the beginning of the action research up until the current phase. Each teacher's scores improved, and this increase seemed to affirm the AR team's work. After reviewing the data, the team planned the professional learning training session to be held on November 9th. The team also drafted focus group interview questions to use during the next PLC collaboration.

During the November session, three final strategies were introduced. For this cycle, strategies included: compare/contrast essay frames, exit tickets, and story maps. Each strategy was modeled, and participants were given opportunities to ask questions. Additionally, the team reviewed Colorin Colorado's (2019) online platform of resources in an effort to introduce participants to additional strategies that could be explored during this action research and beyond. Participants again selected one strategy for implementation, and the team set the week of November 16th as the timeline for implementation and observations.

During the first week of December, the team met to debrief the implementation of strategy 3. Team members had opportunities to share their observations and to provide feedback. I asked the set of previously developed focus group interview questions to guide the conversation. Participants engaged in a collaborative discussion, and their responses were recorded. One participant responded:

> The story maps helped students make meaning of the text. For my level 2s, I modeled beginning, middle, and end. Then, we moved into a little more complex story elements. I plan to continue using these maps throughout the year to help support literacy skills.

Another participant shared that she chose to pair a strategy from cycle 1 with a strategy from cycle 2.

> I used sentence frames with my students but this time with a different purpose. In Cycle I, we used them for writing support. During this cycle, I wanted to try them to help support reading comprehension. After students read a text, I provided frames to help with determining author's purpose and main idea. From there, we used this writing to help complete the compare/contrast essay frames.

The meeting concluded with the administration of the post TSES. Participants set a date for the next AR Team meeting to be held on December 14th.

During this meeting, the team participated in an exit interview. The researcher asked questions related to involvement in the action research process. Respondents were able to share their experiences, focusing on the impact of the professional learning, participation in the PLC, and observation feedback. Responses focused on the collaborative nature of the study. One participant said: "Being in this PLC has caused me to be more reflective on my teaching practices. Learning from others' experiences and having opportunities to conduct peer observations taught me a lot." Another reflected:

> I think my biggest takeaway is the power of collaboration. We already do a good job of this at our school, but I don't think we've had this specific focus on teachers of ELLs. We need it. It makes a difference.

I facilitated the conversation through use of a set of pre-established questions to help guide the conversation. Responses were collected and analyzed to determine themes. The team set a date for a final meeting on January 12th. During this meeting, the AR team met to review the data and shared initial conclusions and observations based on the results. Team members resolved that the work would be essential to our success as a school and committed to continuing to support the effort.

Monthly AR team Meetings. Each month, the AR team met to plan and reflect on the previous cycle. Agendas were shared in advance which allowed team members to add items for discussion (see Appendices G-M). Each agenda focused on the introduction or review of an intervention, time for reflection and feedback, and an overview of the next planned intervention. All interventions centered on professional learning opportunities for teachers. These

opportunities included direct training on literacy and language-focused strategies, classroom observations, and participation in a PLC.

During the monthly meetings, AR team members participated in a PLC, a safe space that allowed for thoughts about professional learning needs, efficacy, and student achievement. As the researcher, I recorded notes for each meeting. Teacher members were provided with training on literacy and language-focused professional learning. The team shared their initial feedback on the strategy, focusing on what implementation would entail and if any adjustments were needed for classroom use. Strategies were shared in the AR team's Google folder for easy access. During the meeting, the team set dates for implementation and observation. We also agreed upon the date for the next AR team meeting.

Teacher Sense of Self-Efficacy Scale

In order to plan the initial interventions, the AR team needed to learn more about teachers' sense of self-efficacy. Teacher participants were administered the TSES to determine their needs, and a focus group interview was conducted to identify specific interventions that would support building teacher self-efficacy. For the TSES, participants responded to a series of items using a Likert scale (1= Strongly Agree, 2=Moderately Agree, 3= Agree slightly more than disagree, 4= Disagree slightly more than agree, 5= Moderately Disagree, 6= Strongly Disagree). Items were designed to explore teachers' views of their abilities to impact the learning of ELLs. Sample items included:

- Teachers are not very powerful influences on ELL student achievement when all factors are considered.
- When the grades of my ELL students improve, it is usually because I found more effective approaches.

- If an ELL student masters a new concept quickly, this might be because I knew the necessary steps in teaching that concept.

TSES scores were recorded and analyzed via a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet. For each participant's response to each statement, I calculated the mean scores. The mean scores for the two efficacy factors, "teacher impact" and "teacher practice" are illustrated in Tables 4.5 and 4.6.

Table 4.5

December 2020 TSES Mean Scores for Teacher Impact

TSES Item	Mean Score
When an ELL does better than usually, many times it is because I exert a little extra effort.	2.3
The hours in my class have little influence on ELLs compared to the influence of their home environment.	5.3
Teachers are not very powerful influences on ELL student achievement when all factors are considered.	2.3
Even a teacher with good teaching abilities may not reach many ELL students.	3.3
If I really try hard, I can get through to even the most difficult or unmotivated ELL students.	2.3

Table 4.6

December 2020 TSES Mean Scores for Teacher Practice

TSES Item Number	Mean Score
When an ELL is having difficulty with an assignment, I am usually able to adjust it his/her level.	2
When an ELL gets a better grade than he/she usually gets, it is usually because I found better ways of teaching that student.	2.3
If an ELL student masters a new concept quickly, this might be because I knew the necessary steps in teaching that concept.	2.3
If an ELL student did not remember information I gave in a previous lesson, I would know how to increase his/her retention in the next lesson.	3.3
If one of my ELL students couldn't do a class assignment, I would be able to accurately assess whether the assignment was at the correct level of difficulty.	2.6
With the right strategies and training, I can be effective with ELL students.	2.3

A review of the TSES data indicated an overall slightly positive influence on teacher impact as evidenced by mean scores on individual items. Responses to the following items demonstrated positive views toward the potential influence of teachers on student performance:

- When an ELL does better than usually, many times it is because I exert a little extra effort.

- The hours in my class have little influence on ELLs compared to the influence of their home environment.
- If I really try hard, I can get through to even the most difficult or unmotivated ELL students.

Participant responses to the following two items yielded a less than positive view of the ability of a teacher to impact ELL performance:

- Teachers are not very powerful influences on ELL student achievement when all factors are considered.
- Even a teacher with good teaching abilities may not reach many ELL students.

For the second theme, teacher practice, participant scores indicated a more positive trend. For all of the items, teachers agreed strongly, moderately, or more than disagreed. The following items yielded the most positive responses:

- When an ELL is having difficulty with an assignment, I am usually able to adjust it his/her level.
- When an ELL gets a better grade than he/she usually gets, it is usually because I found better ways of teaching that student.
- If an ELL student masters a new concept quickly, this might be because I knew the necessary steps in teaching that concept.
- With the right strategies and training, I can be effective with ELL students.

One item, focused on teacher practice to impact the retention of content for ELLs indicated a more neutral response. Teacher participants indicated a need for strategies to address students who had difficulty remembering content from the previous day.

Focus Group Interviews

Monthly focus group interviews were conducted during the AR team meetings. During the initial interview, I asked participants to describe their experiences with teaching ELLs, their prior training, and their professional learning needs. Responses to the initial focus group interview were coded to highlight emerging themes. When asked to "describe the type of professional learning you need as a teacher of ELLs," one participant responded: "I need specific strategies to use with my students. Often, PD is a broad overview of what needs to be done, but I need the how." Another participant gave even more insight. Her words supported her colleagues and spoke to the need for differentiated strategies*:* "I currently teach a differentiated group of ELLs. I need to know reading and writing strategies that can meet all of their unique needs."

When asked "Would opportunities to observe other teachers of ELLs and to be observed have an impact on your practice?" initial responses were varied. One participant responded, "I would love to see other teachers using strategies learned in PD. Seeing in in action with our students would be huge." Another participant shared her hesitations:"Would the observations be non-evaluative? I really would not want the pressure of 'performing' a new strategy with excellence." Upon further discussion and an agreement of what the classroom observations would entail (non-evaluative, peer-friendly, and growth-minded), the participant changed her views*:* "What we've outlined works for me. If we do this the right way, it will be all about helping us grow so that we can help our students grow." Responses to the focus group interviews were authentic. Participants shared individual perspectives and were able to listen to and respect the viewpoints of others.

Collaboration also emerged as an important aspect of professional learning. All participants expressed the importance of being able to learn, implement, and reflect on practice

in a safe space. The formation of a PLC supported teachers' sense of self-efficacy. One participant noted: "Being in a group that shares my experiences is huge! I have a space to talk, to learn, and to be honest and open. Because we all are in the same boat, I feel incredibly supported." Another participant shared her thoughts on being in a PLC with school leaders:

> I really appreciated the 'safe space' we've created here. I feel like, in this group, we can be truthful about our experiences. Even though the principal and APs are here, I do not feel uneasy. Their participation is coming from a place of support. They want to hear our needs and determine ways to support.

Observations

To support strategy implementation, the AR team conducted non-evaluative observations as a learning tool. In pairs of two, team members visited participants' classrooms with a particular focus on teacher and student actions. Visits were conducted using a twenty minute timeframe, and during each visit, members used the look-for form (Appedix M) to record their observations. The written observation forms were submitted to me, and I recorded the feedback electronically. During monthly AR team meetings, I presented the data to the team in order to elicit dialogue about the strategies and their impact on instruction.

During these debriefs, team members shared details about what they observed during these visits. Each member identified her perceived impact of the implemented strategy. One participant responded, "When [participant] utilized the sentence frames for the argumentative writing prompt, I noticed that it helped to support the elements of this writing genre. All students in the class seemed to benefit from the frames." Another commented, "One move that stood out to me was the differentiation of the type of frame. I noticed the template offered more support for Level 2 ELLs and a little less support for Level 3s. That was a great way to scaffold."

Participants also spoke to the level of engagement of students. The consensus was that usage of the strategies supported student engagement by providing necessary scaffolding. One team member explained,

> When I typically assign a writing prompt, some of my students struggle with where to begin. Verbally, they can explain their thoughts, but there is something about putting pen or pencil to paper that causes struggle. I noticed these frames gave them a starting point. They could begin copying the frame and could gradually add their thoughts to them as they moved along.

Another participant agreed and elaborated on her colleague's response. Her response honed in on a specific teaching move observed in a fellow participant's classroom:

> I agree. When I visited [participant's] classroom, I noticed that she did a great job of modeling how to use the sentence frames. For me, that's the key. When students see the process every writer goes through, it helps them understand that a little struggle is okay. It's a process.

Chapter Summary

This chapter detailed this action research by defining the case and context and by illustrating its story. The AR team designed and implemented specific, targeted professional learning to address the needs of content area teachers of ELLs. Through the use of professional learning, peer observations, and PLCs, the team sought to develop the capacity of teachers. TSES surveys, focus group interviews, and observations were employed to assess the effectiveness of the interventions. The next chapter presents the findings of this action research as it relates to each of the research questions and research cycles.

CHAPTER 5

Findings

Introduction

The purpose of the study was to examine the impact of professional learning on the efficacy of teachers of ELLs. To address the purpose of this study, the following research questions guided the work:

1. How do teachers perceive their preparedness to deliver effective instruction to ELLs?
2. What specific professional learning will teachers require to effectively instruct ELLs?
3. What does an AR team learn as members collaborate to equip teachers with literacy and language-focused professional learning?

This chapter includes a description of data collected from multiple sources to establish findings for each research question. Responses to focus group interviews and the TSES were assigned to a research question and summarized into themes. Table 5 displays the themes that emerged for each question. This chapter presents the major findings for each research question as determined throughout the action research process.

Table 5

Summary of Research Findings

Research Question	Findings
Q1: How do teachers perceive their preparedness to deliver effective instruction to ELLs?	Theme 1 – Identification of a lack of preparedness to deliver instruction Theme 2 – Identification of a need for targeted professional learning Theme 3 – Identification of a need for ongoing non-evaluative feedback Theme 4 – Identification of a need for collaboration

Q2: What specific professional learning will teachers require to effectively instruct ELLs?	Theme 1 – Ease of implementation Theme 2 – Address the diverse need of ELLs Theme 3 – Ongoing and easily accessible
Q3: What does an AR team learn as members collaborate to equip teachers with literacy and language-focused professional learning?	Theme 1 – Effective professional learning could lead to improved teacher efficacy Theme 2 – Action research can help schools address the professional learning needs of teachers

Data Collection Connected to Research Questions

Research Question 1: Perceived Teacher Preparedness

Needs of Teachers. To determine how teachers perceived their preparedness to deliver effective instruction to ELLs, TSES and focus group interview results were used. These measures were implemented as a pre, interim, and post aspect of action research. In analyzing the data from the initial TSES and focus group interviews, four major themes emerged. Teachers described their preparedness to teach ELLs in the following ways:

1. Lack of preparedness
2. Need for targeted professional learning
3. Need for non-evaluative feedback
4. Need for collaboration

Theme 1 – **Lack of Preparedness.** Teacher participants all identified and described a lack of preparedness to effectively instruct ELLs. Responses to item 13 of the TSES *(*My teacher training program and /or experience has given me the necessary skills to be an effective teacher with ELL students*)* indicated a lack of confidence in previous teacher training. One participant responded that she "strongly disagreed" with the statement. When asked about training received at the university level, all of the participants indicated zero to minimal amounts. One participant explained,

> During my teacher preparation program, I took one class focused on diverse learners. It addressed the characteristics of both students with disabilities and English Language learners. However, when it came down to strategies, I can honestly say I left school with none.

The newest teacher of the group echoed the same sentiments:

> I can't honestly recall taking any courses about teaching ELLs. I'm not sure if I even realized the need during my training program. I felt I was prepared well, but now, that I am in a very diverse setting, I realize that a learning gap exist for me.

A veteran teacher had the same experiences in her teacher preparation program. However, she offered the perspective of training from the local school.

> As someone who has worked in a diverse school for all of my teaching career, I can say that the PD offered by the local school has been minimal. We typically get a one-time session that gives us an overview of what we need to do but does not explain how we are to do it.

Responses to the TSES and focus group interviews indicated that teacher participants did not feel adequately prepared to effectively teach ELLs, and there was a definite need for professional learning and support.

Theme 2 – Need for Targeted Professional Learning. All three of the content area teachers who participated in this action research study identified the need for targeted professional learning as a necessity for increasing teacher capacity. Responses to item 14 of the TSES indicated that all participants felt they could be effective with the right strategies. Each participant selected "strongly agree" or "agree" for this item. During focus groups, one teacher shared that many teachers enter the field without proper training to support the needs of ELLs. Once in schools, if professional learning is offered, it is generalized and does not provide specific implementation steps. This participant explained:

> It is not enough to say the instruction and assignments for English Language Learners must be modified. Everyone understands this need. Teachers need concrete steps as to how to modify their instruction to meet the needs of this student population. Specific professional learning should provide us with immediate actions that can be taken to increase student achievement.

Another participant agreed that catch phrases are often used to generalize instructional moves. Teachers are told to "modify instruction and assignments" but quite often, they have no idea where to begin. One participant commented that professional learning should, "focus on not just the what and the why but specifically on the how." Professional learning has to equip teachers with specific strategies to utilize in the classroom

Theme 3 – Need for Non-Evaluative Feedback. Six out of six action research participants agreed that teachers should be given opportunities to implement professional learning strategies and to receive non-evaluative feedback via observations. One teacher participant explained,

> A follow-up to the PD session should be an opportunity to try the strategy and to receive feedback on its implementation. While in action, it is sometimes difficult to identify what worked, what did not worked, and what could be improved.

Another participant echoed the same sentiment, saying, "Having the opportunity to receive non-evaluative feedback will relieve a lot of pressure. Trying something new brings anxiety, but knowing others are there to support you makes a big difference."

All participants expressed the importance of receiving feedback from those who participated in the same professional learning opportunities. A participant explained, "It would be very beneficial to hear from peers who received the same training and to also have opportunities to observe their implementation in action." The responses indicated that non-evaluative observations would create a climate that allows for trial and error. Individuals would feel comfortable learning form their mistakes and would be more comfortable with trying new strategies.

Theme 4 – Need for Collaboration. Similar to the previous two themes, all participants expressed the importance of collaboration. Responses indicated that in order to build teacher capacity, teachers should have opportunities to share with and learn from their colleagues. One participant shared:

> Often, trying something new can feel like very isolating. Yes, we collaborate, but often, when new professional learning is delivered, we learn and go off to implement alone. The new learning is almost viewed as a 'one and done' approach. Rarely do we take time to discuss if we implemented the strategies and how they impacted our practice.

Another participant shared:

> Our school's PLCs are amazing. We can ramp it up a notch by making intentional space for follow-up after a professional learning session. Something like an addition to the agenda preparing everyone to discuss his/her trial of the strategy and the effects.

A similar theme emerged in another participant's description. She explained:

> When a strategy works in one classroom, others need to hear about it. Not just that it went well but the specifics. What did you do? What did you change mid-course? What would you do differently? How did students respond? Often, we stop with 'I tried it, and it did or did not work.' We owe it to ourselves as educators to share the wealth.

Analysis of TSES and focus group interview responses indicated a need for frequent opportunities for collaboration among teachers of ELLs. Participation in the AR team provided teacher participants with multiple opportunities to learn new strategies, to discuss implementation, and to learn from one another.

Research Question 2: Specific Professional Learning Needed for Teachers of ELLs.

To determine the specific professional learning needs for teachers of ELLs, I utilized qualitative measures, which included pre, interim, and post TSES administration and focus group interviews.

Before participating in PLCs and professional learning, participants participated in a pre-TSES administration and focus group interview. These measures continued throughout the action research process.

The transcripts from pre, interim, and post focus group interviews were compared to TSES results and AR team meeting notes in an effort to triangulate the data. In analyzing the data from these sources, three themes emerged from the data sources that provided insight into the professional learning needs of teachers of ELLs:

1. Ease of implementation
2. Address the diverse needs of ELLs
3. Ongoing and easily accessible

Theme 1 – Ease of Implementation. During the initial focus group interview, participants were asked to describe their previous experiences with professional learning. Responses revealed commonalities. The first one being implementation design. One participant explained, "If professional learning delivery is complicated, I immediately question my ability to implement the strategy in my own classroom." Participants indicated a need for professional learning to provide specific, actionable steps. One commented,

> As an educator, time is so valuable. The best PD sessions provide me with strategies that are easy to understand and implement. These are the ones that I am more likely to take and try in my classroom immediately. If I have to go back and research or try to figure it out, the chances of me doing so are slim.

Participants were able to recall numerous experiences with professional learning and to identify aspects that made some beneficial and some not so much. Time and ease continuously surfaced. Another participant explained,

> Sometimes, PD strategies can be pages and pages of steps. Quite honestly, with all of the demands of the job, I don't have time to read and decipher all of that. Well, maybe I do have time but feel it could be best used in another area. When a strategy is simple, straightforward, and easy to use, I am ready to try it—the next day!

Theme 2 – Address the Diverse Needs of ELLs. The second theme entailed the need for differentiated professional learning. Participants indicated that prior sessions seemed to provide a "one-size fits all" approach to strategies for ELLs. However, the ELL population is quite diverse. In any school setting, classification can range from beginner to advanced. The needs of a beginner may warrant the use of strategies different from those used with an intermediate language learner. Educators are often told to modify but are not given specifics of how to do so for different levels of ELLs. One team member reflected,

> In the past, I have been told to modify in terms of vocabulary. I have also been told to use pictures or images to help ELLs make meaning. Honestly, I do not feel confident in my knowledge of the different levels or what they mean. Therefore, it makes it difficult for me to modify a lesson or task based on individual student needs.

Another participant shared her experiences with teaching various levels of ELLs:

> In working with ELLs, it is evident that diversity exists within this student group. For this reason, I try to take time to get to know my students and to assess their needs. This makes it easier to know which strategies will work best for them. I do wish more PD focused on specific strategies proven to support each level of ELL.

Theme 3 – Ongoing and Easily Accessible. Focus group interview data indicated the need for ongoing and easily accessible professional learning. Participants shared that past professional learning was a singular event. One participant stated, "Every once in a while, we would learn a strategy or two to support our learners. Sometimes, the PD strategies could be viewed as a suggestion because

training felt very ‘one and done.’ The follow-up piece was missing.” The action research aimed to keep the professional learning focus continual. Through regular monthly meetings, the team kept the focus on the work and took opportunities to build upon learning during each cycle.

Other participants expressed they would be interested in researching additional strategies for ELLs if they were in an easily accessible place. The time factor surfaced again as participants shared that the time it took to research and identify strategies was not always available. When introduced to two platforms that housed a variety of strategies, the following responses were recorded: “This one-stop shop is so beneficial. These strategies are research-based and proven, so I do not have to research their effectiveness,” and, “There are so many strategies to choose from to support my students. I also like that they are easily editable and adaptable to different levels of ELLs.”

Research Question 3: AR Team Learning.

An analysis of results from the TSES administration, focus group interviews, and observation notes provided a look into the learning of the AR team as they worked to develop professional learning to support the needs of teachers of ELLs. After initial coding, identified themes were shared with members of the committee, allowing for feedback on findings. Three major themes emerged.

1. Effective professional learning may lead to improved teacher efficacy.
2. Action research may help schools focus on the professional learning needs of teachers.
3. Teachers and leaders may benefit from frequent collaboration to support professional learning goals and needs.

Theme 1 – Effective Professional Learning May Lead to Improved Teacher Efficacy.

Results of the TSES administration indicated a positive influence on teacher efficacy. In order to determine how teachers identified their efficacy before, during, and after targeted professional learning, I utilized the TSES and focus group interviews. All teacher participants completed the TSES in August, October, and December. Mean scores were collected and analyzed to determine teachers’

perceptions throughout the study. Focus group survey results and observation feedback were collected to triangulate the data. Analysis of the data indicated that professional learning had a small positive influence on teachers' sense of self-efficacy.

As shown in Figure 5, efficacy scores for TSES items focused on teacher impact indicated slight gains from the pre-administration in August to the post-administration in December. For items 1 and 12, a lower mean score indicated a positive change. These specific items focused on whether or not a teacher agreed that extra effort on her part would result in a positive impact on students. For both items, the mean score for participants decreased from 3.3 to 2.3, which means participant ratings changed from "agree slightly more than disagree" to "moderately agree". For items 2, 6, and 10, a higher score indicated a positive change. These items focused on the lack of impact or control a teacher has on ELL performance. For each one, the mean score increased, indicating that participants did not agree with those statements.

Figure 5

TSES Item Comparison: Teacher Impact

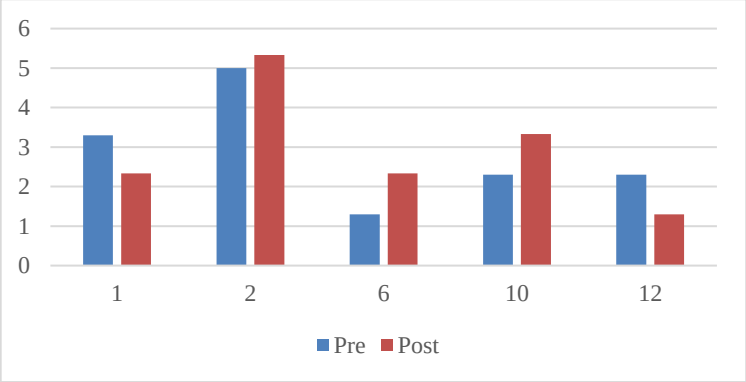
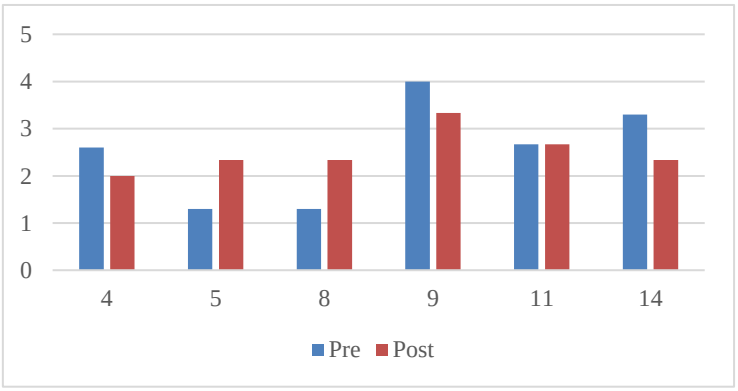


Figure 5.1 details efficacy scores for TSES items focused on teacher practice. Mean scores indicated slight gains from the pre-administration in August to the post-administration in December. For items 1 and 12, a lower score indicated a positive change. These specific items focused on whether or not a teacher agreed that extra effort on her part would result in a positive impact on students. For both items, the mean score for participants decreased from 3.3 to 2.3, which means participant ratings changed from “agree slightly more than disagree” to “moderately agree”. For items 2, 6, and 10, a higher score indicated a positive change. These items focused on the lack of impact or control a teacher has on ELL performance. For each one, the mean score increased, indicating that participants did not agree with those statements.

Figure 5.1

TSES Item Comparison: Teacher Practice



Theme 2 - Action Research May Help Schools Focus on the Professional Learning Needs of Teachers. This action research study sought to identify and address the professional learning needs of teachers of ELLs. Because of the nature of the work, the team had an opportunity to hear directly from teacher participants as professional learning was designed. Throughout the process, the team researched and gathered information. Teacher input was a critical part of this work as it set the course for each cycle. In a debrief of the action research, all participants spoke favorably of participation on the AR team. A participant explained, "What I enjoyed most about being on this team was the ability to offer input on my professional learning needs." This feedback is useful as schools plan to address other areas of concern. AR teams provide a framework for responding to these areas as teams move throughout each cycle.

Results from Action Research Cycle 1

The first action research cycle indicated a trend toward a positive impact on teacher beliefs. Data from the pre-TSES indicated that teachers began with a somewhat lower perception of their ability to impact the learning of ELLs. Initial survey results showed that teachers placed more value on the influence of students' home lives than on the influence of their instruction. Pre-focus group interview responses supported this point. One participant commented, "I try really hard with my ELLs, but sometimes, I do not see the results. It can feel very defeating to think you're doing a good job and then the results don't reflect it." Another participant expounded on the response of her colleague, "I sometimes wonder if I'm making any impact with my students. I try really hard but honestly, I don't know if I have the tools needed to be effective."

Responses of all participants illustrated how the lack of training and preparedness caused teachers to feel as though they were unable to have a great impact on ELL learning. One participant said,

My teacher prep program offered one class focused on diverse learning needs. In that class,

> we focused briefly on ELLs and more on students with disabilities and gifted learners. I can honestly say I left school unprepared to meet the needs of ELLs.

Teacher participants were responsive to the professional learning offered during cycle 1 and were eager to begin implementation. Observation cycles provided an opportunity to see strategies in action and to observe the impact on both students and teachers.

Results from Action Research Cycle 2

During cycle 2, interim TSES results and focus group data indicated an improvement in the area of instructional practice. At the onset of research, teacher responses indicated a lack of strategies designed to meet the learning needs of ELLs. Teacher efficacy scores were low for items, such as "When an ELL is having difficulty with an assignment, I am usually able to adjust it his/her level," and "If an ELL student did not remember information I gave in a previous lesson, I would know how to increase his/her retention in the next lesson." Scores on the interim administration indicated improvement, reflecting a positive impact of professional learning. Focus group interviews supported these findings. A comment from one participant elaborated,

> This process has given me what I needed, which was an increased toolkit. I feel I now have specific strategies to use with my students. I did not have many go-to strategies before. I've tried these, and I know they worked for me. As a result, I will continue to use them in my classroom.

Another participant explained.

> What is most impactful for my instructional practice is knowing where to look for additional instructional strategies. The resources used during this PD are constantly updated, and that is important for me as a teacher. I now have the confidence to try out a strategy with my students because of this experience.

Results from Action Research Cycle 3

As we moved into cycle 3, the team continued to see increases in teacher efficacy as evidenced by the TSES. Focus group interviews supported these findings. Teacher participants indicated an increase in confidence and preparedness in terms of delivering instruction. A participant commented:

> The strategies we learned were easy to understand and to implement. What mattered to me most is knowing which one to support the different learning needs of my students. Each time, the instructor shared how to implement the strategy to support Level 1s, 2s, or 3s. Quite honestly, no one had ever done this for me before. It was usually just a 'modify the task' conversation

Additionally, participants shared that having the opportunity to observe their peers as they implemented newly acquired strategies was particularly helpful. They also expressed the benefits of being observed and receiving non-evaluative feedback. A participant explained,

> So often, most of the observation piece for teachers is tied to evaluation. Administrators enter our room, and there is this self-imposed urgency to make sure everything is perfect. A huge part of my learning came from being able to try a strategy and to have supportive feedback from my peers.

Another participant spoke to the participation of leaders in the observation process. A district official and two school leaders also participated in the observations. The participant explained,

> I think what made this observation cycle different is the PLC work. Because we all formed our own little PLC, I honestly felt less threatened when anyone from our little group entered my room. I knew I was for the benefit of me and my students. Any feedback was nonjudgmental because we were all learning together.

As participants reported, the observation cycle played a direct role in building the confidence to

try new strategies. This increased confidence created a safe space for learning and increased teachers' sense of self-efficacy. A team member explained, "As we moved throughout the cycles, I found myself excited to try the new strategies. I felt I was building my teacher toolkit and learning new ways to support my students." Participation in the observation cycle had a direct impact on the efficacy of the teacher participants involved in this action research.

Chapter Summary

This chapter outlined the findings of this action research by connecting data collection to the research questions and identifying results from each cycle. Findings supported the use of professional learning as an effective strategy for building teacher capacity. Data collected from TSES surveys, focus group interviews, and observations illustrated the impact of the action research cycles on teacher practice. The next chapter provides further discussion of the major findings, limitations for the study, and implications and recommendations for practitioners, researchers, and policy makers.

CHAPTER 6

Discussion of the Findings

In K-12 education, there continues to be a persistent gap between the achievement of ELLs and native English speakers. Although there has been rapid growth in the ELL population, it has not been matched by teacher preparation for instructing this student group (Samson & Collins, 2012). There is a need to offer professional learning to build the efficacy and capacity of teachers of ELLs. This action research case study sought to address the problem of ESOL academic achievement by focusing on professional learning to build the capacity of teachers of ELLs. Three research questions guided this study:

1. How do teachers perceive their preparedness to deliver effective instruction to ELLs?
2. What specific professional learning will teachers require to effectively instruct ELLs?
3. What does an AR team learn as members collaborate to equip teachers with literacy and language-focused professional learning?

This chapter will report conclusions from analysis of the literature discussed in Chapter 2 and the findings outlined in Chapter 5. Implications and recommendations will also be presented.

Summary of the Findings

This research case study provides insight into the impact of literacy and language-focused professional learning on teacher efficacy for teachers of ELLs. The following conclusions were based on analysis of the findings from this action research case study and a connection to the literature. Conclusions focus on the impact of professional learning on teacher efficacy and the impact of action research on schools.

Major Findings Related to the Literature Reviewed

The findings in this study related to professional learning and teacher efficacy. "Teachers with high general self-efficacy have been demonstrated to perceive the implementation of new instructional methods as more important" (Zee & Koomen, 2016, para. 25). When teachers views themselves as capable, they seek new opportunities to learn and to implement new strategies. Focusing on building teacher capacity may have a positive impact on their perceived ability to effectively instruct students. This influence on teacher efficacy may have a direct impact on the academic achievement, especially for student groups such as ELLs. This action research study sought to address this need.

Finding 1 – A Targeted, Professional Learning Program Holds the Potential to Positively Impact the Self-Efficacy of Teachers of ELLs

The professional learning program implemented in this study was designed to be specific, targeted, and easy to implement. Research has indicated that "the most successful teachers of ELLs have a sense of self-confidence regarding their ability to teach EL students" (Gandara et al., 2005, p. 3). Additionally, Gandara et al. explained, "Greater preparation for teaching English learners equaled greater teacher confidence in their skills for working with these students successfully" (p.12). Other studies placed a specific focus on literacy and language training as a specific need for teachers of ELLs (Heineke et al., 2009; Ozwuba, 2018; Fakeye & Ogunsiji, 2009; Wall & Musetti, 2018; Zepeda, 2017; Jeraltin & Ramaganesh, 2013). As teachers participated in this action research, data indicated an increase in their motivation to try new strategies and their perceived effectiveness in the classroom. Implementing a teacher-focused professional learning program may lead to an increase in the efficacy of teacher participants.

Finding 2 – The Creation of a PLC as an Aspect of Professional Learning May Positively Influence Teacher Self-Efficacy

Providing teachers with opportunities to collaborate with peers and experts creates a safe space for implementation and feedback. “The need to provide supportive structures for all literacy teachers in a building to collaborate is evident” (Russell, 2014, p. 30). Collaboration was a key component of this action research as teachers and leaders came together to identify literacy and language-focused professional learning needs, to design a plan of action, and to evaluate implementation of the plan. The work of Heineke et al. (2019) indicated that collaborativee professional development featuring teachers, local, and district leaders was needed to develop linguistically responsive schools. Zepeda (2019) also supports the need for teachers to learn with their peers. In this study, teacher participants indicated positive feelings toward being able to learn alongside each other.

Finding 3 – Non-Evaluative Observation as a Part of Professional Learning May Positively Influence Teacher Self-Efficacy

Research has indicated that observations may be an impactful part of professional learning. When observers are able to observe a practice performed by a colleague that they could try, they may vicariously experience the success of that practice (Hendry & Oliver, 2012, p. 8). A study conducted by Ahmed et al. (2018) supported this statement. Researchers found that individual teachers visiting classrooms of peers may have a useful impact on the entire teaching community. This action research provided teacher participants with two opportunities. They were able to visit the classrooms of peers to observe the implementation of learned strategies. Participants were able to observe and reflect on teacher practice and the impact on student learning. They were also able to record and provide non-evaluative feedback. Additionally, participants were able to be observed by their peers and to be on the receiving end of feedback.

Major Findings Related to the Research Questions

Finding 1 – Teachers Identified a Lack of Preparedness to Deliver Effective Instruction to ELLs

TSES and focus group responses indicated an identified lack of preparedness from teachers. Correll (2016) found that teachers of ELLs who had not participated in pre-service coursework felt they lacked the strategies to meet student needs. All teacher participants of this study indicated minimal to no training focused on instructing ELLs. Throughout this action research, teachers indicated that participation in professional learning led to a feeling of being more prepared to address the specific learning needs of their students. Learning new strategies, implementing them, and analyzing their impact contributed to this positive trend.

Finding 2 – Teachers Required Professional Learning Focused on the Literacy and Language Needs of ELLs

As the team worked to identify the professional learning needs of teachers, participants focused on strategies to support the literacy and language needs of ELLs. In a 2017 study conducted by Zepeda, a literacy and language focus was identified as an attributing factor for increased student achievement. For this study, each of the content area teachers identified the need to make content accessible to students, especially when reading texts and creating written responses. All professional learning focused on strategies designed to meet these needs. Observational data from the study indicates a positive trend toward teacher efficacy as students demonstrated success with implemented strategies.

Finding 3 – An Inclusive AR Team Has the Potential to Facilitate Collaboration

Throughout this action research, the AR team indicated inclusion as a perceived strength. The team was comprised of three administrators, four classroom teachers, and a district employee. Each member brought a varied level of experience and a unique perspective to the work. According to Coghlan and Brannick (2014), “action research is a collaborative and democratic

process." (p. 6). This study's AR team often spoke to the importance of having teacher voice in the process, especially when it came to professional learning needs. "Teachers need to be enaged in learning and they need to be supported in their endeavors by site leaders" (Zepeda, 2019, p.xiii). Working together the team designed a professional learning program based on input and data.

Finding 4 – Action Research Can Be an Effective Approach for Designing Professional Learning Experiences that Build Teacher Efficacy

The team found the action research approach to be an effective way to support the professional learning needs of ELLs. The application of Coghlan and Brannick's research cycles (planning, acting, and reflecting) helped the team identify needs, implement a plan, and refine and reflect during the process. Team participants were able to continually evaluate and provide feedback on the professional learning design, which led to improvements along the way.

Limitations of the Current Study

As this study was conducted, limitations were noted throughout the research process. All work was conducted within the specific context of DMS. As a result, the findings and conclusions may have limited validity because the work has not been replicated in other school settings. It may be beneficial to conduct a similar work in schools with similar, smaller, or even larger ELL populations. Additionally, a small number of teachers participated in this case study. There may be benefits in replicating the work with a larger, more diverse participant group. Lastly, the primary researcher was also the school principal, and although participants were encouraged to be open and honest without concern about perception, working with the school's primary leader may have had some impact.

Implications

The purpose of this study was to learn about how professional learning may positively impact the self-efficacy of teachers of ELLs. The literature suggested a positive impact of teacher participation in professional learning opportunities and peer observations, and these findings

support the research. The results indicate that specific, targeted professional learning has a positive influence on teacher efficacy. The participants of this study expressed more confidence in their abilities to effectively instruct and meet the needs of ELLs. This increased efficacy may have a positive impact on student learning outcomes. As a result, there are potential implications for practitioners, researchers, and policy makers.

Recommendations for Practitioners

Local Schools

As the population of ELLs increases, school districts and schools must have a vested interest in building the capacity of the teachers who serve this student group. The results and conclusions of this study indicate that using action research to implement a targeted, professional learning program may positively influence self-efficacy for teachers of ELLs. The conceptual framework of this study is applicable to other local schools focused on building teacher capacity.

Action research was identified as an effective way to design professional learning focused on increasing teacher self-efficacy. The study indicates that local schools should create opportunities to explore the professional learning needs of teachers. The creation of an AR team is one way to address this need. AR teams should include a diverse group of members as it is beneficial to have the voices of teachers, leaders, and if possible, district officials. Ensuring varied representation allows for individual perspectives that may impact the work. Recommendations include capturing the teacher voice in terms of identifying professional learning needs. Leaders and district officials should seek to listen and to provide support and expertise. Team meetings should be a collaborative and provide a safe space.

When designing the professional learning program, it is recommended the team consider the needs of its teachers and the characteristics of effective professional learning. Based on the findings of this research, teachers are able to provide schools with a detailed list of instructional

needs. Design sessions should include opportunities for teachers to provide input and feedback. Training should be specific, easy to implement, and adaptable to specific learning environments.

School Districts

DMS is one of many schools within UPSS that has a high population of ELL learners. Both research findings and the results of this study recommend that districts focus on building the teacher efficacy and capacity of teachers of ELLs. UPSS has supported this initiative but is working to make professional learning easily accessible and attainable. DMS's work with a UPSS instructional coach supports the replication of this action research in similar school settings. The findings of this study support the district's need to collaborate with schools to provide targeted, job-embedded professional learning opportunities. Specific findings indicate the need for professional learning that is easy to implement, addresses the diverse needs of ELLs, and is ongoing and accessible.

An additional recommendation of this study is to provide training on the action research process to school building leaders. One finding indicated that action research could help schools address the professional learning needs of teachers as they provide opportunities for input and collaboration. This process could be applicable to schools that plan to implement professional learning in any aspect as well as to schools that plan to address other areas of need. By providing training to school leaders, districts set the stage for a continuous quality improvement approach where schools plan, do, check, and act in a cyclical approach.

Recommendations for Researchers

Future studies could focus on replicating this action research in schools with similar contexts. Doing so would determine if literacy and language-focused professional learning positively influences teacher self-efficacy in a variety of settings. Results of future studies could determine if there is a relationship between targeted professional learning and improved self-

efficacy for teachers of ELLs.

It may also be beneficial to replicate this study with a larger group of teacher participants to gather a wider perspective of teacher needs. Focusing on the inclusion of teachers from a variety of content areas and grade levels may yield additional information needed to address the professional learning needs of all. Future studies may produce findings that expand this research and may inform schools as they work to support teachers of ELLs.

Recommendations for Policy Makers

As the population of ELLs continues to increase in our nation, it will be imperative for policy makers to invest in the work of supporting teachers to effectively meet the needs of this student group. One aspect of support will be identifying and addressing teacher needs. In order to do so, policy makers will need to collaborate with teachers. Literature on this topic indicates that teachers are seldom "invited to share their experiences and their concerns with those who shape education policy," yet "it is critical to ascertain their perspectives…if instruction for EL students is to significantly improve" (Gandara et al., 2005, p. 2). By including teachers in the conversation, policy makers may gather a detailed perspective on their experiences, which may impact current education policies regarding ELLs. States also vary in their provision of ESOL pre-service or in-service training, and professional development as well as their requirements for ESOL endorsement and certification. Policy makers may need to perform a needs assessment to determine if requirements should be amended to effectively meet the needs of teachers and students.

Chapter Summary and Final Thoughts

The purpose of this action research case study was to address the impact of literacy and language-focused professional learning on the efficacy of teachers of ELLs. The study's results aligned with the input/output conceptual framework (Figure 1.2). The AR team learned that the

input of action research cycles featuring professional learning, PLCs, and observations cycles produced an output of increased teacher self-efficacy and AR team learning.

Important conclusions can be drawn from the findings of this action research process. Specific findings include:

1. A targeted, specific professional learning program may positively impact the self-efficacy of teachers of ELLs.
2. The creation of a PLC as an aspect of professional learning may positively influence teacher self-efficacy.
3. Non-evaluative observation as a part of professional learning may positively influence teacher self-efficacy.

As for the action research process, the study revealed the following conclusions:

1. An inclusive AR team has the potential to facilitate collaboration.
2. Action research can be an effective approach for designing professional learning experiences that build teacher efficacy.

This action research study has implications for local school districts and schools that have prioritized positively impacting the efficacy and capacity of teachers of ELLs. Local school leaders may want to consider the following recommendations:

1. Form and utilize an AR team to develop a targeted, specific literacy and language – focused professional learning program.
2. Incorporate PLCs and non-evaluative observations as part of a professional learning program.

School districts may want to consider the following recommendations:

1. Including teachers in the professional learning design process
2. Providing professional development on action research to school leaders

Future research should aim to replicate this study in schools with similar contexts. Findings could reveal the long-term influence of literacy and language-focused professional learning on the efficacy of teachers of ELLs.

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Appendix A
Empirical Findings Table

APA—by Author(s) and Year	Title of Study	Purpose	Method	Sample	Result	Conclusion	Implication
Ahmed et. al., (2018).	Peer Observation: A Professional Learning Tool for English Language Teachers in and EFL Institute	To determine teachers views and beliefs about peer observation as professional development	Mixed-method approach using questionnaires (quantitative) and interviews (qualitative)	13 English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers from 6 different countries	The majority of teachers preferred working collaboratively and view per observation as an effective development strategy	Individual teachers visiting classrooms of peers may have a useful impact on the teaching community.	School leaders should consider peer observation as a professional learning tool.
Correll, P. (2016).	Teachers' Preparation to Teach English Language Learners (ELLs): An Investigation of Perceptions, Preparation, and Current Practice	To determine the impact of teacher preparation programs on the practices of teachers of ELLs	Case study including teacher surveys, classroom observations, and semi-structured interviews	79 elementary school teachers in a Kentucky school	Participants indicated they were not prepared by their teacher education programs for teaching ELL students.	Teachers of ELLs who had not participated in pre-service coursework felt they lacked the strategies and expertise to address student learning needs	Pre-service education programs should offer coursework to support the teaching of non-native English speakers. School administrators should provide professional development opportunities that include strategies for teaching ELLs.
Fakeye, D., & Ogunsiji, Y. (2009).	English Language Proficiency as a Predictor of Academic Achievement among ELF Students in Nigeria	To determine the role language proficiency has on the academic performance of students in Nigeria	Ex-post facto and correlational design using an English Language Proficiency Test (ELPT), a standardized TOEFL paper test and an interview designed to assess speaking skills.	200 students; half male and half female with varying degrees of English proficiency	Significant positive relationship between proficiency in English language and the students' academic performance; 41% of changes in students' performance is accounted for by proficiency in English Language	English language proficiency was a strong predictor of the academic success of senior secondary school students in Nigeria	English language teachers in should be equipped with strategies to enable them teach the four language skills of Listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing to secondary students.

Gleeson, M., & Davison, C. (2016)	A Conflict between Experience and Professional Learning: Subject Teachers' Beliefs about Teaching English Language Learners	To investigate the knowledge about teaching ELLs reported by content teachers and how this impacts teacher education	Six cases from a larger qualitative multiple case study Cases were deliberately selected to include the experiences and perceptions of different backgrounds	11 volunteer teachers from two public secondary schools and one feeder Intensive English Centre for new arrivals to Australia	Participants demonstrated comfort in their content and practices and barely relied on PD about teaching ELLs advice offered by the ELL specialist	Observed disconnection between teachers' beliefs, knowledge and practice and engagement.	Further research is needed to identify the kinds of PD it needed to provoke teachers to engage in pedagogical language learning.
Gonzalez, M. (2016).	Preparing Teacher Candidates for the Instruction of English Language Learners	To examine how teacher candidates are prepared to work with ELLs	This qualitative study used a review of lesson plans and a questionnaire focused on three questions: (1) how they plan for ELL instruction and (2) what they feel when planning lessons for ELLs.	5 teacher candidates in the final semester of a teacher preparation program at a large research university in the southeast	Analysis of lesson plans revealed teacher candidates mostly focused on speaking or writing activities and placed limited focus on listening or reading tasks.	Universities will need to provide teacher candidates with training on how to use ELLs' language proficiency data to design instruction that is effective for ELLs.	As ESOL training is not a requirement for all new teachers, local schools must be prepared to provide new and veteran teachers with this training as well.
Heineke et.al (2019).	Language Matters: Developing Educators' Expertise for English Learners in Linguistically Diverse Communities.	To determine what impact professional learning may have on the efficacy of teachers of ELs	Apprenticeship model to deliver professional learning focused on cultural and linguistic backgrounds, strengths, and needs of EL students	32 Chicago public schools with EL populations of 30% or above	Participants in the cohort indicated increased efficacy and awareness of how to develop classrooms focused on the role of language in all aspects of instruction.	Teaching ELs is a complex task, and educators must define the specific knowledge, skills, and mindsets to effectively support this student population.	Collaborative PD with teachers, local school, and district leaders is needed to develop linguistically responsive schools.
Jeraltin, J. & Ramaganesh, E. (2013).	Is Language Proficiency Taken Care of at Higher Education Level?	To determine support given to ELs in graduate school	Assessments were given to determine proficiency in the four domains of listening, speaking, reading, and writing.	Participants included post graduate students of English Literature from 2 colleges	In all four domains, proficiency scores were higher for non-ELLs than ELLs.	This study supports the need for a comprehensive curriculum incorporating language skills and the need for the use of targeted language teaching at all school levels.	ELLs need the support of teachers who can incorporate language and literacy development into their instruction.

Ozowuba, G. (2018).	Relationship between English Proficiency and Academic Achievement of Nigerian Secondary School Students	To investigate the relationship between English proficiency and academic achievement among seniors taking a certification examination	Quantitative correlational investigation of the relationship between English language proficiency and performance on the WASSCE achievement test. The authors focused on distinction between conversational language and academic language.	225 seniors from two secondary schools in Nigeria	The study indicted a strong positive relationship between the English proficiency of seniors and their performance on 4 WASSCE subject assessments (English, biology, government, and mathematics)	Teachers can improve learning outcomes for ELLs by using strategies that will contextualize the content they teach.	In order to support the academic achievement and performance of ELLs, teachers must employ strategies to develop academic vocabulary frequently used on assessments.
Wall, C. & Musetti, B. 2018).	Beyond Teaching English: Embracing a Holistic Approach to Supporting English Learner Students and Their Families	To analyze the impact of one elementary school's approach to address the needs of English learner students and their families	Data was collected from questionnaires and field notes from interviews and focus group sessions. Results were sorted into major themes	The sample group was a Southern California Title 1 public elementary school with an ELL population of 57% and a FRL population of 78%. The school serves 400 students and families.	Focus group respondents thought the education of ELs could be improved by integrating ELD strategies across all content areas and teaching content and language skills	Schools should work toward increasing opportunity, access, efficacy, engagement, and achievement for ELs by partnering with a variety of stakeholders.	The study supports the need for professional learning in instructional models that allow for targeted academic instruction
Zepeda, L. (2017).	Closing the Achievement Gap for English Language Learners: Preparing Educators with Effective Instructional Strategies to meet the Needs for all English Learners	To find ways to begin to work towards closing the achievement gap for English learners by researching instructional strategies, language development, teacher credentialing, and induction programs	This qualitative research study employed the use of classroom observations, interviews, and benchmark data.	The sample was an elementary charter school located on the west coast of the US with a total of 250 students ranging from grades K-6th. Thirty-eight percent of students are ELLs, and 67% are socioeconomically disadvantaged.	School data indicates that all students, including English learners, made growth in the Language Arts target area	In this study, three research-proven strategies were identified as attributing to increased academic achievement for ELLs: teaching academic vocabulary, providing small-group intervention, and recognizing socio-cultural factors.	Schools must provide teachers training in using academic language for their content area, implementing small group intervention with a focus on literacy and language, and recognizing students' backgrounds and the influences on their school experiences.

Appendix B
IRB Approval

Addressing the Impact of Literacy and Language-Focused Professional Learning

Principal Investigator:	Bryant	**Contacts:**	Bryant
Reviewer:	Pavich	**Review Level:**	Exempt
Funding Source:		**Approved Date:**	5/8/2020
Committee:	IRB 1	**Expiration Date:**	
Review Category:		**Project Status:**	Approved

Appendix C
UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA
CONSENT FORM

Addressing the Impact of Literacy and Language-Focused Professional Learning

Researcher's Statement
I am/We are asking you to take part in a research study. Before you decide to participate in this study, it is important that you understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. This form is designed to give you the information about the study so you can decide whether to be in the study or not. Please take the time to read the following information carefully. Please ask the researcher if there is anything that is not clear or if you need more information. When all your questions have been answered, you can decide if you want to be in the study or not. This process is called "informed consent." A copy of this form will be given to you.

Principal Investigator: Karen Bryant
College of Education
bryantkc@uga.edu

Purpose of the Study
In K-12 education, there continues to be a gap between the achievement of English Language Learners (ELLs) and native English speakers. Language barriers pose challenges for delivering instruction that is on grade level, with a focus on rigorous, academic standards. This issue negatively impacts English Language Learners because they are, in turn, unable to demonstrate proficiency. A possible element of this problem is teacher preparedness for instructing this diverse population. This study investigated the impact of professional learning on the instruction of teachers of ELLs.

Study Procedures
If you agree to participate, you will be asked to …

- *Commit to an examination of research-based instructional practices of teachers of English Language Learners over a duration of 3 months*
- *Commit to participation in an observed collaborative learning community to evaluate current research and local school practices for a duration of 3 months (bi-weekly, one hour meetings)*
- *Commit to participation in two thirty-minute focus group interviews once during the onset and once during the closing stages of the research process*
- *Implement research-based instructional practices in content area classrooms over a duration of 3 months*
- *Commit to completion of an online ten to fifteen minute teacher self-efficacy scale once during the onset and once during the closing stages of the research process*
- *Commit to conducting and participating in 3 or more 30-minute classroom observations and implementing feedback*

Risks and discomforts

- The secondary researcher is the principal of the school where this action research will take place. Participants will be asked to share their responses and experiences with teaching practices and efficacy with their supervisor. In addition, they will be observed by both the

supervisor and peers and provided feedback based on these observations. Identifiable, individual information will be collected but will not be shared with anyone other than the researcher. When published in the research, pseudonyms will be used to protect the anonymity of participants. Participants will have the option to opt out of participating at any time.

Benefits

- This research has the potential to benefit teachers of English Language Learners by supporting their implementation of effective instructional practices. This work has the potential to directly impact the teaching practices of participants. Participation in this action research will expose the team to effective instructional practices for English Language Learners. Participants will have the opportunity to implement these practices and to observe implementation in others' classrooms, possibly resulting in an increase in individual teaching efficacy.

Incentives for participation

Participants will not receive any incentive (monetary or non-monetary) for being in the study.

Audio/Video Recording

Audio recording devices will be used during focus group interviews.

Privacy/Confidentiality

In order to protect participants' privacy and to maintain confidentiality, participants will not be identified directly (e.g. name or email address) but indirectly via the use of aliases and generic job descriptions. Direct/indirect identifiers will be retained for 3 months and stored in a password-protected file on the secondary researcher's personal and private computer. Only the secondary researcher has access to this device and its contents. The password-protected file will retain a spreadsheet indicating the coding system, which associates individuals with their pseudonyms and responses to self-efficacy scale rankings, focus group responses, and classroom/PLC observational data. This file will be retained during the duration of the study and deleted from the secondary researcher's computer once the study is complete.

While the researchers will keep your focus group comments confidential, we cannot promise that other focus group participants will do the same; however, we will ask all participants to respect confidentiality by not discussing what was said in the group.

This research involves the transmission of data over the Internet. Every reasonable effort has been taken to ensure the effective use of available technology; however, confidentiality during online communication cannot be guaranteed.

Taking part is voluntary

Your involvement in the study is voluntary, and you may choose not to participate or to stop at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.
If you decide to stop or withdraw from the study, the information/data collected from or about you up to the point of your withdrawal will be kept as part of the study and may continue to be analyzed.
Your decision about whether or not to participate will have no bearing on your employment or evaluations.

If you have questions

The main researcher conducting this study is Karen Bryant, a professor at the University of Georgia. Please ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you may contact Karen Bryant at bryantkc@uga.edu or at 706.542.2214. If you have any questions or concerns regarding your rights as a research participant in this study, you may contact the Institutional Review Board (IRB) Chairperson at 706.542.3199 or irb@uga.edu.

Research Subject's Consent to Participate in Research:

To voluntarily agree to take part in this study, you must sign on the line below. Your signature below indicates that you have read or had read to you this entire consent form, and have had all of your questions answered.

Kaneshia Dorsan	_____	_____
Name of Researcher	Signature	Date
_____	_____	_____
Name of Participant	Signature	Date

Please sign both copies, keep one and return one to the researcher.

Appendix D
Initial Recruitment Email

Greetings, DMS!

In the spirit of continuous quality improvement, we are continuing to identify ways to fulfill our school's vision of creating successful lifelong learners.

Over the past year, we have discussed the need to provide effective supports for our increasing English Language Learner population. As this student group comprises more than half of our school, there is a need to ensure that all teachers are equipped with the tools and strategies to support them.

This fall, I will lead an action research team through the process of evaluating our current processes. From this learning, we hope to identify ways to support the needs of our teachers of ELLs.

If you would be interested in attending a meeting to learn more about this action research team, please reply to this email. Attending the meeting does not equate to participation. It is an opportunity to learn more about the process and to ask any questions.

Thank you for your consideration,

Kaneshia Dorsan

Appendix E
Follow-up Recruitment Email

Greetings!

Thank you for your interest in participating in this action research study. Your involvement will aid our school in fulfilling our vision of supporting the needs of all learners.

As a school we continuously seek ways to support our English Language Learners, and this action research is posed to help us in that effort.

We will conduct our first meeting on July 31st, during which we will delve more into the action research process as it pertains to this study.

I thank you in advance for your participation.

Thank you for your consideration,

Kaneshia Dorsan

Appendix F
TSES—Teacher Beliefs

Modified Teacher Efficacy Scale based on the work of Fraser (2014) and Gibson & Demo (1984)

INSTRUCTIONS: Please indicate your response to each statement by circling the appropriate number beneath each one.

KEY: 1= Strongly Agree 2=Moderately Agree 3= Agree slightly more than disagree
4= Disagree slightly more than agree 5= Moderately Disagree 6= Strongly Disagree

1. When an ELL does better than usually, many times it is because I exert a little extra effort.
   1 2 3 4 5 6

2. The hours in my class have little influence on ELLs compared to the influence of their home environment.
   1 2 3 4 5 6

3. The amount an ELL can learn is primarily related to family background.
   1 2 3 4 5 6

4. When an ELL is having difficulty with an assignment, I am usually able to adjust it his/her level
   1 2 3 4 5 6

5. When an ELL gets a better grade than he/she usually gets, it is usually because I found better ways of teaching that student
   1 2 3 4 5 6

6. Teachers are not very powerful influences on ELL student achievement when all factors are considered
   1 2 3 4 5 6

7. When the grades of my ELL students improve, it is usually because I found more effective approaches
   1 2 3 4 5 6

8. If an ELL student masters a new concept quickly, this might be because I knew the necessary steps in teaching that concept
   1 2 3 4 5 6

9. If an ELL student did not remember information I gave in a previous lesson, I would know how to increase his/her retention in the next lesson
   1 2 3 4 5 6

10. Even a teacher with good teaching abilities may not reach many ELL students
    1 2 3 4 5 6

11. If one of my ELL students couldn't do a class assignment, I would be able to accurately assess whether the assignment was at the correct level of difficulty
    1 2 3 4 5 6

12. If I really try hard, I can get through to even the most difficult or unmotivated ELL students
    1 2 3 4 5 6

13. My teacher training program and /or experience has given me the necessary skills to be an effective teacher with ELL students
    1 2 3 4 5 6

14. With the right strategies and training, I can be effective with ELL students.
    1 2 3 4 5 6

Appendix G
Agenda for Action Research Team Meeting I

AR Team Meeting I	July 31, 2020
Agenda Items: • Establishment of Norms • Review purpose of Addressing the Impact of Literacy and Language-Focused Professional Learning • State of Our School: English Language Learners • ATLAS Protocol: Review of the Data • Action Research Steps/Initial Planning • Consent Forms • Closing/Next Steps	**Notes:**

Appendix H
Agenda for Action Research Team Meeting II

AR Team Meeting II	August 7, 2020
Agenda Items: • Review of Norms • Review of Literature • Focus Group Interview • Review of Pre-TSES Data • Review of Literacy and Language-Focused Strategies for ELLs • Finalize Design of First Cycle/Plan for Implementation • Closing/Next Steps	**Notes:**

Appendix I
Agenda for Action Research Team Meeting III

AR Team Meeting III	September 7, 2020
Agenda Items: • Review of Norms • Debrief Cycle I (Professional Learning and Strategy Implementation) • Focus Group Interview • Design Cycle II/Plan for Implementation • Set date for Professional Learning • Closing/Next Steps	**Notes:**

Appendix J
Agenda for Action Research Team Meeting IV

AR Team Meeting IV	October 5, 2020
Agenda Items: • Review of Norms • Debrief Cycle II (Professional Learning and Strategy Implementation) • Focus Group Interviews • TSES Interim • Closing/Next Steps	**Notes:**

Appendix K
Agenda for Action Research Team Meeting V

AR Team Meeting V	November 2, 2020
Agenda Items: • Review of Norms • Review TSES Interim Data • Design Cycle III/Plan for Implementation • Set date for Professional Learning • Closing/Next Steps	**Notes:**

Appendix L
Agenda for Action Research Team Meeting VI

AR Team Meeting VI	December 14, 2020
Agenda Items: • Review of Norms • Final TSES Administration • Exit Focus Group Interview • Set Date for Final Follow-up • Closing/Next Steps	**Notes:**

Appendix M
Agenda for Action Research Team Meeting VII

AR Team Meeting VII	January 12, 2021
Agenda Items: • Review of Norms • Review Final TSES Administration Data • Debrief Process • Closing/Next Steps	**Notes:**

Appendix N
Look-For Classroom Observation Tool

Teacher Moves (Words, Actions, & Strategies)	Student Moves (Words, Actions, & Responses)

Appendix O

Focus Group Interview Guide (Initial Meeting)

Hello, everyone. Thank you again for being a part of this action research which seeks to address the impact of professional learning on teacher efficacy. This work will specifically focus on teachers of English Language Learners, a major student population of our school.

Before we begin the focus group interview, I would like to remind you that I am recording. Any information shared will be kept confidential. Pseudonyms will be used for the name of our school and all participants.

Questions:

1. Tell the group a little bit about yourself and your journey in education thus far.

2. Reflecting on your training to become a teacher, did you have any formal training and/or classes to prepare you to work with ELLs?

3. How did this training (or lack thereof) impact your instruction?

4. How did this training (or lack thereof) impact your beliefs about your ability to instruct ELLs?

5. How would you describe your professional learning needs as they relate to instructing ELLs?

6. If you could design an effective professional learning program, what would it include?

7. As we prepare to begin this work, is there anything else you would like to share?

Thank you again for your participation in this interview. Your insight will help us as we design and plan for the next cycle.

Appendix P

Focus Group Interview Guide (Cycles 1, 2, and 3)

Hello, everyone. Thank you again for your participation in this action research. As we have now completed action research cycle, I would like to ask a few questions about your experiences.

Before we begin, please be reminded that I am recording this interview. All information will be kept confidential, and pseudonyms will be used. Do you have any questions before we begin?

1. Describe your experience with the professional learning offered during this cycle.
2. Describe your experience with implementing the learned strategies.
3. What impact did the strategies have on student learning/engagement?
4. What is a benefit of having professional learning to support teachers of ELLs?
5. What do you see as a future need for professional learning?
6. Describe your experiences with being a member of this PLC during this cycle.
7. Describe your experiences with peer observations during this cycle.

Thank you again for your participation in this interview. Your insight will help us as we design and plan for the next cycle.

Appendix Q
Focus Group Exit Interview Guide

Hello, everyone. Thank you for your participation on our action research team focused on addressing the impact of professional learning on teacher efficacy.

Before we begin, please be reminded that I am recording this interview. All information will be kept confidential, and pseudonyms will be provided. Do you have any questions before we begin?

1. How has participation in professional learning impacted your instruction this year?

   What components do you think comprise an effective new teacher induction program?

2. How has participation in professional learning impacted your teacher

   efficacy/capacity?

3. How has participation in a PLC impacted your capacity/efficacy with ELLs?

4. Does having more knowledge about how to instruct ELLs help you have a better

   understanding of students' needs?

5. What role did observation and feedback play in your professional learning?

6. Describe the components of an effective professional learning program.

7. Describe the components of an effective action research team.

8. Describe your learning as a member of this action research team.

9. What might be a future direction of this work?

Thank you again for your participation in this work, which is poised to impact our school at large. I appreciate each of you for giving of our time, talents, and expertise.