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Increasing English Progress Proficiency of Multilingual Learners Utilizing Improvement Science

Stephanie Corley Huckabee

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INCREASING ENGLISH PROGRESS PROFICIENCY OF MULTILINGUAL LEARNERS
UTILIZING IMPROVEMENT SCIENCE

by

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DEDICATION

This work is dedicated first and foremost to my children, Jordan and Wilson. They have been patient during many nights of class and have encouraged me in my work. We sat at the kitchen table to do homework and assignments for our schoolwork together, and I would not trade that precious time together for the world. They are the very reason I am inspired to keep learning and growing. I dedicate this to my parents, Steve and Darla Corley, who have modeled hard work for a lifetime. I am thankful for a mother who taught me what it looked like to go back to college while working full-time and raising a family while she battled cancer along the journey. I am thankful for a father who modeled that you can always figure things out and allowed me to take apart things in his shop as a child even if I was not sure how they would go back together. I am thankful for my sister, Heather Davis, who continues to push me to think and challenge the status quo, always with pure grace and boundless love as the guideposts. I dedicate this to my forever in-laws, Jay and Lucy Wilson, who have lived too many vacations to count where I had to step out for a night to take care of a class or paper. Their support of this goal from almost eight years ago has been unwavering and their encouragement paramount. Finally, I dedicate this to the One above who forever demonstrates there is a plan and path better than my own, and who provides infinite grace so that we can boldly live in power, love, and self-discipline.

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This would not have been possible without the volunteers who were willing to share their experiences with multilingual learning in our school. I am thankful for those who shared their stories and the expertise of their experiences. I am proud of how our teachers support multilingual students and hope that this work will highlight the incredible level of professionalism required to do their work. I am thankful for Assistant Principal of Instruction, Michael Williams, and Multilingual Learner Program Teacher, Barbra Hunter, who were both willing to enter brainstorming sessions that at times felt like hurricanes as we were trying to navigate solutions. I am thankful for a district that encourages us to leverage the strengths in our buildings to grow and love our students.

I am incredibly grateful for the professors at the University of South Carolina who have challenged me on this journey. Dr. Kathleen Cunningham has brought improvement science to life and helped me see how the power of one small change can generate a cascade to move mountains for our students. Dr. Suzy Hardie has been a coach and mentor for developing my leadership since 2017, and I am thankful for her insight into leadership of the K12 world. Dr. Pete Moyi has not only served as a committee member, but also shared his experience as a parent in my district with our ML processes. Dr. Jeff Eargle and Dr. Julia López-Robertson had never worked with me until I asked them to join me on this point in my academic journey, and their wisdom and constructive feedback is priceless in how it has helped me see myself as a scholar and how this work will create change for multilingual learners in our school.

ABSTRACT

This problem of practice addresses creating more positive outcomes for multilingual learners in achievement data for English proficiency progress matching or exceeding achievement data patterns of the general student population in a suburban middle school. Improvement science is the framework used to help solve this problem. The improvement team consisted of an assistant principal of instruction, a multilingual learner program teacher assigned to this school along with five additional schools, and the principal. The team began their work with the goal of understanding the current system by learning from students, families, and teachers about their experiences with multilingual learning. Potential areas of change were selected based on how they directly impact student learning and how much access the team had to influence or make changes. Areas explored as potential pathways for solutions included professional development and teacher training, master scheduling, school culture, and family outreach. Based on what the team learned about their local system in combination with published resources and research, they determined that professional development could offer a potential solution to help multilingual learners to grow in language acquisition while also increasing their ability to show what they know in content acquisition. This problem of practice outlines the process and power of improvement science to improve outcomes for multilingual learners.

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AUTHOR'S PROLOGUE

My first experience with a multilingual learner (ML) was in the classroom in 2011 as a ninth grade English teacher. Antonio (pseudonym) had recently arrived in the United States from Cuba after his mother had married an American two weeks before school started. He rarely smiled and did not seem to have any desire to be in our school or speak any English. At that time iPads were not the norm in schools, so I brought my personal iPad from home and attempted to use Google Translate with him. When we were doing some of the more common texts such as *Romeo and Juliet*, I was able to share curriculum in Spanish. His multilingual learner program teacher was amazing and by the end of the year she had him writing short paragraphs in Spanish and then translated to English. In my class he never said much, but he would smile occasionally, and I hoped I made a difference. Looking back having learned from this research, perhaps he was in his “silent period” (Krashen and Terrell, 1983) at that point and he was actually learning quite a bit and it was I who did not understand his need for silence.

The next year I transferred to another high school to teach. Fast forward four years and I was at a football game for my former school during half-time in a packed concession stand crowd. I heard someone say, “Ms. Huckabee! Ms. Huckabee!” and as I turned around, I realized it was Antonio. I had never heard him say my name in the entire year I taught him, yet there he was, saying my name with perfect clarity and clearly wanting to talk to me.

I remember staring in awe at this confident young man who was able to tell me with a smile that I had given him the “wrong” Spanish for an entire year. I had given him the version of Spain and not of Cuba, but he shared he just did not have the heart or words to tell me when he was in my class. He told me he remembered how nice I was and how hard I tried to make sure he could do everything everyone else did in class. I cried right there in front of him and everyone else packed in the concession stand with tears of joy and gratitude. I was able to see the results of his hard work and of many teachers pouring into him through the years. He was proof of the power of teaching and more importantly, proof of the tenacity and determination of a student who had much to overcome and had clearly done it.

When I had a student from Brazil in my Public Speaking class, I asked her to first present her speeches in Portuguese so that other students could hear a language we do not teach in our schools. We had a student from Thailand who amazed us with a presentation of his normal school day that included riding the train with his teachers instead of a bus and a school building that looked like a fancy New York City high rise. My last multilingual student as a classroom teacher was an exchange student from Madrid, Spain, and she taught us what she had learned about the United States in her schooling versus what she was learning in her U.S. History course. All of these students offered perspectives that enhanced the learning in the classroom for all of my students.

I left the classroom to move into administration in a middle school and my first role was assistant principal of instruction. In January of 2020 with one week to go in the semester, two students transferred to our school from Vietnam who spoke no English. I will never forget when our registrar was preparing first semester report cards and asked

me to review their grades. These boys had only been in our school for one week of the first semester, but the grading on their work in some of their classes for that short amount of time was devastating to their grades. Five school days in the United States of America had rendered them failures academically in some of their courses.

I called an emergency meeting with their teachers in one of the science teacher's rooms after school. I knew our teachers wanted what is best for students, so I had to understand what was happening to these kids who had no control over the fact that they had just been brought to a new country and did not speak our language.

What I discovered was a mix of hopes and fears when it comes to working with students who come to us as multilingual learners, yet all of the teachers believed that their approaches were contributing to the long-term success of the students. I reminded teachers that unless they had been through every single support with each student's Individualized Language Acquisition Plan (ILAP), they could not give a failing grade for an assignment. However, was a 60 really the right score for a student who might not even understand what we were attempting to assess? Our school had not historically had many students who did not speak English and it was evident that the teachers wanted to understand more about how they could work with their new students.

I am so thankful for the teachers who met with me that day. They shared fears about using Google Translate and what if it actually translated something into bad words. This led me to help one teacher get over this fear by sitting in class with his multilingual student with Google Translate. Some of the teachers wrestled with the fact that these two new students were mastering simply opening the Chromebook and had not authentically earned any content grade reflective of their teaching. They truly were at a loss for how to

grade in a way that would be equitable to these new students while honoring the learning of their current ones.

They began sharing ideas with each other that incorporated the ILAP documents for these two students along with some simple grace in the situation these boys found themselves in at no fault of their own. We left that afternoon with a more solid understanding of how we would support these two particular students, but I remember wanting to meet with our ML teacher who we shared with other schools at that time to see if we could come up with more ideas to support multilingual students and teachers together in learning.

In a matter of weeks, school would shut down and all of us would enter the world of pandemic school. This was not an easy time for any student, but especially for our MLs as our data would tell us. It is with this background that I found myself thinking of which students experience opportunity gaps in fall of 2021 when my Ed.D. cohort was asked to brainstorm ideas for a problem of practice. The data continue to tell us that these students need our support despite the fact that we have lower numbers overall of multilingual students compared to our neighboring middle schools. Perhaps that is why these students need this work even more as they are marginalized even more in lack of numbers. Even just one student who is not getting the support he or she needs for learning is too many.

This problem of practice is designed to help identify our current system of support or lack thereof for our multilingual learners. This includes listening closely to the experiences of students, teachers, and families. It is about being honest about our current resources and what we might or might not be able to influence for change. It is about

honoring multiple experiences to create sustainable solutions, though always remaining open to flexibility, yielding to continued improvement, reflecting on how to do better by all of those we serve in our school regardless of how they arrived or what language they speak.

CHAPTER 1

DEFINING AN ACTIONABLE PROBLEM OF PRACTICE

This dissertation in practice began in fall of 2021 when students in my cohort at the University of South Carolina in Education Systems Improvement were challenged with defining a problem that would be solved through the practices of improvement science. As a K12 principal, I could offer myriad topics for improvement based on data and experience, but when I reflected on which voices in my school were the least to be heard, but in need of others to listen to most, our multilingual learners were the clear answer for these efforts.

The English Learner student population in the United States increased from 9.2% or 4.5 million students in fall of 2010 to 10.4% or 5.1 million students in fall of 2019 (National Center for Education Statistics, 2022). The organization that primarily controls and manages what multilingual learners should learn and master for English language acquisition in the United States is called WIDA (Mission and history, 2022). WIDA was originally named after the states of Wisconsin, Delaware, and Arkansas working together on an Enhanced Assessment Grant in 2003 when there was a more of a focus on English Language Learners from No Child Left Behind. Today the organization represents multiple states and is also responsible for the ACCESS test which all multilingual learners are required to take in the state of South Carolina (South Carolina Department of Education, 2022). According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2022),

South Carolina's population of English learners is 6% which is below the national average of 10.4% of public school students.

The school in this problem of practice is an affluent, suburban middle school located in the central region of South Carolina and serves as the primary public-school option for seventh and eighth grade students in its zip code. According to the US Census Bureau, the percent of persons aged 25 years and older with at least a high school diploma is 95.8% for this zip code while it is 87.5% for the state of South Carolina (2021). The area has a 59.5% rate of residents with a bachelor's degree or higher for that same age group, while the state of South Carolina reports 28.1% (US Census Bureau, 2021).

Housing data show that the owner-occupied housing unit rate is 83.8% for this area with the median value of owner-occupied housing at \$323,500. The owner-occupied housing rate for the state of South Carolina is 69.4% with a median value of these homes of \$162,300 (US Census Bureau, 2021). In the 2020 presidential election, the primary county comprising the attendance zone for this school voted 69.13% straight ticket Republican and 30.16% Democratic. The Trump and Pence ticket received 64.20% of the vote and the Biden and Harris ticket received 34.10% of the vote for president and vice president (*Election night reporting*, 2023).

The 2021-2022 school year demographics included 942 students on the 135-day active headcount consisting of 49% female, 51% male, 81% White, 6% Latino, 5% Black, 4% Two or more races, 3% Asian, and 1% Other.

Additional publicly available demographic information includes 17% of students with disabilities, 4% as English Language Learners, and 24% who qualify as pupils in

poverty according to the SCDE 135-Day Active Student Pupil Count (2022). The faculty of the school is predominantly White and female, with 4% representing racial diversity.

On June 7, 2022, a memorandum was sent to school leadership from South Carolina Department of Education Superintendent Molly Spearman stating that students from English Speakers of Other Language (ESOL) programs would now be known as multilingual learners (MLs). Additionally, a teacher for MLs would be referred to as a multilingual learner program teacher (MLP teacher) or multilingual learner program specialist (MLPS) instead of ESOL teacher. This was done to help highlight the strengths that come with knowing multiple languages while also honoring the identities of students (Office of Federal and State Accountability, 2022). Some such as Gunderson (2020) have expressed concerns about labeling students with something such as multilingual learner as this is singular and does not respect the whole student. There is also research to support that if a student arrives to the United States with advanced language skills, being labeled as speaking multiple languages or anything other than English can result in a negative net result for students in their learning in the K12 environment (Umansky, 2016).

In the state of South Carolina, multilingual learners are identified by a survey given to every family of a student upon initial enrollment in public schools. There are three questions on the survey:

1. What is the language that the student first acquired?
2. What language(s) is spoken most often by the student?
3. What is the primary language used in the home, regardless of the language spoken by the student?

If a family enters anything other than English for any of those questions, the student is automatically given an English Proficiency Screening (South Carolina Department of Education, 2022). Students must score a proficiency level of 4.4+ and reach a 4.0+ in the different categories of listening, speaking, reading, and writing on the ACCESS test which is the test utilized by the State of South Carolina. Students are monitored for four years after they reach proficiency (South Carolina Department of Education, 2022).

Existing Organizational Data

South Carolina Department of Education Report Card Data

South Carolina School Report Cards from 2012 to 2017 did not include data on multilingual learners if there were not enough students to meet the minimum 20 pupil count threshold. Our school did not meet this minimum requirement for accountability purposes during this time. As shown in Table 1.1, beginning with the 2018 Report Card, the number of students who were included in the subgroup and the number of students eligible for accountability calculations were included even if there were not enough students to create a cohort for accountability (South Carolina Education Oversight Committee, 2021).

Table 1.1 School ML Student Count Data 2018-2021

School ML Student Count Data			
Testing Year	Number of ML students in subgroup	Number of ML students included in Accountability Calculation	Percentage Met Progress toward Proficiency Target
2018	19	10	N/A
2019	19	11	N/A
2020	29	13	N/A

2021	24	19	N/A
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Beginning in 2022, the South Carolina Education Oversight Committee changed how to determine which multilingual learners would be included in accountability calculations, and students who were both working toward or met proficiency in English were then included (South Carolina Education Oversight Committee, 2022). In the past, students who met proficiency were no longer included in the testing. The 2021-2022 Report Card data for multilingual learners counted for our school for the first time and it revealed that our multilingual learners were not meeting English proficiency achievement levels in line with other accountability measurements for our school. Our students historically perform at higher percentages for meeting or exceeding expectations than district and state levels in achievement measures.

Table 1.2 Overall Achievement ELA and Math Data 2022

Comparison of State, District, School Overall Achievement Data ELA and Math 2022		
	ELA Percent Met or Exceeding	Math Percent Met or Exceeding
State	46.6%	38.9%
District	55%	45.1%
Our School	62.9%	52.8%

ML Proficiency Data of 2022 as shown in Table 1.3 demonstrated we have an area of weakness to address as our school lagged behind both the district and the state in the percentage of students who met their progress toward proficiency targets (*Academic Achievement*, 2022).

Table 1.3 State, District, and School ML Proficiency Data 2022

Comparison of State, District, and School ML Proficiency Data 2022			
	Number of ML students included in Accountability Calculation	Number of ML students Met Progress toward Proficiency Target	Percentage Met Progress toward Proficiency Target
State	62238	33790	54.3%
District	623	357	57.3%
Our School	24	12	50%

Our multilingual learners also performed lower than the other middle schools in the district, further illustrating that this particular measurement of accountability is an anomaly in our data.

Table 1.4 District Middle School ML Proficiency Data 2022

Comparison of all district middle schools, ML proficiency data 2022			
	Number of ML students included in Accountability Calculation	Number of ML students Met Progress toward Proficiency Target	Percentage Met Progress toward Proficiency Target
Our school	24	12	50%
School A	28	15	53.6%
School B	53	28	52.8%

Multilingual Learners at Our School

Spanish has been the most common language spoken by our MLs, then Korean, then Vietnamese in our most recent experience. We have a Samsung plant in a neighboring county, and some of the staff of that company have purchased homes in our

attendance zone to enroll students in our school. A multilingual real estate agent has come to our school multiple times with some of the families to help translate when enrolling their students.

In terms of family involvement, our multilingual learner parents and guardians mirror most of our school. Parents who have higher levels of education including the ability to speak English tend to be more involved in their student's schooling (Vera et al., 20212). We celebrate an International Night each year and encourage our students and families to share their culture and language with our community. Our most recent International Night featured Australia, Brazil, China, Czech Republic, Greece, Japan, Lebanon, South Africa, and Venezuela. Of course, that is just one night and that does not count for the authentic inclusivity Theoharis and associates (2020) identify as a critical part of supporting our multilingual learners as we view their multiple languages as a unique resource rather than a burden to bear.

A scathing reality is that in our current arrangement, our students who are multilingual learners have no structured class to work with our multilingual learner program teacher as she covers multiple schools and must pull them out of content area courses to work with them or to coach them on English proficiency. Each time they get pulled out to receive multilingual learner support, they are missing out on instruction with core content classes that will then have to be recovered. Some multilingual students in our district have classes that meet routinely to support their language acquisition and coursework and perhaps most importantly, allow for connections with other students who are learning American culture and academics. This is something we have not been able to

establish at our school due to the lower numbers of multilingual learners and distribution of available teachers and teacher time on campus.

The Improvement Team

The core improvement science team consisted of the multilingual learner program teacher (MLP teacher) for our students, our assistant principal of instruction (API), and me as the principal. I selected them as the primary team members because of their knowledge of the current system, their ability to make changes moving forward to directly impact students and their flexibility in being able to meet routinely and in the natural flow of our work. Our MLP teacher has been working with our school for years and this is the second year for the API. They had already been having conversations about how to address supporting our multilingual learners including our district multilingual learner leadership and were both excited to see how improvement science might lead us to answers.

Right from the start, all three of us had to avoid falling prey to solutionitis, “the tendency for educators to jump to conclusions about the best solution before fully defining the problem” (Hinnant-Crawford, 2020, p. 45). Within the first few minutes of our initial meeting the conversation turned to possible ideas for how to “fix” the situation. Some of our discussion included parts of a system we do not have such as a full-time teaching position or after-school program with transportation. We had to pause and remember that we must work within the reality of our system, hear from those impacted by the system, or in our case, the lack thereof, and at the same time be sensitive to our positions of power in working with students, teachers, and families with multilingual

abilities. We had to constantly remind ourselves to be user-centered and to go back to how our students might feel throughout this entire process (Hinnant-Crawford, 2020).

See the System Producing the Problem

The Current System

Our team engaged in several different activities that resulted in a deeper understanding of our problem and each will be discussed in this section. We examined our current system by delving into the Five Whys, going through a Fish Bone Diagram exercise, and with empathy interviews from various stakeholders to help us understand where we might be able to effectively make improvements for our multilingual learners.

The work began by simply knowing that we were lacking any type of organized or formal system of support on our campus for our multilingual learners. The other middle schools in our district have at least a half-time position and designated class for elective time to serve their multilingual learners. Students work on language acquisition, receive assistance with assignments for their classes, and it serves as a home base for them academically and socially. We provide one-on-one intervention with our MLP teacher, but it has always been at the cost of missing class time as she must pull the students out of instruction usually one at a time. The MLP teacher shared her frustration in feeling that she did not have enough time to reach all students among the five different schools she serves. She also shares a space with a speech therapist on our campus as she has never had the ability to meet with a standing class.

We discussed her concerns about our current multilingual learner population and that some students have learning disabilities that will always cause them to be identified as multilingual learners even though they have sufficient language acquisition. In fact,

upon reviewing the multilingual learner data for our school to help understand more about our specific students, we confirmed that the majority of the students on our list of students who are required to take the ACCESS test to demonstrate mastery of language acquisition speak and understand English quite well. If the students do not pass the required test, they will continue to be pulled out of our classes for multilingual learner program services. They are not learning what they need to know to score higher on the proficiency test, which would be a more realistic reflection of how they are functioning in our school.

Our assistant principal of instruction has been looking at forming a class for our multilingual learners that would be a study hall where they are at least grouped together so that the MLP teacher could work with many of them at once and more importantly, create a space that would be solely focused them, but we have not had an available teacher to support a class. We have considered some changes for the master schedule that might allow seventh and eighth grade to be together for electives which would potentially provide us with enough students to assign a teacher to a class. He oversees professional development for our teachers and has already been interested in what could be done to help teachers become more aware of what our multilingual students need and what biases teachers need to be aware of in supporting these students most effectively.

Our team has high expectations for all learners and as our MLP teacher put it best, students must be empowered to show what they know and sometimes the problem is that we just do not know how to do that. She has been a model of demonstrating how to move away from deficit thinking with multilingual learners and as Hinnant-Crawford (2020) reminds us, this is critical to making sure we focus on the actual problem at hand without

getting distracted. Our MLP teacher has wanted to translate the report cards of incoming multilingual students for their teachers here in the United States so that they can see what kind of student this child was in his or her former school and life circumstances. She believes that one of the hardest adjustments for our multilingual students to face is that in their first languages some of them are incredible academic successes, but that when they are forced into a situation where nothing can possibly make sense solely due to the primary language used, at least for an interim period, they lose their identities as intelligent, successful young people. She sees students check out and sometimes give up on the learning process as they are having to acquire language in addition to the content.

Root Cause Analysis

The Five Whys

Crow and associates (2019) recommend that improvement teams present the problem and then ask, “Why is this?” five times to help identify potential causes (p. 26). When asking why our multilingual learners were not meeting English progress proficiency equal or higher to district and state levels for MLs, our answers kept pointing to a lack of funding beyond our school or district control or a lack of support from the power structures that control public education in South Carolina. The Five Whys did not point to a direct answer on to uncover a root cause, but it was incredibly helpful in refocusing us on what we actually could control within our direct sphere of influence. Hinnant-Crawford (2020) shared that this technique was developed from the Toyota Production System and that some scholars recommend it be used in conjunction with other root cause analysis techniques to provide a more closely aligned diagnosis of causes in context of a system as it actually exists.

Fishbone Diagram

As a team, we discussed four primary areas of control that we can potentially influence in our system when it comes to supporting multilingual learners and their academic achievement toward language proficiency: the students themselves, teachers, administration, and families. Each of these categories provided a launching point for drilling down further on the root causes of what might be contributing to our problem and served as the frame for our first fishbone diagram (Figure 1.1, Appendix A).

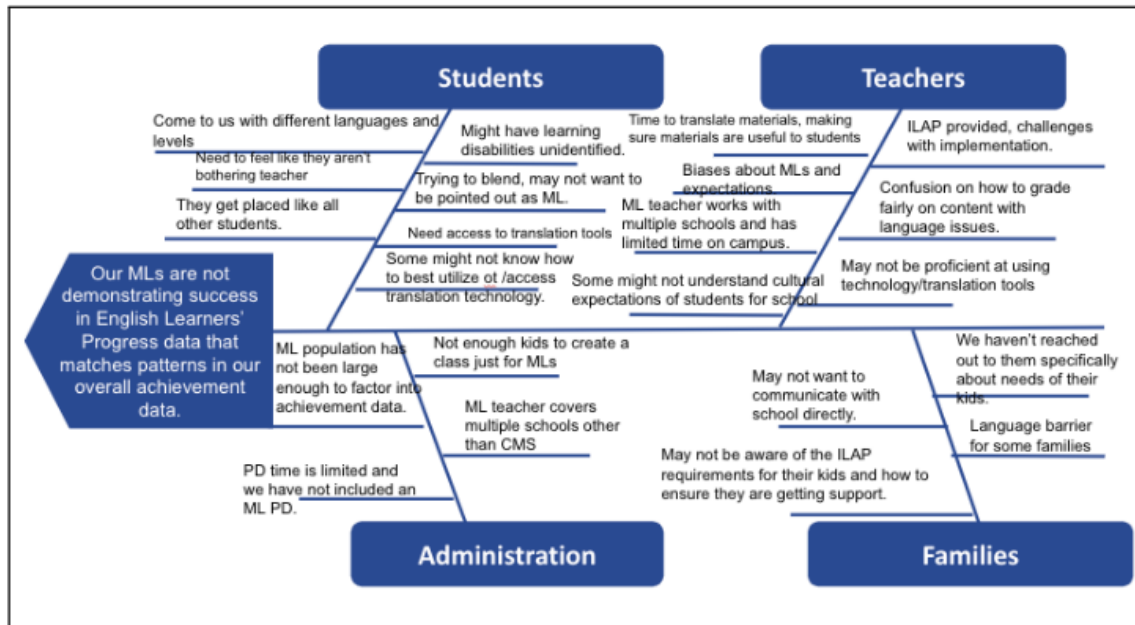


Figure 1.1 Fishbone Diagram

The fishbone diagram provided the canvas for us to focus on the system and to have an “understanding of the problem’s causes well before solutions are sought” (Perry, p. 61). What we discovered was not just a list of potential root causes, but pieces and parts that we could actually control in a positive way on campus. To help make the fishbone diagram more helpful in determining next steps, areas that could be directly influenced by our team were highlighted (Figure 1.2, Appendix B). Teachers and students

are the groups that were identified as areas where we can have the most influence in our current system.

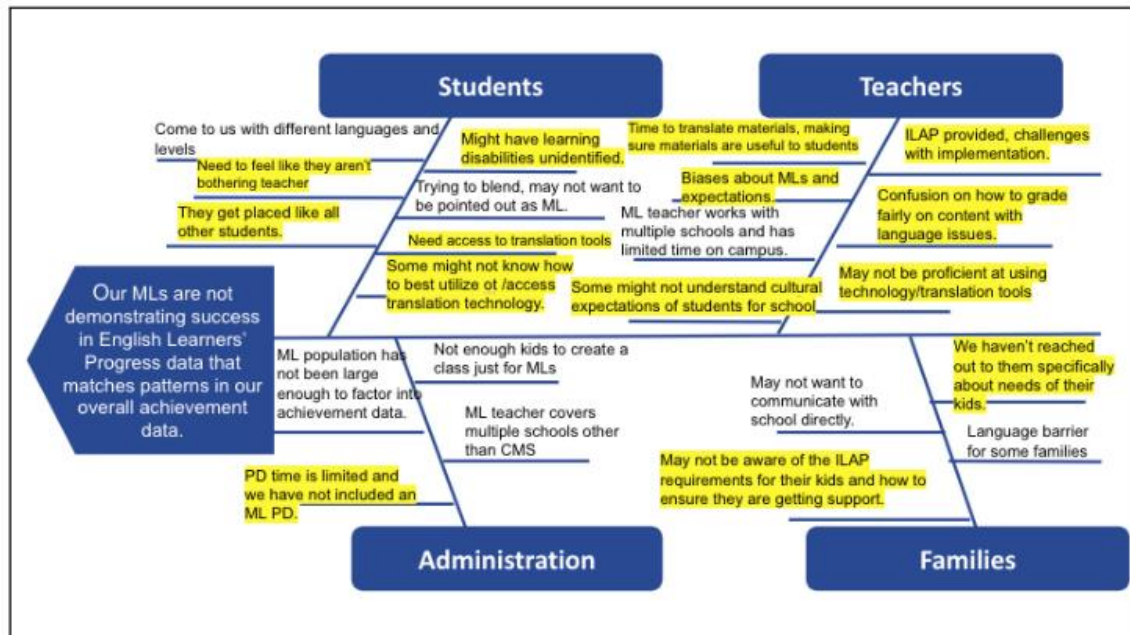


Figure 1.2 Fishbone with Highlighted Areas of Influence

Spending time analyzing what we could and could not directly influence was important as this helped us narrow our focus. We cannot control which languages students may speak when they come to us or if a multilingual learner would prefer to blend in with the rest of his or her peers and not be labeled as a student needing multilingual learner services. We do not control the number of students we have or the numbers other schools have impacting our MLP teacher's availability. We also do not control families who may not want to work with us or the language barriers that exist at home. We could develop plans for managing each of these issues, but the highlighted areas offer potential areas of direct impact for solutions in our system that we can control.

Empathy Interviews

Positionality

Based on the information from the fishbone diagram, the team decided to reach out to students, teachers, and families for empathy interviews to help identify where we could focus improvement efforts. This required that I be sensitive to my positionality and how that might hinder or muddy our work. As Perry and associates (2020) stated, "One of the biggest challenges to constructive improvement is in privileging one's own perspective above that of participants and community members with more marginalized voices" (p. 114). It is important that I am sensitive to power dynamics whether real or perceived and how they might be interpreted or misinterpreted when doing improvement work.

Originally positionality was something I was going to discuss as we were focusing on developing our change ideas and began to implement whatever our plans for change would be. However, this aspect of improvement work appeared much earlier in this problem of practice as it helps recognize positions and experiences in relation to a group of students who are among the most marginalized in our school. For future problems of practice, I will ask those helping solve a problem to spend time reflecting on their positions in relation to those impacted by the problem as part of the work early in the process as this helps develop greater understanding about what we all bring from our prior experiences, expectations, and disappointments in helping improve our systems.

This reflection for me included recognizing that I had never been put in a position to not have English as the language that everyone else could speak around me. I have never been in the same situation as any of our ML students or families, and I cannot

know exactly what they are experiencing. The German I took in high school still resides deep in my neurons, but only in the form of general greetings and Christmas carols. I am not multilingual, and I want to ensure that I convey to any of our students, families, and teachers that being multilingual is a treasured skill to be honored and preserved, not a reason to become exclusive in one language at the expense of others, but inclusive to expand options for our students as they move beyond K12 schooling.

It is also important that I am aware of how I often view things in the world of education having spent time in corporate America. For almost a decade I worked in pharmaceutical sales and the majority of that time was for a North American division of a Japanese company. I distinctly recall being amazed at how the Japanese employees switched so seamlessly between English and Japanese as they spoke with Americans and then with each other. This was the first time I recall recognizing just how valuable it could be to speak two languages in the private sector.

This company made it an expectation that as employees we would seek out areas of individual growth for self-leadership and that we would research the resources to grow. They also provided resources we could check out of a corporate library to listen to as we drove from medical office to medical office and often provided leadership workshops where we were able to meet together to build our capacities as leaders of our respective territories. I have often wondered what education would be like if we could give our teachers some of that same level of autonomy supported by a corporate level of resources to lead themselves to manage the territories of their classrooms. Knowing that improvement science is something that Toyota and healthcare companies have already embraced with success has given me a new perspective and hope that education might be

able to learn and benefit from processes, experiences, and successes of the corporate world (Langley et al., 2009).

When I became assistant principal of instruction at the current school I am serving as principal now, I was able to learn about strong systems from my former principal who continuously improved organizational structures over the nine years she led our school. Our school secretary also created numerous binders and electronic copies of standard operating procedures (SOPs) for some of our school processes such as how the administrative team works athletic events and how we manage assemblies. Our current superintendent also leads our district with the clarity of a systems-approach and models what it looks like to bring his vision to life to love and grow students by modeling strong systems across all organizations he leads. I have been the beneficiary of seeing strong systems in place both at the school level and district level, and this has helped me in seeing the potential for improvement science and systems thinking in the context of the problems our school is working to solve now.

Positionality must be considered for all participants in a problem of practice from those defining the problem to those experiencing the problem and power cannot rest only on one side of the equation used to solve it (Perry et al., 2020). Creswell and Creswell (2018) acknowledge that bias that can happen merely from the presence of a researcher and describe interviews in their work as a “limitation” because they provide “indirect information filtered through the views of interviewees” (p.188). For classical Ph.D. research, these statements certainly hold true as these dissertations must focus on “mastery of methodological, historical, topical, empirical, and theoretical concepts” and information that might have a slant because of the view of a subject could threaten the

validity of the work (Perry et al., 2020, p. 33). However, in solving a problem of practice for a dissertation in an Ed.D. program, the views of those who experience a problem most directly are the holders of expertise knowledge, and that knowledge must be honored fully as we accomplish improvement work (Hinnant-Crawford, 2020).

Empathy Interview Summaries

One of my initial concerns was that if I or the API were to speak with some of our multilingual learners for empathy interviews, they might misinterpret our motives or simply be confused on why we were asking them questions about how they learn. There can be differences in cultural expectations of interactions with teachers and school leaders and I do not know what all of those expectations are for our multilingual learners (Beneyto et al., 2019). Additionally, the middle school brain is one of rapid change, yet it is still rooted in much of the fight-or-flight phase of the amygdala which can cause high anxiety levels (Mears, 2012). In my interactions with two of our multilingual learners who have not yet spoken English as their daily language at school I have noticed that they are timid, though very polite and respectful. I did not want to create undue stress for them by having administrators interview them.

We decided that to interview students and families at our school, we would work with our eighth-grade counselor who already has two of our multilingual learners on her caseload. These students were familiar with her, and she had learned how to successfully reach out to their families. Both students have shown that they will reach out to her when they need support during our school day. Students were asked informally to describe how their classes were going and what is helpful for them to show what they know.

The first middle school student interviewed has struggled academically. Her primary language is Spanish. She shared that she does use Google Translate some, but she prefers to ask teachers for help. She is in a class for students who struggle to achieve MAP testing goals in ELA, and she has been going back to her ELA class during that time for extra help on her research assignment lately with permission from both the Lit Lab and ELA teacher. She cannot get much done on her own when trying to work on a large assignment like the research project and shared that she feels overwhelmed. She said the ELA teacher is using her planning periods to help her and also changed the assignment for her so she can do it.

A second middle school student we interviewed uses Google Translate every day in all of her classes except for Art. She describes Art as her passion and because of her love for it, she does not need translation. She also says that she does not use Google Translate often in math because she understands the topic. Diagrams and pictures are not very helpful for her though teachers try to use them with her. She previously lived in Korea where there were no grades for elementary school and she was not in middle school long enough to receive grades before coming to America. This is the first time she has received grades. She does hope to stay in our schools through high school. She is currently learning an additional language on top of learning English as well.

Families

Our counselor asked our families of these two middle school multilingual learners if they were happy with our school and the assistance we provide their children. They were given an opportunity to share suggestions, but they both responded that they were

happy and did not elaborate or make suggestions on how we can improve or provide additional support for their students.

Our MLP teacher suggested we might be able to learn more from high school students as they are a little older and might be able to verbalize what we are looking for with a little more clarity between their experiences and maturity. Our high school students in the district have a regularly scheduled class and she was able to ask them to share their thoughts on what teachers can do to help them show what they know.

Five high school students shared their expertise of experiencing school as multilingual learners. These empathy interviews revealed that students needed teachers to develop relationships and that a “big smile” matters. They need to feel comfortable asking that instructions be repeated and not feel like they are bothering teachers when they need additional support. Students also commented on their need to use Chromebooks or phones to help translate in class and that some teachers make them put these tools away even though they need them for learning. They stressed that they need these tools to learn English as much as the subjects the teachers are teaching.

This group was astute at describing what they need in terms of collaborative experiences in the classroom to help them learn English while learning the content. They described which teachers they connect with and those are teachers who they can tell love their content and also care for students, even without knowing fully what the teachers are saying in English. Much of their feedback described what helps make learning relevant and meaningful in terms of the ability to build relationships and an environment where they believe it is safe to at least try without a fear of failure for not meeting a standard of perfection that many of them seem to self-impose.

Teachers

I emailed teachers who currently teach multilingual learners and let them know that the MLP teacher, API, and I were working on finding out how we can increase proficiency achievement for multilingual learners using improvement science and this meant that we had to understand their experiences working with these students. I let them know that sharing was 100% voluntary. Some of them emailed me back with their thoughts and some asked to meet in person to discuss this. I went to their classrooms for all discussions except one that took place in my office as the teacher was already there and he initiated the conversation after receiving the email.

Teachers are experiencing the challenges and successes of working with our multilingual learners every day and it was critical that they know how much I value “getting insight into their view of the problem, appreciating their perspectives as individuals, understanding how they feel about the problem, and communication and understanding of their perspective” just as much as it is to hear from our multilingual learners (Perry et al., 2020, p. 63). I left my questioning open-ended so that they would lead with what they believe is most urgent for their particular situation working with multilingual learners. Sample questions included:

- What works with MLs in your classes?
- What does not work?
- How do MLs show what they know?

Even though I reached out to teachers by email and made it clear that their feedback was voluntary, many of them still wanted to meet with me in person to discuss their concerns and ideas about teaching multilingual learners. This helped confirm that I

had identified a problem in my school that needs attention in order to support both teachers and students.

The teachers shared that Google Translate, Quizziz, and modified and shorter assignments allow for multilingual learners to show content progress and mastery in different ways. Many of them also identified ways they partner a multilingual learner with another student in the class who can help guide and explain if there is at least some comprehension. Most allow multilingual learners to leave their phones out at all times with a translation app. When students are attempting to complete a worksheet with lines or tables, most translation apps are unable to process the visuals and make the assignment more confusing for the students according to two teachers. Another teacher shared that making sure students can do retakes helps our multilingual learners not only learn content, but also become more familiar with the language of school which should help them across all classes. Multiple teachers suggested that student choice is key in allowing multilingual learners to select the type of assessment that will allow that particular student to indicate knowledge and mastery. [OBJ]

All teachers shared that they are making their own notes or visuals for students and translating it themselves the best that they can. They are also acutely aware of the time that this takes in order to support students and spoke positively about the work they are doing to support our multilingual learners. Grading is an area where some of them are still struggling and some of them asked me for a clearer plan as it relates to a student who just joined us who speaks no English.

School-wide Teacher Survey

To ensure we had feedback from anyone on staff who would want to share their expertise on teaching multilingual learners, we shared a voluntary survey for all teachers in our school based on empathy interviews (Appendix E). The survey garnered 37 anonymous responses. The primary areas of concern for teachers who willingly participated in this survey were how to deliver instruction when a multilingual learner seems to struggle with understanding English, fully implementing technology tools, how to grade the work of multilingual learners while maintaining standards of content and ensuring full integration of ILAP modifications.

The majority of the respondents indicated that they feel somewhat prepared or greater to deliver instruction to multilingual learners. The question about technology demonstrated a huge range in how teachers feel they are utilizing technology for our students or the lack thereof. We have been a 1:1 digital device district for almost a decade and it was interesting to see such a wide variation in teacher comfort with a tool that our students use across all classrooms. Grading the work of multilingual learners showed the most teachers indicating they are not confident, and this is a topic that also surfaced strongly in the first empathy interview with teachers. Some teachers struggle with balancing the demands of standards with a student who struggles to grasp or express knowledge of standards because of language. Finally, respondents were split evenly in their preference for receiving professional development between in-person and self-paced, with live, virtual receiving the fewest votes.

Teachers were asked with an open-ended question to share the best way a multilingual learner can show what he or she knows in his or her particular content area

when there are gaps in English. Some responded that Google Translate was helpful in addition to incorporating visual connections and clues. There were also responses from our performing arts teachers that indicate that multilingual students are generally able to move seamlessly into their content due to the performance nature. Struggles teachers shared included not having enough time to coach students through material and that often multilingual learners are placed in CP courses even though they might be gifted and talented though we do not see their giftedness because of language.

Empathy Interview Findings

The empathy interview notes were shared with the Improvement Team to review and discuss. The fishbone diagram was updated to include that the students need to know they are not bothering teachers and that they need access to translation apps at all times. In fact, the first thing that we noticed was the overwhelming message from the high school students that what they need primarily has to do with teacher affect and emotion toward them in the classroom. We were thinking we would hear about technology and tools that make learning easier, and though they did mention translation tools, the clear message is that they need teachers who are understanding and patient with them and they know what that looks like.

We also updated the fishbone diagram with feedback from the teachers about the time that they invest with our multilingual learners. Many of them follow the ILAP modifications, but also work to provide their content in a student's first language. This is an area that appears to be a classic "recreating the wheel" with teachers remaking things even though someone else has probably already translated some of what they are utilizing. They seem to share within their departments, but there is not a schoolwide bank

or sharing space for resources they are creating and using to support multilingual learners.

The middle school interviews reveal two different student learning personalities we must be aware of when working with our multilingual learners. One potentially has needs beyond language acquisition, yet it can be challenging to fully assess multilingual learners for learning needs. This can make modifications and accommodations even more challenging for teachers. The other is someone who is self-motivated and an advanced honors student in her former school, but challenging her and allowing her to show what she knows for high-level work as she transitions to an American classroom can be difficult. It was also interesting to learn that there is no such thing as grades until secondary level in her former school.

The family responses to our school counselor were what we would expect as most of our interactions are positive with them. Most interactions are initiated by us according to our counselors. Vera and associates (2012) remind us that some parents may feel there is negativity associated with being an immigrant or non-native English speaker, and this might result in parents framing their conversations around positive interactions even if there are valid complaints or that there might be hesitation bringing attention to negativity.

The empathy interviews brought this problem to life well beyond the numbers in the data that initially alerted us to a problem. Students do not have to speak the language to know good teaching and our high school multilingual learners were powerful in their descriptions of knowing what good teaching looks like. Our students and teachers shared the common theme of technology with one group needing access and the other group

needing to understand how to best harness it. Some of the high school students were able to clearly identify the conditions in which they can best learn English.

The empathy interview process helped us see that our students and teachers both want to achieve the goal of understanding one another and that we have more in common than we perhaps thought initially. Spending time learning from the people most impacted by this problem helped those of us on the improvement team step aside from our own experiences and into their expertise.

Theoretical Framework

Creswell and Creswell (2018) identify pragmatism as “consequences of actions, problem-centered, pluralistic, and real-world practice oriented” (p. 6). This aligns with what Hinnant-Crawford (2020) suggests as the research paradigm that simply explores “what works” (p. 15). Hinnant-Crawford (2020) goes on to say that “In many ways, pragmatic researchers seem to be well aligned with the scholar-practitioner, who is primarily concerned about uncovering ways to do their job better (p. 16).

Improvement Science also borrows from Constructivism in that it relies heavily on the independent experience of each person involved in a community (Creswell & Creswell, 2020). Additionally, by the very nature that the goal of improvement science is to in fact transform the system in which it is being applied, the nomenclature of transformative is also warranted (Creswell & Creswell, 2020). Bryk and associates (2017) remind us that though researchers have spent much time investing in defining conceptual frameworks and theories to improve learning, there must be a shift away from the theoretical and technical to the actual users of a system in order to reach true improvement.

Creswell and Creswell (2018) define work such as this as emergent design which “...cannot be tightly prescribed, and some or all phases of the process may change or shift after the researcher enters the field and begins to collect data” (p. 182). This aligns well with improvement science and the flexibility in plan-do-study-act cycles that respond to what we can learn in the processes of implementing change ideas while working toward aim statements. Hinnant-Crawford (2018) also reminded readers that measurement in improvement science should be “embedded in day-to-day work tasks and should not be an added burden to what people already have to do,” in addition to being “designed with the user in mind” (p. 138).

Statement of Problem of Practice

This problem of practice acknowledges that our school’s multilingual learners are not demonstrating success in English Learner Progress that matches all other achievement patterns in our school as it relates to district and state comparisons (*Academic Achievement*, 2022). It is a willing attempt to identify a weakness in our current system, but more importantly, it is embracing an opportunity to help discover how we might make changes to support some of the most marginalized students in our school community.

According to Perry and associates, (2020), the following considerations must be made to ensure that I have identified an actionable problem in which I am able to create a change:

Urgent for the organizational leadership

My goal as the leader of my school is that every single student feels fully valued the moment they step on campus and that they are fully supported to reach their full

potential in a developmentally responsive environment at the middle level. The data tell us that our multilingual learners are not experiencing the same levels of success as all of our students to meet proficiency in achievement with English proficiency. Our multilingual learners are the only group not experiencing higher achievement than district and state performance levels in this particular measurement and it is up to the organizational leadership to uncover opportunity gaps and close them for these students.

Actionable

Efron and Ravid (2020) state that “Practitioners have grown to recognize the distinctiveness and validity of their own knowledge and have realized that there is no substitute for their familiarity with a particular setting” (p. 4). This team knows our current system and also recognizes opportunities for change. From the beginning we avoided solving the problem with our own ideas so that we could take actions based on the valuable insight provided by students, teachers, and parents.

Perhaps most importantly, we have the ability to act on what we have learned from various stakeholders in the circle of this problem. Students, families, and teachers have provided insight from each of their perspectives to help our team explore areas that are possibilities for action that can result in change.

Feasible

We will develop a theory of improvement and measures to establish what we plan to do addressing this problem of practice. We have the lens of systems thinking that can be applied to this problem, and the tools of improvement science to help create sustainable solutions. We are starting with one of our smallest populations in the school and can use our learning to scale forward for other marginalized groups of students. This

problem of practice is one in which we will be able to “consider leverage, value, and capacity to effect change” in a manageable, results-oriented way for the growth of our multilingual learners (Perry et al., 2020, p. 55).

Strategic

Our data tell us that our multilingual learners are not experiencing success that our general student body achieves in learning English. We must determine the opportunity gaps in our current system using our current resources to ensure that we are providing them with what they need to reach their full potential. We worked hard from the beginning to avoid the trap of solutionitis and wishful thinking so that as we work on this problem of practice, we are strategic in maximizing and manipulating resources that exist in our reality (Perry et al., 2020).

Tied to a specific set of practices

There are specific rules governing how multilingual learners are supported by the South Carolina Department of Education. There are policies and practices concerning how students are placed in appropriate courses to support their learning established by the SCDE. My vision is that every student feels fully valued the moment he or she sets foot on campus and that includes our multilingual learners. We also have school-based practices such as professional development and professional learning communities providing avenues for working with teachers. This work will reinforce both the state requirements and my vision, with an established process for reaching all stakeholders who can help solve this problem.

Forward-looking

The work we are doing for the students in this problem of practice is work we are doing for all students. Hinnant-Crawford (2020) reminds those doing improvement work to respect those we are bringing into the conversation and that “in an effort to do no harm, do not invite users to be a part of your process for defining problems if you cannot respect and appreciate what they bring to the table” (p. 48).

The traditional approach to solving problems in the field of education as described by Bryk and associates (2017) is one that will “make extraordinary demands on leaders' time, as they seek to advance broad changes while also working hard to sustain political support in the face of inevitable implementation problems” (p. 6). This problem of practice flips that narrative to focus on those closest to the issue while honoring their experiences and time with the goal of implementation in a way that will lift students above the problems already created by large-scale change attempts. We will be teaching others about the power of improvement science and systems thinking so that others may continue the work of making school a place inclusive of all students.

Leading the Improvement Process

The work of leading an improvement team aligns with the distributive leadership model which allows, encourages, and trusts innovation by all educators in our building to help achieve our goal to help all students grow (Spillane et al., 2004). Whatever we believe we are creating to support teachers must actually support teachers and the only way to find out if we are contributing or distracting to their work is to hear from them on our work.

One of the more interesting aspects of improvement science that I found myself having to wrestle with as a participant and building level principal was letting go of much of the direct control with this work. I had to ask others to assist with empathy interviews in order to be most respectful for those who are closest to this problem - our multilingual learners. I am relying on the expertise of teachers to share their experiences and on the expertise of a team that might not make decisions exactly as I would. In fact, I would advise others who are looking to determine if a problem is a potential target for improvement science to reflect on how others may take the lead in the work. If there is space for you to help others step into their own strengths to solve a problem, you have perhaps identified a topic for improvement science as others will learn these processes to help make relevant, sustainable changes.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF KNOWLEDGE FOR ACTION

Perry and associates (2020) distinguish the literature review in improvement science as a targeted search to understand the complexities and context of a specific problem while researching and building upon practical knowledge to solve that problem. Based upon our systems analysis and empathy interviews, this research focuses on the current state of affairs with legislation and practice for multilingual learners in the context of South Carolina. It then shifts to defining funds of knowledge for both multilingual learners and teachers, understanding the language of school as it relates to culture and academics for multilingual learners, and identifying instructional practices that best support multilingual learners to show what they know regardless of levels of English acquisition.

Current State of Affairs for Multilingual Learners

South Carolina is an English-only state though it does provide exceptions in South Carolina General Assembly Bill 2191 via Section 3: “This act does not prohibit any law, ordinance, regulation, order, decree, program, or policy requiring educational instruction in a language other than English for the purpose of making students who use a language other than English proficient in English or making students proficient in a language in addition to English” (*English language is the official language of the state, 1988*). Interestingly, monolingualism as a law puts South Carolina in the language minority as between 60-70% of the entire world’s population speaks at least two

languages and many speak three or more languages (Martinez, 2018). Almost one in four students in public K-12 schools across the United States speak a language other than English at home according to census reports (Anderson, 2015). According to one recent study, 80% of European students in equivalent K12 education were studying one or more foreign languages while in the United States that number was 20% (Devlin, 2018).

As an English-only state, bilingual education is not offered as the standard for multilingual learners in South Carolina though there are magnet programs which draw English-speaking students to learn other languages. However, all students in the state are encouraged to attain biliteracy which is defined as “...having a functional level of proficiency in two languages” (South Carolina State Board of Education, 2019, p 2). The SC Seal of Biliteracy award has three levels ranging from bronze, silver, and gold tiers based on a student's score on a test for a foreign language and an overall GPA of 3.0 in English class. The guide for this award states: “The South Carolina Seal of Biliteracy encourages students to go beyond minimal language requirements and to truly attain levels of language proficiency for success on the world stage” and explains the need for biliteracy with the following rationale:

The benefits of proficiency in more than one language are growing steadily for South Carolinians. According to the state’s Department of Commerce, South Carolina ranks number 1 in the U.S. in the percentage of its workforce employed by foreign affiliates with 7 percent of South Carolina’s workforce (131,900 South Carolinians) employed by international firms. One hundred and fifty countries are served by vessels that use South Carolina’s ports, and global brands such as Sonoco (20,000 employees), Milliken (10,000 employees), Amazon, BMW,

Boeing, BOSCH, and Michelin (among others) call South Carolina home. Some of the most predominantly taught languages in South Carolina - Spanish, French, German, and Chinese (Mandarin) - are well represented in companies with strong ties to the state. (South Carolina State Board of Education, 2019)

Many states approach multilingual education with an intentional bilingual approach that supports learning in a student's first language as a student is acquiring skills in the literacy of English which demonstrates value in a first language. Martinez (2018) shared a tire analogy to help explain how it might be good practice for multilingual learners to utilize a first language in learning as it relates to academic content:

Because changing a tire is important work, and because I have two arms at my disposal, I typically use both arms to get the work of changing the tire done. No one ever wonders why I use both arms to change a tire...What would be strange would be for me to put one arm behind my back- to limit myself to a subset of appendages when trying to get that work done. (p. 517)

Collier and Thomas (2017) showed that English-only and short-term bilingual programs closed the achievement gap by about half, while long-term bilingual programs of high quality closed the entire gap after schooling in the students' first and second languages after 5-6 years.

Some scholars have made the argument that multilingual learners should receive content in both their home languages and English when possible rather than working to suppress knowledge that might be expressed through their first language as they are learning academic content (Garcia, 2009). Collier and Mason (2004) reported the

following from their research on bilingual learning in content classes: “Teachers in these bilingual classes create the cognitive challenge through thematic units of the core academic curriculum, focused on real world problem solving that stimulate students to make more than one year’s progress every year, in both languages” (p. 2). Garcia (2009) argues that denying students the opportunity to learn in a bilingual environment automatically results in a remedial education without the level of rigor extended to all students. Beliefs that only a student’s new target language should be used exclusively for instructional purposes without utilizing his or her first language, that there should be no translation, and that languages should be kept completely separate did not support learning as proven in both cognitive psychology and applied linguistics (Cummins, 2007).

The US Department of Education Office of Civil Rights states,
The obligation not to discriminate based on race, color, or national origin requires public schools to take affirmative steps to ensure that limited English proficient (LEP) students, now more commonly known as English Learner (EL) students or English Language Learners (ELLs), can meaningfully participate in educational programs and services, and to communicate information to LEP parents in a language they can understand. (2020)

The OCR includes supporting documentation to ensure compliance for specifically supporting English language learners. This includes information requiring that programs have highly qualified teachers, staff, and administrators in addition to appropriate instructional materials (United States Department of Education, 2020). According to the South Carolina-based Center for Educator Recruitment, Retention and Advancement

(CERRA), the 2022-2023 school year began with 1,474 teacher vacancies which compares to 1,063 for the 2021-2022 school year in the state (2022). Hiring for all positions is a concern, but this creates even more urgency in addressing the teaching shortage for positions such as MLP teachers who provide critical support for our multilingual learner students (Mokhtari, 2021). In 2015, there were 30 states with critical shortages of teachers to support multilingual learners across the nation (Lam & Richards, 2020).

Funds of Knowledge

Moll and associates (1992) explained the concept of “funds of knowledge” as a method of strategically identifying and partnering with the knowledge and skills found in local households of students to help bring value and mutual understanding of different ways of knowing. This includes valuing knowledge that might not be what is considered academic in nature by those in a school setting, yet knowledge that can be quite complex for community members to function successfully. Teachers shift more into a partnership as a co-learner in working with students through the lens of funds of knowledge to understand more about the contexts surrounding each student beyond the school building. Multilingual learners bring with them a wealth of skills that may be used at home that may never be noticed in the course of a school day, yet these are assets to those they assist and can translate to relationships with school culture (Ziegenfuss et al., 2014).

Adichie (2009) cautioned viewers of her TedTalk “The Danger of a Single Story” to avoid limited and narrow thinking of others as she recounted the assumptions people made about her life in Nigeria based on their knowledge without considering what her experiences might have been. Gonzalez (2016) provided ten assumptions to rethink about

multilingual learners referred to as English Language Learners (ELLs) that can lead to limiting attitudes about the potential our students have to offer:

1. ELLs are homogeneous.
2. ELLs are immigrants.
3. Parents of ELLs do not speak English.
4. ELLs are fluent in their native language.
5. English-language proficiency is an indicator of intellect.
6. Social English proficiency equates with academic English proficiency.
7. Using a native language in school interferes with English-language acquisition.
8. English is their second language.
9. A classroom buddy is a translator.
10. Communication is not possible because of language barriers. (pp. 1-3)

Assumptions about any student can lead to what Hinnant-Crawford (2020) described as deficit thinking. This is “a worldview that rationalizes and justifies inequalities in outcomes and locates the cause of those outcomes within the very communities whose outcomes you are trying to improve” (Hinnant-Crawford, 2020, pp. 45-46). Educators must avoid making assumptions about any of their learners, including multilingual learners who may not be able to communicate their truths initially (Gonzalez, 2016). There tends to be a focus on what our multilingual learners cannot do instead of focusing on the richness of new perspectives and experiences they can bring to the classroom (Martinez, 2018).

On June 7, 2022, the South Carolina Department of Education shared a memorandum supporting asset-based language surrounding multilingual learners:

A ML brings diverse cultural identities and new perspectives to strengthen classrooms and communities. MLs achieve the South Carolina College and Career Readiness Standards while navigating between native and instructional languages. MLs provide the global perspective that is needed of the South Carolina Graduate and emphasize the advantages of bi-/multilingualism to honor students' identities as strengths rather than deficits. (Office of Federal and State Accountability)

There have been positive associations between multilingualism and the area of metacognition, working memory, abstract and symbolic representation, and problem solving which highlight the strengths of our multilingual students (Ardasheva, 2012; Martinez 2018).

Teachers bring their own funds of knowledge to learning based on their professional experiences and instructional practices (Wei, 2014). Conferences, courses, self-selected reading, and directed professional development help shape the funds of knowledge teachers bring to the classroom for all students including multilingual learners (Banegas, 2022). In the state of South Carolina, teachers are able to add a teaching endorsement called English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) by taking fifteen credit hours that must include Principles and Strategies for Teaching ESOL to PK-12 Learners, Linguistics, Teaching Reading and Writing to Limited English Proficient (LEP) Learners, two additional courses and a practicum that can be waived by teaching ESOL successfully for one year (South Carolina Department of Education, 2019).

The Language of School

Language Acquisition

When students enter schools as multilingual learners, there is often a progression of phases they experience to acquire English (Harris, 2019). Most students will begin by using their first language in school before going into what is known as “the silent period” or time of intentional nonverbal communication. Multilingual learners will then move into a phase of single word or formulaic speech of the new language before developing more complex production of speech (Krashen and Terrell, 1983).

The silent period has been viewed as both a negative time when students withdraw resisting learning in contrast to a positive time in which they are actually quietly understanding new meanings and participating in intrapersonal rehearsal of language (DaSilva et al., 2008). Harbaugh and associates (2018) discerned between selective mutism and the silent period as a multilingual learner in the silent period will still communicate in his or her first language whereas there would be no to hardly any communication in any language at school in a diagnosis of selective mutism. The silent period must be respected as a part of the language acquisition process and requires patience as students may not respond as quickly as educators expect them to based on instructional support invested in the students (Foppoli, 2022).

Typically, multilingual learners will move through a period of language learning including the pre-production or silent phase, into early production and the emergent phase, and then a distinct transition into language acquisition leading to a level of fluency that allows for increased comprehension and communication in English or the new language (Cummins, 2007).

Cultural Norms

When a student arrives at a new school, he or she must learn myriad practices and rules of school culture to be what is considered a “good” student, yet most of the school norms operate on an unconscious level for the majority of those in the school system. This can be incredibly challenging for our multilingual learners if they are not provided with explicit direction in what the most basic of school expectations look like in their language (Alexandrowicz, 2016). Schools should proactively consider how to help multilingual learners access school rules and expectations in addition to providing means for them to navigate basic needs such as how to ask to go to the restroom or to indicate they do not understand (*Accommodations for ELLs to welcome students*, 2022).

Teachers must be able to communicate with students from various cultural backgrounds by presenting in an open and respectful manner without offending cultural sensitivities (Sarı & Yüce, 2020). In some cultures, it is incredibly offensive to touch a student on the head or to show the bottom of a shoe which could make circle time on the floor especially challenging for younger students (Alexandrowicz, 2016; *Four gestures to reconsider when teaching an ELL class*, 2022). Students from African and Asian cultures are more likely to avoid direct eye contact with positions of authority such as a teacher, while Middle Eastern cultures are more likely to hold a longer gaze with closer physical proximity (Pratolo, 2019).

Educators of middle level students must be especially sensitive to the developmental characteristics of multilingual learners which includes the biological, emotional, and social changes that accompany adolescence while learning a new language (Ziegenfuss et al., 2014). Middle schoolers in particular may feel a sense of

embarrassment or shame if they are singled out for attention from a teacher pushing into a class to assist them with language (Gonzalez, 2019; Whiting, 2017). Positive teacher attitudes include being willing to respond to questions while not highlighting student weaknesses in front of others (Martens, et. al, 2009).

Botello and associates (2017) provided a list of opportunities for teachers to create culturally responsive classrooms for multilingual learners. To help make sure multilingual learners feel supported in school they recommend making the curriculum relevant, using a variety of teaching modalities, becoming familiar with cultural norms, getting to know students' contextual skills and educational backgrounds, distinguishing between academic or school English and conversational or home English, and honoring students' first languages. There can be discrepancies between multilingual learners and teachers in terms of goals for cultural values and practices, but each must recognize the experience of the other in order to help create a productive relationship for learning (Wei, 2014).

A critical part of establishing strong relationships with multilingual learners is ensuring that teachers know how to pronounce and spell students' names correctly as this indicates that teachers value these students (Breiseth, 2021; Gonzalez, 2019; Kohli, 2012). Mispronunciation of a student's name or creating nicknames simply for ease of others can create a sense of alienation for multilingual students (Shanbhag, 2016). Schools should have ways to make sure that everyone is clear on pronunciation of a student's name so that from class to class or on the announcements the student's name is said correctly and respectfully (Kohli, 2012).

Families

School culture can be very different for families who are newer to the United States. As one Hispanic parent shared about the differences from what she was accustomed to, “Here in America, the parents are more involved. In our countries, we don’t do that. My mom never went to the school unless I did something horrific” (Larson & Eisner, 2022). There can be barriers such as hesitancy to engage due to translation concerns, transportation issues, lack of encouraging family support from the school, or a perception that teachers do not have time or do not meet with families (Chen, 2008).

Eisner and Larson (2022) surveyed 81 South Carolina school districts to find out if they were providing language support for students specifically in terms of translation support for families which is required by the Office of Civil Rights. Some of their findings include:

- 42% of the 43 districts that counted more than 100 Spanish-speaking families among their students did not employ a single full-time or part-time interpreter.
- 21 districts enroll more than 100 families who speak other languages, like Portuguese, Vietnamese, and Mandarin. Only four of those districts said they had dedicated interpreters on staff in languages other than Spanish.
- More than a dozen rural and metropolitan districts admitted to violating federal guidelines by using bilingual students as translators.
- 19 school districts acknowledged they used children as interpreters, though the guidelines state only trained professionals should be called on to do the job.

- 20 districts did not directly answer the question or said they were not sure.

Academic Language

Coleman and Goldenberg (2009) stress the importance of understanding how challenging academic language can be for multilingual learners due to its abstract nature. This makes it harder to master than conversational language and often means teachers are making assumptions about what students already know. Students may be able to communicate successfully in conversational English without understanding the demands of academic discourse (Deussen et al., 2008). Willner and Mokhtari (2017) demonstrated that students need more support in explicit instruction in language specified for academic purposes. It is important that teachers reframe academic language into a consistent pattern for students across classes as it allows for students to show what they know with a scaffolded approach (WIDA, 2016).

According to Haneda (2014), it can take students learning English five to seven years to master academic language in order to understand and produce the appropriate responses expected in traditional schooling. It may take two to five years for multilingual learners to master oral skills such as vocabulary, listening comprehension, and oral expression according to Ardasheva and associates (2012). Research from 2017 indicates that 25-50% of English learners in the United States will be labeled with this classification for the duration of their schooling (Hanover Research as cited in Mokhtari, 2021).

Instructional Practices

Show What They Know

Novak (2022) stated, “It is not enough to comprehend information if there is no way to express it” (p. 3). If there is flexibility in how multilingual learners are able to demonstrate their learning and mastery, teachers will have a more accurate understanding of student progress (O’Malley & Vadez-Pierce, 1996). Lopes-Murphy (2012) argued that Universal Design of Learning (UDL) provides accessibility to all students and that this approach removes barriers multilingual learners may face no matter their level of language mastery. By following three principles of UDL including developing specific opportunities for engagement, providing alternative representations of content, and by facilitating options for action and expression, multilingual students showed enhanced learning (Allen et al., 2018; Novak 2022).

Multilingual students who are scaffolding with UDL principles have also demonstrated growth facilitated by group work resulting from collaboration and connection with peers (Lopes-Murphy, 2012). The collaborative nature of peer feedback can provide a natural opportunity for multilingual learners to practice language acquisition with content learning (Novak, 2022).

It is also important to note that often multilingual learners have already learned concepts and skills in core content and perhaps only need to learn the English academic language affiliated with that information (August, 2018). Anderson (2015) shared student interviews that included statements such as “I felt dumb and left out when we did advanced math because my teacher wouldn’t let me do it even though I knew I could” (p. 3). Ardasheva and associates (2012) pointed out that standardized academic achievement

tests may provide “downwardly biased estimates” of what multilingual learners actually know, especially for those who have strong academic backgrounds in their first languages (p. 770). Wolf and associates (2016) point out that often assessments often provide insufficient data on what a multilingual student can understand or do in content areas or in assessing English skills. However, we can design educational content including assessments that can be more beneficial if we include student voices and input in the instructional process (Shyyan et al., 2008).

Students who are learning a new language in addition to new content must feel that they can make mistakes and view them as opportunities to learn, not as an indication that they are failures or less intelligent (Ferlazzo & Sypnieski, 2018). It is important to celebrate the fact that many of our multilingual students come to us with an incredibly rich lexical knowledge and that they may in fact have more vocabulary than our traditional students in addition to knowing the same words in multiple languages (Martinez, 2018). Barr and associates (2011) emphasize the importance of core vocabulary for each topic a multilingual learner is to understand in order to experience academic success.

Providing teachers with prompts for productive discussion can also help multilingual learners show what they know. Youngren (2017) recommended the following for productive discussion:

1. Help students share, expand, and clarify their own thinking: Give time to think. Can you say more about that? What do you mean by that? Can you give me an example?

2. Help students listen carefully to one another. What did your partner say?
Who can repeat what ____ just said?
3. Help students deepen their reasoning. Why do you think that? What is your evidence? Is there anything in the text that made you think that?
Does it always work that way? How is your idea like ____'s idea?
4. Encourage students to think with others. Do you agree or disagree with ____? And why? Are you saying the same thing as ____? Who can add onto ____'s idea? Can anyone take that idea and push it a little further? Who can explain in their own words what ____ means? (p. 6)

Shyann and associates (2008) studied middle school students who were classified as both disabled and as English language learners to uncover which instructional strategies were deemed most effective by teachers and students. The discrepancies in each group reported provide insight into what might help our multilingual learners more than what most educators might assume. Teachers reported that relating reading to student experiences would be most helpful while students reported peer tutoring is what they believe is most feasible. In math, teachers reported daily relooping of previously learned material as the best strategy while students reported reinforcing skills through games was most effective for them. In science, teachers reported that using visuals was the most helpful strategy, but students reported peer tutoring as their choice for learning science (Shyann et al., 2008). It is important that we consider what students perceive as opportunities to engage and listen to their feedback on how they can best engage with curriculum and assessments which may require altering traditional classroom assessments and provide training for teachers on what this might look like (Lopes-Murphy, 212).

Feedback is critical to multilingual learner success and can help fill gaps in both language and content acquisition (Zano, 2022). Dehghanzadeh and associates (2019) point out that the most common element used to gamify learning as a second language is the presence of feedback and that this was not surprising given the importance of this strategy for other learning goals. In another study with English language learners based in Thailand, “students reflected that peer feedback was a worthwhile experience for social interaction, and provided them with perceiving the writing process, developing affective strategies, supporting critical thinking skills, and developing socially and intellectually by means of working collaboratively” (Kuyyogsuy, 2019, p. 76). The author also notes that students must be instructed on how to give feedback as some students will struggle with the belief that the teacher is the owner of knowledge or that their thoughts are not valued depending on their cultural belief systems about school power.

Teachers should remember to speak slowly as multilingual learners are listening in one language yet thinking and producing in two languages (Ferlazzo & Sypnieski, 2017). However, teachers must also be cognizant of the work of Krashen and cautious to avoid “foreigner talk” which is an intentional reduction in words with the goal of enhancing comprehension, but negatively reducing a student’s exposure to natural language (Krashen, 1982). Teachers must balance this with ensuring there is sufficient wait time as in one study of over 200 teachers, the average wait time was one second and if no student answered, the teacher immediately moved to repeating the question or calling on other students. Another approach to presenting instruction that allows students to control aspects of delivery with the ability to replay information for understanding is the flipped classroom approach. Tucker (2016) recommends this for all students but

especially for those who may not have strong support at home for homework as can be the case for some multi language learners. This design allows the student to control the pace of the learning of the content area, but the practice is done in the classroom where the teacher is available as the resident expert and results in higher levels of student-led inquiry and engagement (Putri et al., 2019).

Selection of instructional resources for multilingual learners is imperative to ensure that they are able to comprehend content as they are learning language. Visual aids, scaffolding, and multimedia have proven to help shift multilingual learners from passive listeners to active speakers (Halwani, 2017). Many of today's educational literacy programs such as NewsELA allow teachers to select various Lexile levels that can match their students' skills to help enhance understanding (*Support English language skills and content area knowledge*, 2022). It is also important to select culturally relevant texts for all students including multilingual students to help them access literacy skills. Sharma and Christ (2017) recommend to create engagement and growth for all students in literacy, teachers consider books that meet the following guidelines:

- Validate a culture through accurately portraying language and experiences in their illustrations and words.
- The author or illustrator are of the background portrayed in the book.
- The main characters are of the same race/ethnicity/religion of the reader.
- The main characters are of the same age/gender as the reader.
- The main characters talk like the reader.
- The reader has probably lived or visited places like those in the story and the story could take place this year.

- The reader has probably had an experience similar to one in the story
(p. 303).

Youngren (2017) recommended instructional strategies which best met the needs of multilingual learners for English language development and listed them according to their effect size:

Table 2.1 Instructional strategies targeted for multilingual learners

Instructional Strategy	Effect Size
Collective Teacher Efficacy	1.57
Self-Reported Grades/Student Expectations	1.44
Teacher Credibility	.90
Classroom Discussion	.82
Feedback	.75
Teacher Clarity	.75
Teacher-Student Relationships	.72
Vocabulary Instruction	.67
Repeated Readings	.67
Study Skills	.63
Direct Instruction	.59
Cooperative Learning vs. Individualistic Learning	.59

Hill and Björk (2008) presented the theories of language acquisition as identified by Krashen and Terrell (1983) with corresponding questions that teachers could utilize to help students engage with classroom learning. Taboada and associates (2012) demonstrated that teachers who employed the instructional strategy of questioning helped students show what they know specific to science as students were also acquiring skills in

English. Teaching students to generate questions themselves as they are interacting with texts has also been shown to improve their comprehension and understanding when learning English (Taboda et al., 2012). Aguirre-Muñoz and Amabisca (2010) demonstrated that teachers who have interactions with students including modeling, questioning, and instruction will naturally scaffold instruction to a multilingual learner's next level of linguistic or cognitive performance.

For almost half a century, Krashen (1982) has stressed the importance of providing inputs in language plus one level of challenge to help achieve higher levels of language acquisition as an expert in this field. Lichtman and VanPatten (2021) maintain that Krashen's theories still stand today even with the advancement of the digital age and that with minor adjustments, his theories should still lead the way in how multilingual students are learning new languages.

Though the focus on multilingual learners is on verbal language acquisition, nonverbal cues and gestures have proven to help students access learning English more readily (Ferlazzo & Sypniewski, 2017). Gestures closed the performance gap between English proficient and English Language Learner children in a study that observed student understanding of the equal sign in math in an elementary school (Valdiviejas et al., 2022). The authors concluded that the results could be due to enhanced attention or consistency in presentation of instructional concepts across various problems and platforms. However, gestures proved to be a powerful tool that could be utilized for all multilingual learners when appropriate.

Professional Development

Professional development must begin with teachers and administrators being open to the process of inquiry to learn about the multiple contexts in which their multilingual students exist while embracing the strengths of multilingualism (Moll et al., 1992). The majority of teachers who work with multilingual learners do not have the specialized training to provide the language and reading interventions these students need to reach their full potential as their primary teaching assignments encompass academic content (Mokhtari, 2021).

There must also be respect for the teachers who do have the training and experience to help our multilingual learners grow. Percy (2016) stated “Because ESOL teachers are often pulled for testing support, teach across different grade levels, and are required to rearrange their instructional schedules to accommodate standardized assessments, this sends an implicit message that their instruction is largely nonessential, or expendable” (p. 232). Whiting (2019) interviewed ESOL teachers and found that at times they reported feeling secondary or like a distraction to learning in mainstream classrooms, yet they also recognized the power of the safe space they can create for multilingual learners when they pull students out of classes to their classrooms.

Shyyan and associates (2008) demonstrated the empowerment teachers can feel when they communicate and share information with colleagues on what they are doing in their classrooms to provide effective instruction for our multilingual learners.

Collaboration among teachers who specifically teach multilingual learners is recommended as these teachers representing various content areas can intentionally plan academic language to be explained and utilized across all disciplines consistently

(Mokhtari, 2021). For collaboration to be a successful endeavor, there must be “common meeting times for planning, professional development on how to successfully collaborate, equal status, clearly defined common instructional goals, and compatible working and personality styles.” (Bell, 2012 p. 490). Studies highlighting collaborative teams that included the regular classroom teacher, the MLP teacher, and bilingual staff members have demonstrated it is possible to significantly close the achievement gap between the multilingual learners and native English speakers (Theoharis & O’Toole, 2011).

Analysis of teacher feedback about working with multilingual students from one study revealed that they experienced problems in planning the learning processes, lack of teaching experience, time management, classroom management, communication skills and attitudes, and prejudices (Sari & Yüce, 2020). Any professional development for teachers to support multilingual learners must respect their limited time and resources for learning. Successful professional development means there is successful implementation and that requires collaborative problem solving and solution finding between teachers, instructional coaches, multilingual teachers, and administrators (Coleman & Goldberg, 2009).

Peer coaching is a promising model for creating change in teaching practices and increasing student growth and coaches are particularly effective in helping determine which strategies regular classroom teachers might use with multilingual learners (Rodriguez et al., 2014). The flexibility that is afforded to instructional coaching models avoids the rigid, scripted model of professional development that does not easily consider the complexities of the needs of multilingual learners (Cummins, 2007; Rodríguez et al., 2014). The most optimum coaching situations respect the workflow systems already in

place so that coaches and teachers have clear understandings of roles and processes for learning (Chien, 2013; Nuss, 2020).

Nuss (2020) explored the characteristics of instructional coaching for multilingual learner support in what was described as a low-incidence environment with student numbers of fewer than 25% of the total student body needing English language support. The three elements of successful instructional coaching for this environment included facilitation of adult learning, knowledge of second language acquisition theories and best practices, and coaching as the model for delivery of professional development. Conditions for effective coaching include a supportive policy and leadership environment, time to get into classrooms and provide follow up, and motivated teachers who are receptive to improving their practice (Chien, 2013). The coach helps teachers discern between content misunderstanding and language acquisition issues and how to help overcome those for individual students (Louisiana Department of Education, 2022).

Providing information to all teachers about the experiences of multilingual learners and what it is like for them to experience American culture and school has been beneficial in building empathy for all students (Nuss, 2020). Teachers who are reflective in their practices as they specifically apply to multilingual learners can best support ML students who may need them to scaffold or alter instructional approaches or feedback to deliver content (Lucas et al., 2018).

Guskey (2000, 2016) established five levels of evaluating professional learning that can help determine what the goals are for training specifically in education. These levels include:

Level 1: Participant's reactions

Level 2: Participants' learning

Level 3: Organizational support and change

Level 4: Participants' use of new knowledge and skills

Level 5: Student learning outcomes

Guskey encouraged evaluators to begin by planning backwards through the levels, utilizing “clear specification of the student learning outcomes to be achieved and the sources of data that best reflect those outcomes” (2016, p. 36). This model has been widely used and studied by graduate students working to establish a specific instrument to validate his model to state-level departments of education such as that of West Virginia applying it to their professional development design and research (Stohr, 2013).

Guskey also recommends that professional development “flip the script” which traditionally means beginning with changing teacher attitudes and beliefs with the goal of changing how they teach which then creates changes in student learning outcomes (2022). Instead, he stressed that teachers must directly see the success of their teaching as it impacts student outcomes and with that, beliefs and attitudes will change because of teacher experience, not because of what they are told they should believe (Guskey, 1989). This is an important note in planning our professional development as an initial assumption was to focus more on sharing the information that would change negative perceptions or beliefs about our multilingual learners versus focusing on what might directly enhance student outcomes in the classroom.

No matter the professional development approach a school utilizes, it must meet this basic tenant that Bearshark shared in a podcast with *High Tech High Unboxed*, “If it

doesn't work for teachers, it doesn't work" (Patton, 2021). Teachers must be the voice of reason to determine if in fact professional development is effective in all arenas including that of supporting multilingual learners.

There is a wealth of information about how to support multilingual learners and perhaps the greatest challenge has been deciding which aspects of a literature review can help us solve this problem. As I conducted research, I created a list of resources I thought might be most helpful for teachers as I discovered them (Appendix D). The main topics include resources for the cultural consideration of schooling for multilingual learners, coaching of teachers with multilingual learners, and instructional strategies to support multilingual learners as they acquire English and academic content. It is evident that our multilingual learners can be complex in terms of where they are on the continuum of language development, but that there is much research on how we can provide support for both teachers and students. The literature review has provided a more thorough understanding of what all of our stakeholders in this problem need from our team and from each other.

CHAPTER 3

FORMULATING AN IMPROVEMENT PLAN

After reviewing our school data, engaging in a root cause analysis with the original and highlighted fishbone diagram, empathy interviews, and the literature concerning multilingual learners, the aim statement for this problem of practice was established: We will raise English learners progress proficiency scores for our school's multilingual learners above the proficiency percentages of district and state levels by spring of 2025. This would align English learners progress proficiency scores of our multilingual learners with the pattern of achievement on SC Ready ELA and Math for all of our students which both traditionally exceed district and state levels.

Theory of Improvement

The next step was to develop a theory of improvement, which Perry and associates (2020) state “requires that a scholarly practitioner blend their observations with the literature and with their own practical knowledge” (p. 90). Our greatest challenge with this part is that with an MLP teacher who is also responsible for five other schools in addition to ours, it was hard not to feel overwhelmed with all of our ideas coupled with an urgency to go try them all. The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching reminds those who work with improvement science to focus on flexibility as the journey toward potential solutions serves as additional learning about the original problem in addition to providing the means to uncover new ones (*Our Ideas*. 2022). The driver diagram helped us refocus on what we could control and narrowed our

energies to be more effective in determining implementation strategies for the PDSA cycles.

Driver Diagram

The four main areas identified as primary drivers to achieve our goal based on the research on our current system or lack thereof and in the literature included professional development and teacher training, the master schedule, our school culture, and family outreach (Figure 3.1, Appendix C). Out of these primary drivers, we selected professional development and teacher training as the one to explore further for this round of improvement as we believed this will most likely have the most direct influence on our students in how they experience school with us and eventually on their English proficiency.

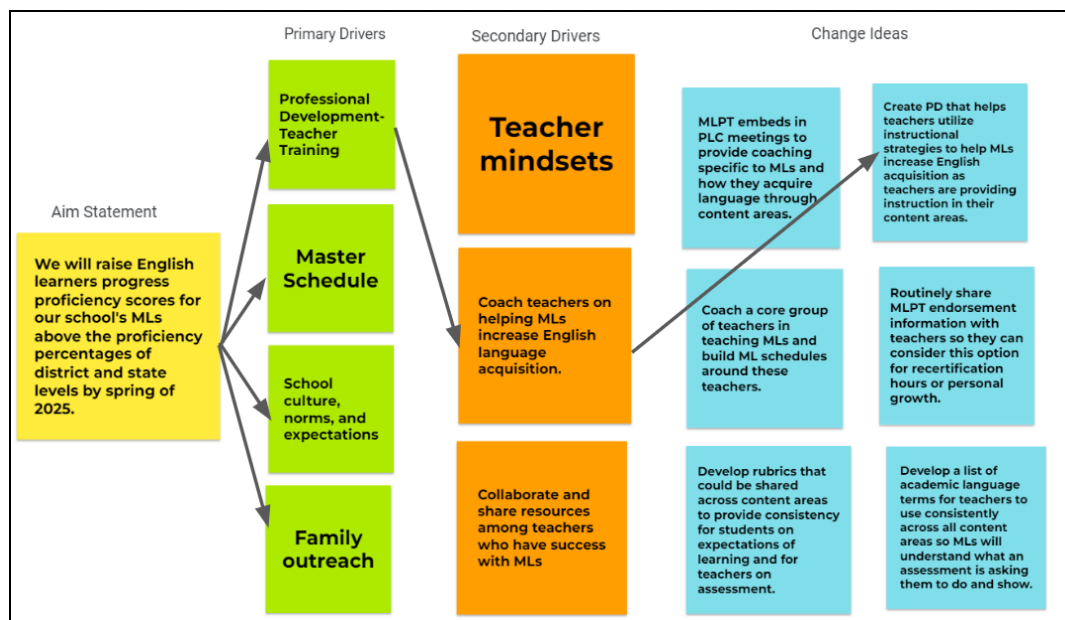


Figure 3.1 Roadmap for Action: Driver Diagram

Once it was determined that professional development and teacher training would be the primary driver of focus, secondary drivers were developed that were critical to making that change occur. These included addressing deficit thinking, coaching teachers

on helping multilingual learners acquire English, and developing methods to collaborate and share resources among teachers within our school that support multilingual learners.

The secondary driver selected for change ideas was coaching teachers on helping multilingual learners increase English language acquisition. We know that in our current system, we have a better chance of reaching students if all teachers are prepared to help multilingual learners acquire English proficiency and this led us to the change idea of creating professional development specific to this topic. As scholarly practitioners, this choice allows us to take action that will impact students as quickly as possible while impacting as many adults as possible. It is a risk, but a greater risk would be not taking action for our multilingual learners (Perry, 2020).

Change ideas with their source for inspiration included the following:

1. MLP teacher embeds in PLC meetings to provide coaching specific to MLs and how they acquire language connected to their content areas. The work of Krashen (1982) and Shyyan and associates (2008) led to this idea as it is a combination of the theory of how students acquire language but also builds upon how adults collaborate in professional learning communities.
2. Coach a core group of teachers in teaching MLs and build ML schedules around these teachers. Wang (1998) stressed the importance of maximizing the opportunities students have to learn, and by investing in a group of teachers who are uniquely trained to work with our MLP teachers, we might have a greater change to excel their learning. This is one way we might consider structural options to assist our ML students.

3. Develop rubrics that could be shared across content areas to provide consistency for students on expectations of learning and for teachers on assessment. MLs might need a different avenue than traditional assessment to show what they know to their teachers. Lopes-Murphy (2012) and O'Malley and Vadez-Pierce (1996) argue that students who do not speak the primary language of a school might need supports that could be similar Universal Design for Learning to help show teachers what they know about content that might otherwise be lost in translation.
4. Create professional development that helps teachers utilize instructional strategies that help multilingual learners to increase English acquisition as teachers are providing instruction in their content area. Our district is already heavily invested in John Hattie's instructional strategies meta-analysis, and this ties in with what the literature demonstrates as well. For example, the work of Krashen and Terrell (1983) from even over forty years ago supports the instructional strategy of questioning with multilingual learners which has a positive effect size (.48) with students according to more recent meta-analyses of Hattie (2015). Of course, we must keep in mind that Hattie's work was not specific to MLs, and we must ensure that teachers are getting more specific information on how they teach MLs with the strategies Hattie has identified as most impactful for learning. As Collett and Dubetz (2022) noted, "questions engage certain reasoning skills for MLs" and asking them to create or respond to questions can also enhance their language development. Guskey's (2016) work also provides an intriguing approach to helping teachers by providing professional development that will lead to more

successes with MLs in the classroom rather than professional development that tells teachers how they should feel about MLs in the classroom.

5. Routinely share MLP teacher endorsement information with teachers so they can consider this option for recertification hours or personal growth. Our district provides training access to help teachers receive additional credentials, and this can be shared with our staff as we are notified of the opportunities.
6. Develop a list of academic language terms for teachers to use consistently across all content areas so MLs will understand what an assessment is asking them to do and show. WIDA (2016), Barr and associates (2011), and Willner and Mokhtari (2017) provide supporting evidence for MLs to have explicit instruction in academic language to demonstrate what they know even as they are acquiring a new language.

Once again, as a team we had to refrain from the urgency to work on all the possible change ideas at once or to select multiple places to start and truly pause to consider how we can most effectively impact the people, resources, and our overall system to support our students.

We also had to remember that practical measurement is critical to making sure that improvement work is actually making a difference. We would need to use tools that ideally already exist and that would not be new to our processes. The data and research could not be so clinical or removed from the natural flow of our work and that of our staff that they would seem contrived or forced. Ideally, whatever we use to help gauge our systems for data would be easily duplicated for our teachers in how they could also gather data for their classrooms.

As a leader who is aware that a problem exists, it is counterintuitive to slow down the work to solve it. It is especially challenging to ask people to slow down when the empathy interviews showed that our teachers are willing and excited to help solve this and most importantly, that our students need us to help teachers know how to best reach them. However, if we had followed through on the urgency, we would have created more distraction in helping identify how we can help the most students in our school in our system and possibly exhausted our ability to create meaningful change.

Perry and associates (2020) recommend reviewing elements of a driver diagram by filling in the following sentence shared by the New York City Department of Education (2018): “If we want to accomplish [aim] we must [primary driver] through/by/with [secondary driver] and one way to do that is [change idea]. Following that pattern with our driver diagram, this reads:

If we want to raise English learners progress scores for our school's multilingual learners above the met proficiency percentages of district and state levels by spring of 2025, we must coach teachers on helping MLs increase English language acquisition and one way to do that is to create professional development that helps multilingual learners increase English acquisition as teachers are providing routine instruction in their classes.

The driver diagram serves as the roadmap for action, and it is described as a “live document subject to refinement as new learning accumulates” (Perry et al., 2020, p. 153). My personal understanding of the driver diagram changed as I became more familiar with the processes of improvement science with this document to be “revisited and revised over and over as new knowledge comes to light” (Crow et al, 2019). Because this is a

living document without an end date, we will continue to it to add or change implementation ideas through the years and we do not have to fear the wasted efforts, futile results, and all-to-familiar pattern of “attack, adopt, and abandon” that can plague traditional educational research and change (Rohanna, 2017, p. 68). The driver diagram went through seven transformations just in the time it was being prepared for our PDSA cycles. Knowing that this document is something that will exist well beyond the dissertation process allowed me as building leader to give full focus to one change idea knowing that we are keeping an active, running list of additional steps to take that might help us continue to close opportunity gaps for our multilingual students.

In the course of designing the driver diagram, there were multiple drafts designed to explore various pathways from each primary driver. Perry and associates (2020) remind us that the driver diagram represents the “big picture” and that we are looking to identify one or more changes that could lead to a positive impact on our goal for improvement (p. 92). The version of the driver diagram presented in this problem of practice was selected because we believe it honors the expertise of our multilingual learner program teacher while focusing on improving support for our teachers as the users of our current system of multilingual learner support. It respects our current system and the time constraints of those involved. Most importantly, we will have the greatest chance to impact how our multilingual students are learning across our building.

Participants Involved in Disciplined Inquiry (i.e., PDSA) Efforts

Improvement science is user-centered and embraces concepts of design from the worlds of goods and services (Bryk et al., 2017):

Designers now regularly seek to (1) to observe people as they carry out their work; (2) understand how contextual factors shape this work activity; (3) visualize how individuals might engage with new tools and routines; (4) develop, evaluate, and refine changes in prototypes based on users' experiences with them; and (5) exploit the insights generated through these processes to engineer better goods and services for use effectively as scale. (p.30)

If we do not create something helpful for users, we have not selected the correct change idea or driver for solving this problem and we will need to change course (Biag, 2017). This change idea honors the wealth of expertise that our MLP teacher, our assistant principal of instruction, and our teachers bring to the table as professionals who are users of our current system who will now help determine how it will exist moving forward. We will also be relying heavily on what we learned in the empathy interviews and in the literature review to help shape our work.

Institutional Review Board

According to the University of South Carolina, a dissertation in practice for improvement science situated as this project meets the criteria of quality improvement and not research.

Overview of the differences between QI and Research		
	Research	QI
Purpose	To test a hypothesis in order to create/expand knowledge. Activity is designed to yield generalizable findings.	To assess and improve a process, program, or system. Findings are relevant to a specific organization; however, may be of interest to other similar organizations.
Benefits	Knowledge obtained may or may not benefit current subjects, but is intended to be broadly useful and may benefit future patients, providers and certain communities.	Knowledge obtained is intended to improve the performance of an organization. Improved performance and efficiency yields benefits to all parties.
Methods	Systematic data collection	Systematic data collection
Analysis	Statistically prove or disprove hypothesis	Compare a program/process/system to an established set of standards, or to establish internal benchmarks
Result	Answer a research question and produce generalizable knowledge that may be applied broadly.	Improves or creates a program/process/system that results in greater safety, efficiency or satisfaction within an organization.

Figure 3.2 Quality Improvement and Research Comparison. (University of South Carolina, 2022).

We are working to design a sustainable system that will bring the expertise of our MLP teacher, our assistant principal of instruction, and teachers together so that support for multilingual learning will increase. Participation was voluntary. This project is specific to the resources and participants at our site and is designed to solve a problem specific to our school and our systems. There are no groups designated to research specific applications or controls and we are not working to answer a research question to create and publish generalized findings. We do believe that working with our multilingual language teacher and assistant principal of instruction will help teachers improve their ability to deliver instruction to our students, though we will not be studying that belief in any identifiable way with students in the context of this project.

Iterative Plan-Do-Study-Act Cycles

The theory of change was tested first with our improvement team considering what we learned in empathy interviews and the literature review to create professional development for teachers to support multilingual learners. Plan-Do-Study-Act (PDSA) cycles were the process utilized to help develop and explore improvements for our change idea. During the plan phase, objections were determined, predictions were made, and assignments were made to determine who is carrying out which part of the test. The do phase required carrying out the plan and recording data. Throughout the study phase, we analyzed the data, our predictions, and summarized what was learned. The final phase of a PDSA cycle is the act phase which is when changes are made that will help further improve the next cycle in the work (*PDSA cycle: Health navigator NZ, 2022*).

PDSA cycles helped establish what matters most to teachers who have worked directly with multilingual learners this school year so that our team could know where to continue to focus our efforts as we know that if it does not work for teachers, it does not work (Patton and Breakspear, 2021). This point in our work required restraint as we are natural doers and it would be easy to organize all that we had uncovered up to this point to create an entire professional development series. However, by moving ahead at a slower, yet deliberate pace through PDSA cycles, the work could be ordered according to what the audience of teachers would be most receptive to learning, and this would in turn be most beneficial for students. We decided to utilize a Google form for our data collection as this also allowed us to share responses easily with each other on the team both through visual metrics populated by Google and in Google sheets.

PDSA cycle 1 was the first attempt to narrow focus, organize, and present the ideas we wanted to include in a school-wide professional development session for teachers. I utilized Google Slides to organize the topics for professional development based on what was learned in the literature review and empathy interviews. Then we decided to use a Google Form to generate feedback. We hoped to develop a way to rank what teachers want to learn most so that we would know best how to order our work. PDSA 1 was shared initially within our improvement team so that we could ensure that directions were clear and that what we had created made sense from how it is designed to how it is delivered via email to users. PDSA 1 was a dress rehearsal to work out the issues for what a solid PDSA cycle should look like before a single teacher beyond our improvement team would see it.

PDSA cycle 2 included improvements we were able to make from the initial feedback on PDSA 1. This iteration was shared with teachers and other stakeholders who work with our ML students for feedback. We anticipated that this would also include Google Slides and a Google Form delivered via email. The ranking of what they wanted to learn about most out of the many topics that are available to support multilingual learners would be key for this work.

The goal for PDSA cycle 3 was to be the actual presentation of professional development based on what teachers shared as most pressing or most important to them. Practical measures for the first two PDSA cycles were gathered from Google Form responses. When the work moved to the actual professional development presentation for PDSA cycle 3, practical measurement shifted to something done in context of the training

to model an idea teachers could use in their classrooms to monitor for understanding of instruction (Hinnant-Crawford, 2020).

Though just three steps can feel small, I had to keep in mind that the work we are doing in context of this dissertation in practice as Perry and associates (2020) stated is “bounded in a shorter timeframe within a larger improvement project” (p.110). Three PDSA cycles were just the beginning of solving our problem and each step was an important piece of the overall puzzle of multiple change ideas that would help us reach our aim statement.

CHAPTER 4

TESTING THE CHANGE

Moving into the real work of creating and testing the change did not come without personal reflection in terms of my leadership and wanting to know that up until this point we had done all we could to honor the voices of everyone who is a part of solving this problem. This was a new form of solutionitis I experienced looking for confirmation that the direction we are headed is in fact correct. Langley and associates (2009) state, “An inhibitor of real change is the search for the perfect change” (p. 7). At this point in our work, I found these words to be a great comfort and encourager to move forward boldly knowing that there is no doubt that change is needed, and even if this is not the “perfect change” it will result in learning and growth toward improving outcomes for the multilingual learners at our school.

PDSA Cycle Outline

The descriptions of each step of the PDSA cycle are as follows and this list is based on a graphic provided by the website article *PDSA cycle: Health navigator NZ* (2022).

Plan

- Determine the objective for this PDSA cycle
- Make predictions
- Design plans to carry out the cycle (who, what, where, when)
- Establish practical measures for data collection

Do

- Carry out the plan
- Record data

Study

- Analyze the data
- Compare results to predictions
- Summarize what was learned

Act

- Make changes for the next cycle.
- Move to the next cycle.

There are multiple books and illustrations across industries that provide iterations of the PDSA cycle process, but I used this simple bulleted list for its clarity, applicability, and ease of use in a K12 setting (Langley, 2009). As a school leader implementing improvement science, my goal was also to help those I lead learn how to do it themselves and I believe this is an excellent teaching tool for the process.

PDSA Cycle 1

Plan

The objective of PDSA cycle 1 was to create a professional development outline that could be evaluated by teachers who were currently serving multilingual learners to find out if they would find it user-friendly. We were hoping to organize the information teachers had indicated they would like to learn about with small samples of what the professional development might include. Even though this cycle focused on our team

doing both the creating and evaluating of the work, this was a crucial step, and “no PDSA is too small” *PDSA cycle: Health navigator NZ*, (2022).

Predictions for PDSA cycle 1 included that we would be able to create a summary document that would work for what our teachers needed. Information included what was learned in empathy interviews and from the initial teacher survey. It was anticipated we might uncover some issues that could prevent us from maximizing feedback or perhaps change what we think is most important to include in this professional development. One to two weeks was the expected response time to receive the surveys back. We also anticipated that we might uncover potential areas that we would be able to improve if someone on our team did not fully understand the delivery, content, or purpose since we ran a self-test initially. We also anticipated we would recognize where both the form and the focus for the professional development might be on the right track.

Professional Development Content

Based on the information uncovered in the root cause analysis, the literature review and teacher survey, four main topics were selected to explore in this PDSA cycle:

1. Identification of MLs at our school to explain how students are identified and how many MLs we have for the current school year
2. Descriptions of the phases of language acquisition with appropriate questioning techniques for assessment
3. Content-specific coaching for teachers as they are planning instruction for multilingual learners
4. Technology support options for multilingual learners in the classroom

Initially, I thought this training would focus almost strictly on the twelve instructional strategies uncovered in Chapter 2 as provided by Youngren (2017) as our staff already receives quite a bit of coaching on instructional strategies matched with Hattie's effect sizes (2015). However, the survey we provided teachers indicated that there were other areas of concern that could have a more direct impact on student and teacher experience as we work to teach our multilingual learners (Appendix F).

Practical Measures

For measures to be practical, what was created in this dissertation in practice must be easily replicated in our organization and across multiple levels and for multiple trainings beyond our initial PDSA cycles. As Bryk and associates (2017) explained concerning practical measurement: "For both teachers and students, time is a highly limited resource, and data collection needs to fit in this space. That means measures to inform improvement must be embedded in the regular work of teaching and learning" (p. 100). The challenge in navigating this part of the project was truly remembering to keep measurements practical and not going down a road that would be difficult to replicate in our daily business as a school. This very moment in this work is where I recall realizing the importance that those embracing improvement science must stay committed to the "practical" in practical measures. If we made the measurements so complicated and out of reach for others in our building, we would not be sharing the power of improvement work.

Teachers are incredibly busy as are instructional coaches and administrators. We cannot ask them to create unreasonable ways to measure change and it would be artificial to do so with a team who is also learning the processes of improvement science while

doing improvement science. Hinnant-Crawford (2018) reminded readers that measurement in improvement science should be “embedded in day-to-day work tasks and should not be an added burden to what people already have to do,” in addition to being “designed with the user in mind” (p. 138). Practical measures must make sense to the systems that exist in our school to help reinforce how we work together for our students. We must also remember that it is essential to be brave enough to confront where systems are not working so that true improvement can happen and practical measurements help shine a light to bring clarity where change might be a possibility.

PDSA cycle 1 began by dividing the topics for our professional development ideas into four sections in a Google slides presentation grouped according to the four main areas uncovered in empathy interviews, research, and the initial teacher survey. This would be too much information for one professional development session, but over time we would need to cover most, if not all, the information in the slides. This might help us know what to cover as a priority. The four sections include the following:

Section 1: Multilingual Learner Updates for South Carolina: Revised terminology, context from around the globe, and how students are identified in our school.

Section 2: Student Experience of Language Acquisition: Why a regular classroom teacher would benefit from this information, the five main phases of language acquisition including an explanation of the silent period, how to help students show what they know.

Section 3: Challenges in Specific Content Areas: Content-specific areas to be mindful of with suggestions for modifications for ELA, math, social studies, science, and elective courses.

Section 4: Technology Tips to Help Support MLs: Translation tools to use at school and when contacting home, tools to use in the classroom, how and who to contact for more support.

I created a Google Form that would indicate how user-friendly each respondent believed the information would be for a professional development session to support multilingual learners. Responses could range from 1 = “not user-friendly at all” to 5 = “very user-friendly” with an open-ended question to provide suggestions after each ranking question. We decided on “user-friendly” as the gauge after considering what was shared in a High Tech High Unboxed podcast where it was stressed that “if it doesn’t work for teachers, it doesn’t work” (Patton & Breakspear, 2021). If teachers found this to be useful, we believed that would translate to it being something that would work for them. We very intentionally designed our first PDSA cycle test run to go to our team including our assistant principal of instruction, our MLP teacher, and me. Our goal was to experience the delivery and experience of what we created like our next round of stakeholders would so that we could clean up any communication or operational issues.

Do

Narrowing down what we would include into an easy-to-use format was the first challenge of getting started in PDSA cycle 1. Google Slides was the format we decided to use to help share information as we knew that this was the most efficient way we could reach teachers for feedback on a PDSA cycle and we have also used Google Slides or a similar format, EdPuzzle, for choice PD sessions for our teachers. We did not know at this point if our PD would be delivered digitally or in person, but we knew this was a familiar format for our staff. This was our very first run at what this might look like for

our teachers, so I emailed this to our team members just as teachers would receive it. This included links to both the Google Slides of the topics and the Google form. The Google Slides were arranged in the four sections mentioned previously and included slides covering the following topics:

Section 1: Multilingual Learner Updates for South Carolina: Revised terminology, context from around the globe, and how students are identified in our school

Section 2: Student Experience of Language Acquisition: Why a regular classroom teacher would benefit from this information, the five main phases of language acquisition including an explanation of the silent period, how to help students show what they know

Section 3: Challenges in Specific Content Areas: Content-specific areas to be mindful of with suggestions for modifications for ELA, math, social studies, science, and elective courses

Section 4: Technology Tips to Help Support MLs: Translation tools to use at school and when contacting home, tools to use in the classroom, how and who to contact for more support

Each participant in this PDSA cycle then filled out this form to provide feedback on how user-friendly they thought each section was for teachers. Our goal was to experience the receipt of the form and the process of filling it out just as our teachers would.

Table 4.1 PDSA Cycle 1 Google Form Questions

PDSA Cycle 1 Google Form Questions						
<p>Directions: Thank you for sharing your feedback on this professional development topic draft. Feedback is 100% voluntary. Feedback is 100% anonymous unless you share your name in your response. The presentation you are reviewing is divided into four sections as indicated with a numbered blue box for each section.</p>						
<p>Scale for responses to PDSA Cycle 1 Survey:</p>						
Not user-friendly at all	1	2	3	4	5	Very user-friendly
<p>Section 1: How user-friendly is the information in this section for teachers? Section 1 includes a terminology update on the shift of language with the SCDE, MLs across the globe, how MLs are identified in SC Public Schools, and how many MLs are currently identified at our school.</p>						
<p>Section 2: How user-friendly is the information in this section for teachers? Section 2 includes information outlining the five phases of language acquisition including the silent period, levels of language the student might be able to achieve, and corresponding questions a teacher could use to help a ML show what he or she knows.</p>						
<p>Section 3: How user-friendly is the information in this section for teachers? Section 3 includes information designed for specific content areas with challenges students might experience in each one and suggestions for how teachers can help multilingual learners show what they know specific to content areas.</p>						

Section 4: How user-friendly is the information in this section for teachers? Section 4 includes the most common technology tools utilized by teachers in our school to support MLs in addition to some less familiar ones.

Study

Quantitative Data PDSA Cycle 1

After everyone completed the form, I used Google Forms averaging feature to determine the average response to each question. I used this number to determine which topics our team ranked as the most user-friendly for topics of professional development. The higher the average, the more user-friendly we had determined the topics in that section to be for teachers. The original quantitative survey responses collected using a Google Form for each individual survey question are in Appendix G.

Table 4.2 PDSA Cycle 1 Ranking of Topics by Average

Rank	Section/Topic	Average
1	Section 4 included the most common technology tools utilized by teachers in our school to support MLs in addition to some less familiar ones.	4.33
2	Section 1 included a terminology update on the shift of language with the SCDE, MLs across the globe, how MLs are identified in SC Public Schools, and how many MLs are currently identified at our school.	4.0

2	Section 2 included information outlining the five phases of language acquisition including the silent period. Each phase included levels of language the student might be able to achieve and corresponding questions a teacher could use to help a ML show what he or she knows.	4.0
3	Section 3 included information designed for the four specific content areas with challenges students might experience in each one. The information also includes suggestions for how teachers can help multilingual learners show what they know specific to content areas.	3.33

Based on this analysis of the data from PDSA cycle 1, our improvement team felt that technology is the area where our teachers will find that professional development is most user-friendly. We anticipated that they would find that what they can learn about this particular topic would make working with their multilingual learners easier and help them develop new ideas for these students to show what they know even if there is a difference in language ability. This seemed to be the most user-friendly in terms of how we believed teachers would find this information to be useful and therefore important for professional development. The section and topic that ranked the lowest when our improvement team evaluated PDSA cycle 1 was individual content coaching.

Qualitative Data PDSA Cycle 1

After selecting a number on a scale of one to five for rating a section on a range of being user-friendly, the question “Do you have any suggestions for improving the

information in this section?” was asked in this version of the survey. This is a description of each question and the feedback provided:

Table 4.3 PDSA Cycle 1 Qualitative Responses

PDSA Cycle 1
Do you have any suggestions for improving the information in this section?
<p>Section 1 information included a terminology update on the shift in language with the SCDE from ESOL to ML, MLs across the globe, how MLs are identified in SC public schools, and how many MLs are currently identified at our school. The feedback on the first section includes the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It is a TON of information and a lot of text on each slide. This presentation should be broken down into many pieces to work within the 3–5-minute time frame. • We could also include Cambourne's conditions for learning language to use as a foundational piece of research to supplement what is included on this slideshow. • I think this section looks good! It provides the user with updates and information that could/should be applied to their classroom or school. • How detailed can we get with individual student data? And would the entire faculty care or just those who know they are teaching MLs?
<p>Section 2 included slides outlining the five phases of language acquisition including the silent period. Each phase included levels of language the student might be able to achieve and corresponding questions a teacher could use to help a ML show what he or she knows. The feedback on the second section includes the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I think the way this section ended provides users with questions to show what MLs know. I thought this was very helpful and provided real classroom usage.

- Will teachers understand the direct correlation between questioning as a strategy and how that can serve as assessment? Maybe this could be its own session?

Section 3 included slides designed for the four main content areas (ELA, math, science, social studies) with specific challenges students might experience in each one. The information also includes suggestions for how teachers can help multilingual learners show what they know specific to content areas. The feedback on the third section includes the following:

- The information provided here was useful and I like how it was broken down by content area. I feel like this could go well combined with section two if you were splitting this presentation up for professional development purposes. While the information is user-friendly, how can teachers help ML students overcome some of the challenges listed? Is it simply to lend into section 4 and the technology piece or are there other strategies?
- This would be a 5 for each content area teacher to be matched specifically with his/her content.

Section 4 included the most common technology tools utilized by teachers in our school in addition to some less familiar ones. We also included information about contacting our MLP teacher. The feedback on the fourth section includes the following:

- I like how this provides resources for users to use to help ML students.
- This is something we need to make sure we review with them as they uncover new tools they are using in the classroom that we might not even be aware of.

We also left a completely open-ended space for additional comments or suggestions on PDSA Cycle 1, and this was the feedback the team provided:

- We will probably need to break this into smaller chunks and allow the teachers to digest the information. I'm happy to help in any way :) The information is GREAT! I just don't want them to be overwhelmed and tune us out.
- Very informative and detailed!
- I think this is too much for one presentation/session even in these sections.

Section 1 for beginning of year so teachers know how kids are ID'd and reminder on ILAP from MLP teacher for that first week back to school? Then section 3 info to PLCs via API. Section 2 and Section 4 could be together for another presentation from MLP teacher or for API to coach teachers if they ask for help with grading.

This small PDSA cycle taught us that it was well worth the time and energy to test out the initial plan on ourselves first. Even though we were close to the topic and the work, we uncovered some issues that could have created confusion or prevented us from communicating what we needed to the teachers who would volunteer to give us feedback. The information seemed organized grouped into four main sections on the creative side, but this was confusing in delivery. The slides were not meant to be the actual professional development, but ideas for how we might group the topics and this was lost even on our team.

Our MLP teacher shared additional ideas for learning language that we had not included as ideas to share with our teachers. We believed it was important that teachers learn the process of language acquisition as presented by Cummins (2007) and Krashen (1982), and also that they could understand some of the scientific responses of the brain as they occur with learning (Rushton, et al, 2003). This would probably be one session in

and of itself. The API pointed out that teachers may also need more coaching on questioning not only as a strategy, but also as an assessment tool. We have been focusing on questioning and feedback as school-wide professional development goals between reviewing Hattie's effect sizes (2015) and including on-site coaching with Weston Kieschnick. The draft slides we created included some ideas we could use of the examples of questioning teachers can match with multilingual learners depending on their language acquisition level, but we would need to make sure we emphasize the assessment potential these same questions possess and how that ties into feedback.

We also struggled with the word "User-friendly" as the scaled descriptor. The word "user" could make the evaluator in a PDSA cycle think more of ease-of-use of the product or professional development itself rather than the quality of the information and how it might help our students. We considered many different words such as "meaningful," "practical," "useful," and "helpful," and determined that "helpful" is the goal of our work. What will teachers find helpful for their instruction? PDSA cycle 2 will include the word "helpful" in place of the word "user-friendly". For the record, this was not decided in one official meeting. We bounced around the language as we passed each other in the hallway or had meetings about other topics. This speaks to how natural this work can be when it makes sense for helping solve a problem.

In the initial email that went to the team I indicated that scanning this information should only take teachers three to five minutes to garner feedback. Our MLP teacher interpreted it as we would cover each topic in the actual professional development in that time window. We learned we needed to be clearer in our instructions and expectations and I learned that I was not as clear as I had thought. This is an example of when I acted

independently when I should have run something by our team, and thankfully the team was there to improve my work. Moving forward to PDSA cycle 2, there would be no time reference to avoid this confusion and we recognized that grouping topics in slides was creating confusion. We predicted that it would take teachers one or two weeks to respond to the survey, but with just our team we had our results within two days. Based on previous experiences with teachers, we left a response expectation at one to two weeks.

The improvement team agreed that content-specific coaching for teachers is ideal, but it must be done in a way that respects their time. We were thinking we might introduce content specific coaching with teachers only of a particular content area as we do not want teachers sitting in meetings while we are not addressing their work. This would be something we could do through our PLCs or department meeting time depending on the schedule of our MLP teacher, but as whole group professional development we might not have as much support of the teacher audience as we moved through the various content areas.

Our MLP teacher brought up another technology tool as we were reviewing the PDSA cycle 1 survey called Talking Points which is an app that allows two people to communicate in different languages as it translates for them. It seems our teachers are not very familiar with this resource so this is information I made sure we had available to share with them, our counselors, and our support staff for the following school year should a family need us to use it to help support them and their students.

Even with our backgrounds in working on this problem as the improvement team, the method of presenting the information for teachers to evaluate seemed disjointed and overwhelming. It was cumbersome to open the slides with different topics and then go

back to the Google Form. Even dividing all of our ideas into four main sections ended up being confusing rather than helpful. Clearly, we needed to design a more streamlined method of delivery. When I looked at our open-ended question, it seemed too forced and perhaps passively demanding because of the position of everyone on the team. Instead of asking “Do you have any suggestions for improving the information in this section?” which automatically insinuated a need for improvement, it was changed to simply “Comments/Suggestions” which allowed for a more balanced response in positive or negative feedback.

Act

The word “user-friendly” was changed to “helpful” in our questions. I redesigned the evaluation process into one single Google form with descriptors of information fully listed so that those viewing it could see everything they needed in one place. This meant that they would not see as many specific examples as they would have with the Google Slides presentation, but in hindsight that was probably more information than what was needed to provide for where we were in this process. The open-ended question was changed to simply “Comments/Suggestions”. This was another reminder to start small and that in doing so, teams will probably be more proactive in detecting issues in the prototypes as they build their work.

We recognized that in PDSA cycle 1, having topics grouped as we did was confusing and that it could lead to misunderstanding about what we were trying to measure. Our goal was to learn exactly where our teachers would need support to best support their MLs which would then help us create the professional development leading us to solve our aim statement. We knew we had to list out specific topics that included

both what we heard from teachers in empathy interviews balanced with what was uncovered in the literature review to ensure we were offering a range of ideas for those who helped us in the next PDSA cycle.

Our own review of PDSA cycle 1 helped us see that the professional development itself would need to be scaled back to smaller chunks and that we had to also consider audience. If the entire faculty were receiving the training, we would design it for a wider audience than if it were designed for content-specific instruction. Though we believed the content-specific support could be helpful, for this professional development we were leaning more toward a whole-group approach that would apply to any content teacher in our school working with an ML student.

Leadership Reflection PDSA Cycle 1

As a principal in a K12 public school, it could be challenging to find the time to meet with an improvement team the way it has been presented in many of the books I have studied on the topic. Teacher time has been more protected than ever as it should be, and I had to move forward with much of the design on this with communication with my team via email and when we were able to intersect in the moment in the building. This is the reality of those of us working in schools filled with students and staff and I had to work past my own concerns that we were not meeting enough. In fact, I now see that our time together to help solve this problem has been more organic than planned and that means we can sustain this dynamic moving forward without having to have scheduled meetings to dictate that we do this work. It is natural to what we do.

I also struggled with the decision to run a test on our improvement team for PDSA cycle 1 as I was concerned it would be like having a conversation with a mirror in

an echo chamber. Instead, this decision proved to be the right one as it provided us with the opportunity to share our own feedback on what worked and what did not. We were able to work out some of the issues before we presented it to our staff, and it was interesting to see how we interpreted the instructions and the experience differently with the survey.

Leaders who are embracing improvement science must recognize the realities of their time and that of their team. I also highly recommend the test-run on the improvement team to help ensure that the products being shared with others are as streamlined and as practical as possible to respect the expertise of those who are willing to help us solve the problems as they are most likely closest to the potential solutions. Our PDSA cycle 1 helped us clean up issues that would have potentially created a loss in teacher input, and therefore, a loss in how we are working to support our MLs.

PDSA Cycle 2

Plan

This objective of PDSA cycle 2 was to test our revised evaluation form and updated professional development information with a specific audience of volunteers. Teachers who were currently teaching multilingual learners and experts such as MLP teachers and district level multilingual learner leaders were offered the opportunity to voluntarily and anonymously share their feedback. This resulted in a pool of 27 potential respondents.

We predicted that our revised form with the word “helpful” as the practical measurement along with space to provide any additional comments and suggestions on each of our topics would help us garner more information about the updated PD than our

original design from PDSA cycle 1. We did not include Google slides or any additional attachments to this survey. Everything that teachers need in order to respond was in one streamlined Google Form. We believed we would gather helpful (i.e., practical) measures allowing us to further refine our ideas for what we will share with teachers during the 2023-2024 school year with professional development opportunities to support multilingual learners.

Do

An email with a link to the revised Google Form with the topics for the professional development to better reflect what we would present to our teachers was sent blind-copied to 25 teachers who currently teach at least one ML student. The survey was also sent to an MLP teacher at one of the high schools in our district and to our district coordinator for multilingual learners as they are also valued stakeholders in this work creating a pool of 27 potential respondents. The form made it clear that responses are anonymous and voluntary. It is important to note that our district is Google district, so our teachers are very familiar with the instrument which further supports why this is a way to find practical measures in our building. We received 16 responses to our survey for a 59% return rate. Teachers were provided with approximately two weeks to respond with their feedback.

The form was designed so that the information we received would help further direct the design of the professional development that we would present to our staff. There is a plethora of information to choose from concerning coaching teachers on instructional practices in supporting MLs. The goal of PDSA cycle 2 was to learn which of the nine potential areas of learning we had specifically identified from all of our

research would be most helpful for an audience including teachers from all content areas meeting in one training opportunity to help support their MLs.

Table 4.4 PDSA Cycle 2 Google Form Questions

PDSA Cycle 2 Google Form Questions						
<p>Directions: We are asking for feedback on the topics below as we develop professional learning for our school. The goal of this learning is to help support teachers as they engage with and instruct our multilingual learners. We want to begin by understanding what would be most helpful for teachers to learn about.</p> <p>Feedback is 100% voluntary. Feedback is 100% anonymous unless you share your name.</p> <p>Thank you for helping us figure this out!</p> <p>Scale for responses to PDSA Cycle 2 Survey</p> <p>Not helpful at all 1 2 3 4 5 Very helpful</p> <p>1. Do you think it would be helpful for teachers to learn why the SC Department of Education changed terminology from ESL (English as a Second Language) to ML (Multilingual Learner)?</p> <p>2. Do you think it would be helpful for teachers to learn about multilingualism across the world and how South Carolina compares?</p> <p>3. Do you think it would be helpful for teachers to learn how multilingual learners are identified in SC public schools?</p> <p>4. Do you think it would be helpful for classroom teachers to learn how many students at our school are identified as multilingual learners?</p>						

5. Do you think it would be helpful for classroom teachers to learn about the process of language acquisition and ways they can help students show what they know based on where students are in the process of language acquisition?
6. Do you think it would be helpful for classroom teachers to learn strategies to help assess/grade the learning of MLs?
7. Do you think content-specific coaching on challenges MLs may experience in a particular course would be helpful for teachers? (For example, idioms and figurative language are especially challenging in ELA. SC History may prove to be especially challenging for a student who is not from a state or country with our systems of government.)
8. Do you think technology training specifically coaching teachers on how to best help multilingual learners show what they know would be helpful?
9. Do you think technology training to help teachers communicate with families utilizing translation services via telephone or an app would be helpful?
10. Do you have any additional suggestions on how we can best support teachers as they work with multilingual learners at our school?

Study

Quantitative Data PDSA Cycle 2

Teachers scored each of the nine topics we presented them on a scale of one to five to indicate how helpful they thought a topic would be to help them support their multilingual learners. Their responses were averaged and then the averages were ranked

from what they believe would be most helpful to the least helpful. The original results of the survey using a Google Form are located in Appendix H.

Table 4.5 PDSA Cycle 2 Ranking of Topics by Average

Rank	Question/Topic	Average
1	5. Do you think it would be helpful for classroom teachers to learn about the process of language acquisition and ways they can help students show what they know based on where students are in the process of language acquisition?	4.73
2	6. Do you think it would be helpful for classroom teachers to learn strategies to help assess/grade the learning of MLs?	4.67
3	7. Do you think content-specific coaching on challenges MLs may experience in a particular course would be helpful for teachers? (For example, idioms and figurative language are especially challenging in ELA. SC History may prove to be especially challenging for a student who is not from a state or country with our systems of government.)	4.47
4	9. Do you think technology training to help teachers communicate with families utilizing translation services via telephone or an app would be helpful?	4.33

5	8. Do you think technology training specifically coaching teachers on how to best help multilingual learners show what they know would be helpful?	4.13
6	4. Do you think it would be helpful for classroom teachers to learn how many students at our school are identified as multilingual learners?	4
7	3. Do you think it would be helpful for teachers to learn how multilingual learners are identified in SC public schools?	3.73
8	2. Do you think it would be helpful for teachers to learn about multilingualism across the world and how South Carolina compares?	3.4
9	1. Do you think it would be helpful for teachers to learn why the SC Department of Education changed terminology from ESL (English as a Second Language) to ML (Multilingual Learner)?	2.93

The results of this survey made it abundantly clear that teachers want to learn about the process of language acquisition, instructional strategies for assessment, and content-specific coaching. When our improvement team ranked topics in PDSA cycle 1, we listed language acquisition with learning about the changes in terminology at the same level in the middle of our ranking. Teachers who responded to the survey in our PDSA cycle 2 listed language acquisition as their top request for what would be most helpful and learning about the reasons behind the SCDE terminology changes as very last. This

served as a lesson for our team on positionality and a reminder that those closest to the problem could be experiencing a problem differently than those of us sitting farther away.

When the improvement team completed the survey in PDSA cycle 1, we ranked the content-specific professional development lowest and in PDSA cycle 2, teachers placed content-specific coaching as third out of nine. Teachers ranked technology in the middle of their concerns and we ranked it first thinking it would be what they wanted to learn more about. This is an example of why it is important that we listen to those closest to the problem as their experiences directly with students are different from what our positions and perspectives offer. As an improvement team of administrators and the MLP teacher, we were essentially wrong in what we thought teachers would want to learn about most.

Perhaps this is even more of a reason to run a test on the improvement team itself. This indicates to us that in our positionality, we do not experience working with multilingual learners as our teachers do. This makes the argument even stronger that as Hinnant-Crawford (2020) coaches us, small scale tests are critical to improvement science supported with practical measurements so that we can see variations. In this one small test run, we see variation in how our team understood what teachers need versus what they actually told us. What other systems might we be seeing through a lens of positionality that could be impacting our teachers and their work with students?

Qualitative Data PDSA Cycle 2

After respondents selected a number on a scale of one to five for rating a specific topic on a range of being helpful, there was an open-ended section labeled “Comments/Suggestions.” after each question. This was an intentional shift from our

PDSA cycle 1 that asked, “Do you have any suggestions for improving the information in this section?” Through a slight shift in tone with space offered for comments and suggestions and not just a question asking for suggestions, the goal was to garner more feedback in PDSA cycle 2 than we would have otherwise. Based on the amount of feedback received, this shift was the right decision to improve the work and learning from PDSA cycle 2. This is a description of each question and the feedback that respondents provided:

Table 4.6 PDSA Cycle 2 Qualitative Responses

PDSA Cycle 2 Comments/Suggestions
<p>Question 1: Do you think it would be helpful for teachers to learn why the SC Department of Education changed terminology from ESL (English as a Second Language) to ML (Multilingual Learner)?</p> <p>Comments/Suggestions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I have taken several ESOL courses towards the ESOL endorsement so I already know. • I think it's important to note that the terms have changed to become more asset based. Looking at the ML through a lens of what they bring to the classroom, not only in the value of their heritage language(s) but also their cultural knowledge. • It doesn't matter what they call it. What can I do to help my student? • It might be interesting to know, I guess, but I don't think it really changes how we deal with ML in the classroom. • Not sure myself.

Question 2: Do you think it would be helpful for teachers to learn about multilingualism across the world and how South Carolina compares?

Comments/Suggestions

- This would provide context to what we are doing in South Carolina relative to other places and how we can improve.
- It's important to have a global view to understand communication and how language/culture works not only in SC but around the world. It opens up minds and lines of communication. There is a "whole big world" out there! :)
- No; again. What can I do to help my student here and now?
- If they have great suggestions, THAT would be very valuable, but MLP teacher is always sending us helpful things to try as well
- Nope. I am sure we are far behind.

Question 3: Do you think it would be helpful for teachers to learn how multilingual learners are identified in SC public schools?

Comments/Suggestions

- Yes. Teachers always have questions regarding this. I think it is important that all parts of the process be transparent and understood by all stakeholders.
- No; I trust the professionals.
- I thought they were in it because of a box their parent checked when they enrolled

Question 4: Do you think it would be helpful for classroom teachers to learn how many students at our school are identified as multilingual learners?

Comments/Suggestions

- YES!! Know who is in your building. We are all language teachers. It is no longer the sole responsibility of the ML teacher to be the only one who teaches language.
- Somewhat; if our numbers are getting larger, maybe we need to have more specific protocols in place.

Question 5: Do you think it would be helpful for classroom teachers to learn about the process of language acquisition and ways they can help students show what they know based on where students are in the process of language acquisition?

Comments/Suggestions

- This would be a huge asset to help grow ML students and provide adequate skills for teachers to assess the growth of these students.
- Yes. I don't think a super deep dive into this is necessary but at the least be familiar with the stages of language acquisition and be able to write language objectives that support the MLs at the appropriate stage of proficiency.
- Now here's a question that matters. Yes; this is important, but not so much for the experienced teacher.
- YES, ABSOLUTELY!

Question 6: Do you think it would be helpful for classroom teachers to learn strategies to help assess/grade the learning of MLs?

Comments/Suggestions

- I believe many teachers are uncomfortable grading ML students the same way traditional students are graded.

- Strategies= probably the most important of all. Finding and using research based successful strategies for MLs would offer the most growth for this particular group.
- Teachers know how to be fair to these students when it comes to grading. We can assess quite well.
- Yes!

Question 7: Do you think content-specific coaching on challenges MLs may experience in a particular course would be helpful for teachers? (For example, idioms and figurative language are especially challenging in ELA. SC History may prove to be especially challenging for a student who is not from a state or country with our systems of government.)

Comments/Suggestions

- This would be beneficial to meet the student where they are when they enter our building.
- Math can also be difficult if they can't understand the directions or word problems, but many excel at actually doing math.
- Content specific PD would be amazing.
- YES! We need this!
- English speaking students struggle with this; so, of course, MLs will.
- Yes, I think that could be very helpful!

Question 8: Do you think technology training specifically coaching teachers on how to best help multilingual learners show what they know would be helpful?

Comments/Suggestions

- There are a lot of online tools available
- Alternate means of assessment is not only a great idea, but necessary for our newcomers.
- Anytime we can incorporate technology is a win win for both the teacher and student,
- It could be helpful, yes but maybe keep this as an option for tech savvy teachers, unless it's something really easy and not too overwhelming.

Question 9: Do you think technology training to help teachers communicate with families utilizing translation services via telephone or an app would be helpful?

Comments/Suggestions

- Teachers/admin/school staff seem to be intimidated by using apps/phone services that are easy, intuitive and a great resource. We need to be comfortable using these because when we are not, our communication with our ML families is stilted and impeded.
- Most of the time, email does the job along with Google Translate.
- I haven't needed this yet. It could be helpful if I get kids that REALLY don't know much English... then definitely!

Question 10: Do you have any additional suggestions on how we can best support teachers as they work with multilingual learners at our school?

- Have a core team of teachers, ideally one from each content, to have a PLC group dedicated to ML learners to ensure common language and assessments are used in every course.
- no

- I wish we could have a full time ML teacher at our school. It is so hard when a student who speaks no English or very limited English comes and you are struggling trying to find material and things for them to do.
- I applaud this effort to bring awareness to our ML group and I am at your disposal any time you need me. I can also bring our state director in as well and she is a wealth of knowledge also.
- Could we make a team of teachers just for these students?
- More ELA resources need to be available through the district or school that align with our framework. Often, these students require an additional prep in order to create lessons and materials for the student to use. Also, these students need more support outside of the classroom. Possibly even their own enrichment class in place of an exploratory class. These students have little to no support outside of the classroom and teachers are stretched thin keeping up with behavior problems and accommodations for other students.
- I think that the multilingual learners need an exploratory with a teacher who can help them with their work from their core classes. It isn't enough for them to just "get by." These students need more one on one help than a teacher can give who has a classroom of 25 or more students.
- I wish we had more google translate versions for Spanish. Even when I use it, it's not quite right for my individual student.
- nope.

- As I get more learners that have limited English, I will need some different techniques. It also helps me to always be learning a language myself so that I remember how much of a struggle it can be just to put a proper sentence together.
- Some support from ESOL would be nice. I have not had a positive experience working with them in quite a while.

In reviewing the responses, there is a definitive range in terms of how helpful teachers believe many of these topics would be. Some indicate that they do not necessarily care to learn about the why behind the nomenclature or identification of multilingual learners as they just want to know how to support their students. Some questions had polar opposite responses. As the leader of a school looking at a small sample out of all of the adults in my building, it is clear that there is a range of opinions on perceived needs in terms of what teachers have in supporting students. Teachers who have indicated they do not need any support will hopefully serve as experts and models for those who have indicated the opposite. We must ensure that we create an environment where teachers will share their own expertise as clearly there are staff members who are confident in their teaching of multilingual learners.

No one asked for further clarification on the survey or responded with any question on the actual tool itself, so our prediction that delivering the information in this revised format would make it easier for teachers to respond was accurate. We also predicted that we would learn even more than what we asked from our teachers by shifting the open-ended portion to simply “Comments/Suggestions,” and this proved to be correct. Their comments and suggestions provided some specific direction we can

apply to coaching teachers to work with multilingual learners in our school and even to further develop future driver diagrams to support our aim statement.

The last question asked for any additional suggestions on how we can best support teachers as they work with multilingual learners at our school and our teachers suggested ideas we have been both working toward and that would be new approaches for this work. Our multilingual learner program specialist at the district level has continued to offer her assistance and has offered state help as well. This is an example of the power of networking that I have not fully tapped into as a leader and it is encouraging to know that people have been there to assist. This would be an additional avenue for us to develop our Network Improvement Community (NIC) for supporting our multilingual learners and as Hinnant-Crawford (2020) described, “it becomes like the old cliché – together, everyone achieves more – the network becomes a team” (p.190).

I found one suggestion to be a full-circle moment as someone asked for more versions of Spanish and that is exactly what I needed back in 2011 when I was working with Antonio. This is something we could explore with our digital integration specialist or reach out to schools with larger populations of students who speak Spanish to connect with their resources.

Act

Once we learned from PDSA cycle 2 that (1) our teachers want to learn about the process of language acquisition, (2) our teachers want to better understand how to assess the learning of MLs, and (3) we have a wide range of confidence and experience in our school in working with MLs, the next PDSA cycle involved planning school-based professional development in conjunction with our district’s professional development

calendar for the 2023-2024 school year and presenting it to teachers. We generally provide time the first week teachers return for our MLP teacher to lead all teachers through understanding what it means to provide support for students with an ILAP (Individual Language Acquisition Plan). This is when she also shares her availability and contact information should teachers need to reach out to her directly to support their students. PDSA cycle 3 would include information on language acquisition including explaining the research of Krashen (1983) and the silent period that students may experience while they are with us and how they can best assess their MLs no matter where the student might be in the phases of language acquisition. This is what we learned our teachers would like to learn more about so that they can better support their multilingual learners in PDSA cycle 2.

Leadership Reflection PDSA Cycle 2

There are times in this work where I have been concerned that I have not created a revolutionary new tool or groundbreaking instrument or some undiscovered assessment practice that will revolutionize schools and the experience of multilingual learners. I have had to remind myself that improvement work starts at the locus of the problem in my building for our learners and then I will share our learning with others, not the reverse.

It is hard not to attempt everything on the driver diagram all at once. This is a natural side effect of working together to untangle a problem. We have seen new opportunities as a team and how within each of our areas of influence we could move forward. We are witnessing first-hand the synergistic possibilities that are created when solving problems using improvement science.

I am thankful for a school where teachers are comfortable enough to provide feedback and believe that as a leader, it is up to me to ensure that everyone on our staff knows that I am always open to learning about how we can improve our systems and work as it supports our students. In the process of this dissertation in practice, I have had some teachers share during their planning blocks with me in person and I have been pleased with the response on our Google form. It is critical that teachers know that I see, hear, and honor their expertise and that I am willing to learn from them. I need to explore how I can ensure this is truly the case throughout my building for all teachers.

PDSA Cycle 3

Plan

Based on what teachers shared in PDSA cycle 2, the highest-ranking topics they would like to learn about included language acquisition for students and strategies for to best assess MLs. The information provided in Comments/Suggestions on these two topics provided insight into how we might want to specifically plan this professional development. Both questions garnered feedback that indicates teachers need this, but we also received feedback indicating there are teachers who already know about these topics and how to assess quite well. The balance in sharing this information will be in presenting information that is helpful to as many teachers as possible without being a waste of time for our more experienced teachers. The qualitative feedback on both of these topics was wide-ranging, despite the topics being the highest ranked by most teachers in the quantitative ranking assessment.

It is important at this point in the work that to revisit the information discovered in the literature review about Guskey's work and how to best design professional

development (1989, 2022). The goal with this professional development was not about changing teacher attitudes about MLs (Guskey, 1989). We were likely to create more lasting change by helping teachers see how their choices in how they teach and lead MLs have a direct impact on tangible outcomes and the growth of their students. If we could help them see more immediate returns on their outcomes such as more streamlined ways to assess or more confidence that students are following their assignments, teachers would be more likely to remain committed to any changes they may choose to implement in their practice (Guskey, 2022).

The slides for the professional development presentation were reconfigured from the sections of PDSA cycle 1 with the additional feedback from PDSA cycle 2 to a more streamlined and specific presentation for PDSA cycle 3 (Appendix I). The slides began with our MLP teacher's contact information for our staff. Then they transitioned into slides that explain the five phases of language acquisition and each slide provided characteristics of that particular phase, how long the phase might last, and question stems that teachers could use to assess student learning (Foppoli, Cushman, 2022). We also included a slide on the silent period with information about the type of learning that might be taking place during this phase as our MLP teacher has shared that this particular phase can be incredibly confusing and frustrating for teachers and MLs alike (Cushman, 2022). Next, we included a brief list of tips for improving spoken communication with MLs. The professional development slides end with a section on what an Individualized Language Acquisition Plan (ILAP) looks like and how that works with grading and assessment. The final slide reminded teachers that our MLP teacher has her own room for the first time in our school's history should they want to donate any flags or other

decorations and that if they have specific questions, we invited them to stay with us to ask.

We wanted to make our professional development time with teachers informative for everyone concerning the chosen topics, but also provide ample time at the end for teachers to ask our MLP teacher specific questions about their students. The estimated time for the presentation is 30 minutes for a full audience, but there will also need to be at least another fifteen minutes for teachers to ask student-specific questions after the whole group is dismissed. We decided that I would introduce the session, our MLP teacher would lead the staff through it, and our API would also help lead by assisting with slides and by being available with the MLP teacher to answer instructional questions.

Our MLP teacher has historically presented to our staff the first week teachers return in August, but this particular year, she was unable to attend. This is the week that teachers are attending meetings on a wide range of topics from safety plans, to setting up grade books, to decorating classrooms, to organizing digital classrooms, and the list can go on. Teachers also have not met their MLs at that point in their work to have a true understanding of what support they might need in order to support their students. We predicted that by moving our MLP teacher's time to initially work with our teachers, they would be a more engaged audience because they will be attending with specific students in mind whom they have worked with for at least six weeks of school at this point. We predicted the information might also be better received in a more targeted professional development time where it is the only topic rather than being grouped in with multiple topics as it generally is the first week teachers return to school each year.

Having our MLP teacher present to our teachers well into first quarter and not the first week teachers return is different from our normal system, and we believed that this might be a more meaningful time for teachers to hear this information because they will have met their MLs. Our expected audience included approximately 50 teachers and four administrators in attendance for the professional development session. The teachers would include those who teach ELA, Math, Science, Social Studies, and our Exploratory courses.

Do

There were 48 teachers, three school counselors, and four administrators in attendance for the presentation. Almost every teacher who attended has at least one ML on his or her roster for at least one class whether the ML is someone currently receiving services from our MLP teacher or a student who is being monitored.

We met in our cafeteria for the professional development session once afternoon duty was complete. I introduced our MLP teacher as teachers new to our staff may have received ILAP information but may not have met her in person at this point. She presented the slides as they appear in Appendix I and our API sat up front with her to help guide the slides and to be present should teachers ask questions that he may be able to assist with from an instructional lens. Our MLP teacher coached teachers on how to speak to MLs and modeled what it felt like when people yell at them as if they have a hearing issue. She also shared anecdotal information not included in the slides including what some of our ML students say makes the biggest difference in how they will decide whether to approach a teacher to ask a question or not and it is if they smile or not. The presentation (Appendix I) concluded with examples of Individualized Language

Acquisition Plans, an Individual Student Report, and information about the new Ellevation system South Carolina is now utilizing for ML students and how teachers can access this tool (South Carolina Department of Education, May 2023).

After the presentation, I moved to the front of the cafeteria and asked teachers if they had any questions or were wondering something someone else in the room might be wondering. Two teachers asked questions. Our MLP teacher addressed those questions and then I asked that anyone who had specific questions about their MLs or a question for our MLP teacher to remain in the cafeteria as I dismissed everyone else. Five teachers remained to meet with our MLP teacher.

Four of the five teachers asked for clarification on how they are currently implementing ILAPs in their courses for their MLs. The fifth teacher asked her for more specific coaching on supporting her MLs and the MLP teacher and this teacher sat down to review Ellevation together on the teacher's laptop so that the teacher could see how to use this new tool to support her students. This gave the MLP teacher an opportunity to see how our teachers experience working with this new system. This provided an excellent trial run of what we might do next.

The presentation portion of the professional development took 27 minutes to complete. The question and answer time took an additional 20 minutes. The entire professional development time with all teachers lasted 47 minutes.

Study

Quantitative Data PDSA Cycle 3

We intentionally did not send out a survey or reflection tool immediately after the session for everyone in the audience that could potentially make teachers feel they were

being tested or quizzed based on the professional development session they attended. My concern as a school leader is that they could interpret traditional quantitative questioning as a whole group as not trusting their professionalism or their ability to know when they needed to seek more clarification on a topic concerning their students. Our API sends out a general survey about professional development each spring, and this session will be listed as a topic for teachers to provide topic at that time when they are evaluating our entire professional development program.

This was a shift in our measurement techniques from PDSA cycles 1 and 2, and as Langley and associates (2009) stated concerning measurement, “One approach is to use process or other measures associated with the system measure. The appropriate process measure to use depends on the theory that the team is currently using to develop the change” (p. 252). At this point in our processes, we needed to measure differently than we had in the past in order to honor the experts in the room and our measures needed to adapt to where we were in our current system.

Bryk and associates (2017) highlighted the difference in measurement in academic research versus improvement work reminding readers that measurements for improvement science must not only respect the time of teachers and students, but that “rather than measure constructs, the goal is to predict important future consequences before they occur so that productive actions can be taken” (p. 100). We avoided focusing solely on one type of construct or measurement and were able to garner important information based on metrics of observation that will help us improve our support for multilingual learners as we move forward in this work. Using questioning as a technique for practical measurement provided the avenue for us to be more productive as we move

forward in developing professional development that helps support our teachers as they support our MLs in increasing their English progress proficiency.

The quantitative data that we did extract is that out of 48 attendees, 7 had questions, and informing us that 85% of the audience did not seek further clarification. Two of the attendees asked questions during the whole group part of the presentation and five remained after we dismissed the group so that they could speak with our MLP teacher individually. We were encouraged that 15% of the attendees felt comfortable enough to seek further clarification about how to support their MLs.

Qualitative Data PDSA Cycle 3

Asking teachers if they had any questions or wanted to ask something someone else might be wondering was an intentional modeling of a low-pressure questioning technique that our teachers can also use in their classrooms to check for understanding or for areas that need further clarification (Ferlazzo, 2021). Two out of forty-eight attendees asked questions. One question asked by a Social Studies teacher was about how teachers can identify which phases students are in and if our MLP teacher is monitoring them. The second question from a Leadership teacher was about what it means when a teacher sees a student's name in the new Ellevation Education system, but does not have any information on that student from our MLP teacher for an ILAP. This provided an opportunity for our MLP teacher to provide clarification on what it means for students to be actively working with her or in the monitored phase because they have scored beyond needing her support.

The next way I checked for understanding was asking that anyone who had a question for our MLP teacher about a specific student to remain to ask her while we had

the time with her on our campus as everyone else was dismissed. Five teachers including a PE teacher, a social studies teacher, an ELA teacher, a math teacher, and a band teacher remained to ask for further clarification on what they need to do to support MLs currently on their rosters. As I am working with teachers this year, I will be able to remind them that in the whole group situation, two teachers spoke up with wonderings, but when I provided more specific guidelines for questions with specific access to the coaching of our MLP teacher, the response was much higher and this is one way we need to be providing opportunities for all of our students including MLs to access teachers for further coaching and clarification.

Our MLP teacher was pleased that seven teachers had asked questions either with the whole group or individually and she determined the next step for our staff will be for them to bring their laptop devices to a professional development session to explore the new Ellevation student information system. This provides specific information on where students are in their language acquisition journey in addition to providing instructional strategies and specific examples of what a student should be able to do now and what teachers can be helping students work toward as their next step toward English proficiency.

The professional development session provided teachers with the information that was requested most from our PDSA cycle 2. The teachers appeared engaged throughout the session and the questions that the two teachers asked of the whole group allowed our MLP teacher to fill in information we had not thought to provide. We did not realize that teachers might not understand the differences between students who were actively receiving services versus those being monitored and this session helped us see that. We

also realized that we do not know how teachers see the information on the status of an ML in terms of English progress proficiency in PowerSchool as compared to how we do since we have different levels of access to the system as administrators. We do not know how teachers are experiencing information on their MLs between all the possible systems to which they have access such as ILAPs and Ellevation, and this is an area for us to possibly explore. The State of South Carolina has invested heavily in the new Ellevation Education System (South Carolina Department of Education, May 2023) and we anticipate spending more time on this moving forward now that it has officially been launched for our teachers.

If we would have made the professional development a technology tool presentation which is what our improvement team members identified in PDSA cycle 1 as the number one concern, the presentation would most likely have been less helpful and most importantly, not as focused on teachers and how they work with our students. We would have probably had less engagement and the information would not have been as focused on how teachers can directly impact their instruction with students. The idea for technology came out of initial empathy interviews information, but even then, we had projected our own beliefs on what we thought teachers would need. This was another reminder that the improvement team needs to get out of the way of those with the best information in improvement work to get as close as possible to those who can help solve the problem.

The phases of language acquisition as labeled in the slide presentation could be adjusted to match the resources our teachers use more closely as Ellevation does not follow this same pattern according to our MLP teacher, so that is an area of further

improvement we could add for the next round of this presentation. The information we shared should help teachers see an increase in outcomes in how their students are able to show what they know which is important in how Guskey (1989, 2022) frames professional development to have the most lasting impacts.

Our original prediction that the presentation would take around 30 minutes and that teachers would need another 15 minutes for one-on-one questions was close to how this session of the professional development was rolled out. It took 27 minutes to move through the slides and our MLPT met with individual teachers for 20 minutes. I will keep this time configuration in mind for not only this professional development, but also for other presentations with our teachers and staff.

The time our MLP teacher had to guide one of our teachers through the Ellevation system at the end of the professional development time has provided much of what we need to know for PDSA cycle 4. She was able to see exactly how our teachers experience this student information system when they open on their computers and also listen to what the concerns were of this one teacher. She shared this one coaching session provided some clarity on what she needs to share with our teachers and how it will best work for them from the vantage point of how they open and experience the program.

Act

Our MLP teacher did an outstanding job of personalizing the presentation to the kids who are in our school right now, and we have encouraged her to take it to her five other schools so that they can also benefit from this work. This would provide five additional groups of teachers to help further refine the professional development she is providing our school and provide more information on what else we need to do to support

our teachers as they support our MLs. She is already a network for all of our schools and for many of our ML students and their families, so it is imperative that as a school administration we are maximizing her efforts any way we can on our campus to help support the work she is already doing here and across our district.

The presentation that our MLP teacher shares with our teachers has always been the first week teachers return when they are packed with so many other meetings that must take place as school ramps up each year. We believe that by having this meeting five or six weeks into the school year, the information is more meaningful as it has provided teachers with time to meet the MLs they are working with so that they are more informed in what they might need to ask of our MLP teacher. In the past when our MLP teacher has presented the first week teachers were back, teachers never asked her specific questions about students or asked clarifying questions. This year we had two teachers ask whole group clarifying questions and five teachers remain beyond the original presentation time to discuss specific concerns about their students. This told us that our prediction was right and that teachers need time to meet their MLs to know what they even need to ask, and that professional development geared toward MLs is better served once school is in session.

For next year we have planned to have our MLP teacher present again on the fourth Tuesday of September as her initial meeting, and we will send out a quick Google Form survey the week prior for them to share any questions they may have so that she can include them in her presentation. We will monitor what types of questions she receives this year now that teachers have seen how accessible and helpful she is in coaching them on supporting their MLs as they are working toward English progress

proficiency and what that looks like for our students. We will also monitor the feedback our API receives from his general professional development survey. This will help continue to inform iterations of professional development and extend PDSA cycles into continuous improvement opportunities helping us to further efforts to help reach our aim statement.

As we move to the more immediate concern on our campus for PDSA cycle 4, we will focus on the training teachers on how to effectively use Ellevation to support their students. We will also ensure that we have experienced what it looks like to see a student record of an ML in our PowerSchool system from a teacher point of view so that we know what teachers see in terms of a student's current level of English progress proficiency or their range for monitoring. We will also provide more detailed descriptions of what the levels of proficiency and monitoring status mean based on the questions we received from teachers during the professional development of PDSA cycle 3 so that they can better understand which phases of language acquisition a student might be in and how they can assess students in ways that will best allow students to show what they know across all content areas.

Leadership Reflection PDSA Cycle 3

Our MLP teacher has many years of experience and our API is closer to the beginning of his administrative career, and improvement science has leveraged both the wisdom of experience and the gift of seeing a system through a new lens. Seeing them leading our faculty in the session brought this to light as one more strength of leveraging improvement science as it invites everyone to the table. Their willingness to offer ideas, expertise, and most of all, honest feedback when we have needed to refine and redirect

through this process has been incredible to see. I have learned from both of them in this process as they bring their own positions and experiences to the work.

During the professional development session, I sat quietly in the back as a qualitative data observer so that I could observe the engagement level of our staff (Creswell and Creswell, 2018). I saw a few teachers checking email or their phones, but overwhelmingly, their focus was on our MLP teacher. Everyone was engaged with the learning. She was conversational in her presentation and modeled much of what she was showing the staff on our slides. She made it easy to want to learn and because so many of our teachers have at least one ML on their rosters, they were a willing and engaged group. Teachers asked questions in our session indicating we had not provided all of the information they needed. Every question is an opportunity, and it was critical that I was listening during the presentation to see what we could uncover for our next PDSA. I am thankful for teachers who asked the questions to help us understand how we might better support everyone in the room.

I remember thinking when we started this that there was no way the three of us would ever have the time to do all the things that it sounded like had to be done in order to actually do improvement work. I remember wondering if any of the authors had ever been in a plain old public school – not a charter, not a Title 1, one without any behavior coaches, one without an adult to spare – one like mine. I remember thinking that it was wild to think we would be able to learn how to do improvement work with our schedules.

I also remember when I decided that the improvement work was worth it and that our multilingual learners were worth it even more to at least try. The majority of our best work was via late night emails or when the three of us literally ended up in the

intersection of the main hall in the school building at the same time unplanned. I think that is exactly how improvement work in a school just like mine should be. It should be real. It should be right. It should be right for the ones we are working to support and in a plain old public school without time and adults to spare, I believe we are doing it right.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The goal of this improvement work is to help improve English progress proficiency for our multilingual students and that requires us to do things differently than what we have done in the past. The change idea for this dissertation in practice is but one of many ideas our team is pursuing to help support our multilingual students as we recognize that this is a complex problem that will require addressing multiple systems and the people who either influence them or are influenced by them.

Importance of Positionality

This work has taught me that there is a distinct relationship between the person asking for information to solve a problem and the person who has the answer on how to solve it. Initially, I envisioned I would be doing all of the empathy interviews to help gather information for my team and what I found instead was that I needed the help of others to get the information that this work needed. I had to let go of the thought that I am the expert and trust that others will tell us what they need that will ultimately support our multilingual learners. I had to trust that others would be able to learn more from students than I would regardless of my intentions. Awareness of positionality helped me remain user centered as Bryk and associates (2017) describe it: “At its most basic level, being user centered means respecting the people who actually do the work by seeking to

understand the problems they confront. It means engaging these people in designing the changes that align with the problems they really experience.” (p. 32).

In the course of researching for this dissertation in practice, I found Guskey’s model of professional development evaluation (1989, 2022) that indicated it is best to begin professional development with tangible results teachers see in their classrooms when coaching them on supporting struggling or marginalized students rather than starting with information designed to shape attitudes or beliefs. The responses we received in both PDSA cycle 1 and PDSA cycle 2 support this is true for our teachers as well. This information was crucial in how we moved into PDSA cycle 3 as we shaped professional development plans. The research of the literature review supports respecting the positionality that teachers experience as they are the people who work most closely with the students we are hoping to help in this work. We will move forward following actions that will allow teachers to see concrete gains in instruction with multilingual learners.

Knowing We Created Change

Make the Work Problem-Specific and User-Centered

Bryk and associates (2017) make it clear that identifying the exact problem statement can “prove harder than it sounds” and that landing on the specific language to frame improvement work can be a challenge. I remember feeling overwhelmed with problems to choose from in fall of 2021 when we were first asked to consider our improvement science topics as a cohort. Looking back, every single problem that I stated was broad and lacked the specificity that is required of improvement science to focus on meaningful change. It took quite a few weeks to finally narrow the framing of the

problem in order to reach a point when our team could then look forward with drivers and change ideas to address the problem. It was also a new experience for me to shift the lens to being user-centered and understanding that though I am a school leader, I would be relinquishing control of much of this work and in doing so, the work would be better. I have been changed in how I see problems, users, and the importance of getting out of the way so others can lead work.

Focus on Variation in Performance

Empathy interviews helped our team understand how different stakeholders experience the challenges of helping multilingual learners meet English progress proficiency. This work helped us identify “what works, for whom, and under what set of conditions” (Bryk et al., p. 13-14). Prior to learning how improvement science works, I know that we would not have taken the time to find out how students, teachers, and families experience learning in context of the multilingual learner experience. I would have focused almost solely from the end product of data points. Creswell and Creswell (2018) stated “the value of qualitative research lies in the particular description and themes developed in the context of a specific site” (p. 202) and a dissertation in practice points to us beginning with our context and then looking for variations within our scope as we did with achievement data review which led us to question specifically why we were seeing a variation in that pattern for our MLs.

Variation in the ranking of what matters most to teachers from PDSA 1 which involved our improvement team versus that of PDSA 2 which involved classroom teachers and multilingual learner experts helped demonstrate why variation matters. We thought teachers would want to learn about technology and that there would be a focus on

tools to make the job of teaching easier. Instead, we saw variation when our teachers told us in PDSA 2 that they wanted to learn more about how their students learn to acquire language. This variation and the fact that we were wrong is what helped us more effectively shape PDSA 3 which had an impact on a wider audience. The improvement team itself, though immersed completely in solving the problem, cannot earnestly provide the perspective of that which it is not. Our team thought one thing and our teachers told us another. This experience has helped me realize as a building leader that variation is not a negative result of what we measure, but instead a gateway to explore the why behind the variation which will lead to better experiences for our teachers and staff.

See the System That Produces Current Outcomes

Perhaps the hardest part of improvement science is taking an honest look at the current system. When we began to evaluate what our current system consisted of or the lack thereof, this project felt incredibly overwhelming. Our MLP teacher served multiple schools and we could not change that. We did not have enough multilingual learner students to create a stand-alone class and we could not change that. We did have a system where our MLP teacher would pull multilingual learners out of class when she could work with them, but then they were missing valuable instruction from another class, and we could not change that. The hardest part was taking an honest look at our system when there were so many potential avenues for change. However, it is only by acknowledging the reality of our system that we have been able to move forward to change ideas that we believe will make a difference.

Prior to this work, our teachers received their ILAPs for students within the first ten days of school and received a quick introduction to our MLP teacher during their

busiest week of the year upon returning to school. Now, we have asked teachers what they need to learn more about to support their MLs to help them reach English progress proficiency and even more importantly, given them time to work with their MLs for this school year so that they will have time to formulate questions or become aware of concerns that they can bring to our MLP teacher. We submit our school plan for professional development to our district office and we would like to continue to hold this particular training each year at this time. We have started teaching our teachers what it means to learn a language while learning content and provided specific question stems or alternative assessment strategies. Our MLP teacher has her own class space for the first time in our building and we worked to schedule our MLs during an academic enrichment time together so that our MLP teacher can pull them as a group to help build community.

The state of South Carolina is also reviewing current systems as they relate to supporting our MLs and since this dissertation in practice began, there have been more steps that demonstrate such. Currently there is a proposal to the federal government to change the requirement that MLs must earn a composite score of 4.4+ and 4.0+ on the four domains of Listening, Reading, Writing, and Speaking on the annual English Proficiency Test. The proposal requests that the individual domain requirements be removed and the goal be the 4.4+ composite which stakeholders have shared more accurately reflects a student's proficiency on grade level (Multilingual Learner English Proficiency or Reclassification Criterion Proposal, 2023).

We Cannot Improve at Scale What We Cannot Measure

We will be able to measure our progress toward our aim statement over time, but this DiP is one snapshot of the work we are doing. We are beginning by measuring one

piece of an exceptionally large puzzle, but it is imperative that we do so as “Improvement requires attending to each of the component processes that combine together to determine how well the overall system functions” (Bryk et al., 2017, p. 15). Creating professional development that addresses both what our multilingual students and teachers need is just one part of the work we need to do.

PDSA cycles allowed us to develop a means for practical measurements to inform our work for improving academic outcomes for our multilingual learners. This process has proven that it is possible to measure what our teachers need and that what they identify as most important might not line up with what school leadership believes. We have also learned that our teachers are willing to provide feedback to inform us on how to best support them and I believe we can continue similar processes in measuring how and what we pursue to help them best support all students. It was important that this DiP model that it is possible for others to assess whether a team is moving in the right direction toward a goal with iterative processes and measurement tools that are easily accessible and that this can be replicated by teachers doing their own trials toward making improvements in their work with students.

Over the course of this dissertation in practice, we have been able to see another year of data as reported on the SCDE Report Card which is encouraging. The students change in this data year to year, but the test has remained the same and reflects the effort of our students and teachers to demonstrate that there is progress in meeting proficiency as students are learning English.

Table 5.1 Comparison of ML Progress Proficiency Data 2022 to 2023

Comparison of ML Progress Proficiency Data 2022 to 2023			
	Percentage Met Progress toward Proficiency Target 2021-2022	Percentage Met Progress toward Proficiency Target 2022-2023	Change
State	54.3%	54.5%	+.2%
District	57.3%	56.6%	-.7%
Our School	50%	60.9%	+10.9%

The state and district had minor changes from last year, while our school showed a positive growth of 10.9% more ML students meeting their progress goals toward proficiency. We are pleased to see the trend for our multilingual learners is positive and that it is following the pattern we are more likely to see with our students in metrics of overall achievement for our school in general categories of ELA and Math achievement scores. We hope to see this trend to continue with our professional development coaching teachers on language acquisition and how they can support students in goals toward English progress proficiency. Our MLP teacher has also make it abundantly clear that she is a resource to help support teachers as they support students, so if a teacher is struggling with an ML, the professional development and question opportunity should have helped teachers see how accessible and willing to help she is.

Use Disciplined Inquiry to Drive Improvement

One of the most valid reasons for school districts across the country to adopt improvement science as a tool for improvement is that it respects the realities of busy school days while demanding evidence of what works or does not. By identifying where

our teachers believe they need the most support coupled with the expertise from the root cause analysis and literature review, our team was able to transform ideas into a tangible product that will reflect the investments of everyone involved. This will help continue to build our capacity to serve all students.

Plan-Do-Study-Act cycles have worked for the automobile and healthcare industries for years and they are a practical and reliable tool for those of us in the world of education (Langley et al., 2009). The turnaround time on PDSA cycles is fast rather than the slow pace of red-taped bureaucracy, providing feedback that can impact student experience quickly as we experience in this dissertation in practice. The power to quickly impart change for our students is powerful and a needed change for our field.

Accelerate Learning Through Networked Communities

Our MLP teacher works with five schools beyond ours and she is a literal network for the ML community in our area. My goal is to support her with any learning from our building, though the reality is that she brings the wealth of her network as she serves our students each time she sets foot in our school. Improvement work helps me recognize and honor her work even more and my goal is to ensure that other principals are also recognizing her expertise across the network of our schools for our shared students and families.

Additional future NIC (Networked Improvement Community) opportunities include other MLP teachers across our district and with our district coordinator for multilingual learners. We have strong support in finding solutions with our current resources through our district and will share what we are able to do with others. Beyond our district, we also have potential partnerships with other middle schools via the South

Carolina Association of School Administrators or the South Carolina Association of Middle Level Educators to share our work and network with schools attempting to solve a similar problem.

Limitations

The goal of this dissertation in practice is to help improve the level of English progress proficiency for our multilingual students. We are limited in that this time frame and canvas are but a small fraction of a larger system to address that goal. A primary tool for problem solving was an anonymous survey, so we are lacking direct correlation to the content area, years of experience, or additional demographic information concerning teachers that could have been utilized for shaping professional development. This work is specific to a middle school in South Carolina and the regulations impacting how we can work with our multilingual learners are not necessarily that of all schools in the United States and abroad.

Recommendations to Continue Our Work

In addition to the change idea featured in this dissertation in practice, we have also started investigating how we can maximize the master schedule for our multilingual learners which was identified as a potential primary driver on our driver diagram. Beginning next school year, our goal is to schedule our MLs so that they are together during the exploratory block for Academic Enrichment which is a study-hall type course. This allows students to work with our MLP teacher during a non-academic time rather than being pulled out of core content classes.

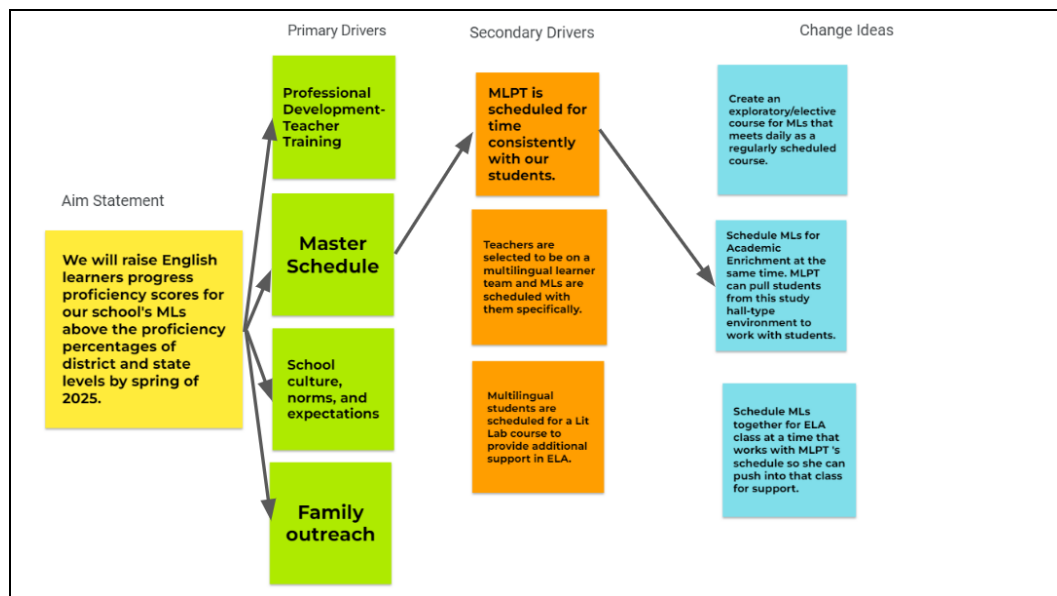


Figure 5.1 Updated Driver Diagram

We have also provided a new classroom space for our MLP teacher and will be working to make sure we create an environment that is welcoming and supportive of learning for our students. I have updated a driver diagram that demonstrates our thought process on the master schedule as a driver to improve English progress proficiency for our students (Figure 5.1, Appendix J).

Another idea from our Driver Diagram was to embed our MLP teacher in our content-specific PLCs (Professional Learning Communities). We received strong feedback from teachers that they do want to receive coaching specific to their content areas, so we will be working on scheduling our MLP teacher to attend PLC meetings of each core content area to help advise those teachers on what is unique to their content area for multilingual learners and how they can best help their students show what they know. This is an area that the improvement team did not recognize as being so important, and this serves as another example of listening to those closest to the problem in order to help find the best solutions.

Final Leadership Reflection

There are multiple leadership styles that can be assigned to school leaders, but I believe the work of improvement science is best carried out with a blend of distributive and transformative leadership styles. A leader must be willing to let go of some of the control of the process, distributing the typical hands-on expectations of traditional research, and in doing so, can expect some transformation of themselves and others who are able to share their expertise so that problems can be solved. As Malloy and Leithwood (2017) state,

Distributed leadership is not about people working independently on the tasks that the formal leader has requested. Distribution of leadership implies that a network of individuals is working more or less interdependently to enact leadership practices toward a common goal (p. 70).

My goal as a leader is that I will be a catalyst to help others step into their own leadership capabilities that will make a positive difference for our students and staff. Though this may require coaching as someone is learning a new position or responsibility, ultimately my goal is to create teams that reflect I trust others to grapple, grow, and hone their own leadership skills under the distributive model of leadership. This requires me to convey that I am a leader who is safe for someone to express vulnerability if they are in doubt of their abilities and also that I am honest in coaching if someone needs to improve in how they are approaching their work. I am thankful for the leaders who have provided me with distributed opportunities and in doing so, have transformed me and my ability to lead. Distributed leadership in improvement science means that same level of trust is imperative as different team members may take on different aspects of the work, yet

everyone is working toward the same aim statement to solve a problem for our students. A strong improvement team recognizes the interdependence they have on one another and the importance of trust, and I am thankful that in our roles as assistant principal of instruction, MLP teacher, and principal, we have worked so well together as we have brainstormed, challenged our current structures, and looked actively for avenues of change for students.

Bennis and Nanus (2007) described a transformative leader as one “who commits people to action, who converts followers into leaders, and who may convert leaders into agents of change” (p. 3). Improvement science also challenges leaders to recognize “the limits of what they actually know” and “that their efforts to intervene will almost surely beget unintended outcomes and that they can do harm as well as good” (Bryk et al., 2017, p. 191). The care and consideration volunteers have shared with us demonstrated to me that we have teachers who want to take a greater role in serving our multilingual learners and that given the opportunity and support, they will help lead this charge for our staff and our students. My goal is to continue to share the power of improvement science and the benefits of systems thinking to the benefit of our students, so that our staff will also understand the transformative potential that could positively impact their work from classroom management routines, to how they are selecting instructional materials, to how they are assessing their students for mastery of standards.

This DiP work is just the beginning of making improvement science and practical measures the routine approach of how we solve problems on our campus. We are just in the beginning phases of helping our teachers see how improvement science can impact their own work in the classroom and how they support students. As someone who spent a

decade in corporate America, I appreciate that much of improvement science cuts through the weight of the red tape and bureaucracy that can tie up schools and instead simply seeks to find what works. I find it exciting that we are taking the experiences of industries beyond education including Toyota and the healthcare industry and applying a similar systems-approach to our schools (Langley et al., 2009).

Systems Thinking

This dissertation in practice and the classes preparing me to get to this point have provided an opportunity for our staff to hear more about systems-approaches to how we grow our students. As a leader, my hope is that our staff will continue to question and improve our systems to ensure we are providing our very best with the resources we have for our students, staff, and families. Improvement science and systems improvement are not concepts to be locked away in this paper or an individual professional development session, but a part of the culture of the building.

At the beginning of the past two school years, I opened with a reminding our staff on systems thinking and how important it is that they let our administration team know when a system isn't working well. We've had tweaks and changes to how we manage some of our day-to-day operations that have lessened confusion for both students and teachers and my goal is that these conversations will always be on the table as we just make continuous improvement of our systems the norm. The true goal is to continue to model this until this also becomes the norm for how teachers are approaching their instruction so that they feel the empowerment to do what works for them based on the students they have year to year and even block to block and day to day. An area that I would like to further explore is how much variation is in the average teacher's system in

one day, yet they are provided with fairly prescriptive curriculum, standards, and tools and in some cases, large numbers of students to manage all at one time with requirements to manage IEPs and 504s for individual students. How many systems are we asking teachers to manage at one time each and every day?

When I closed out the year in June of 2023 at our annual staff luncheon, I reminded people that my door is always open to ways we can improve any of our systems and that if they had anything they wanted to share on the way out, to please let me know. I reminded them that we all have unique perspectives about the work in our building and that means we might have different ideas on how to improve things. One of my team leaders sent me an email that very afternoon as he was closing out the year with the subject line “since you asked...” and he shared three valid concerns that were part of our systems that could be improved easily but were all things I had never noticed from my viewpoint. Each of the items on his list were minor adjustments we could make to improve our overall systems for our students, no PDSA cycles even required. In one email, he addressed three things I could not see from my position. This past fall I overheard our school secretary reminding someone, “Don’t forget, we already have a system for that!” and it made me smile. Anytime we can already have a system that works well for those who need it in place, we have just helped save someone some time and that can be priceless to those working to support students in a K12 environment.

In the internal staff newsletter at the end of the first quarter of the 2023-2024 school year I wrote: “I encourage you to take just a moment to think about the systems you have in place and how you can either lock them in place or run some small tests for changes as we move into the second quarter. And as always, if you have an idea for how

to tweak one of our school-wide systems, please let me know!” My goal is to make it the norm that everyone is open to evaluating what works and what does not work, and that they feel empowered to figure out what might improve the situation. Our students cannot afford for us to wait if something is not working.

Our faculty recently met to address how to best support students who are our lowest 20% in terms of achievement on state testing. We began by asking teachers to look at their own gradebooks and to ask a simple question: Why are these the kids in the lowest 20%? We provided a simple Google form for teachers to provide feedback as a PLC on some key questions to help us figure out why these kids are struggling. We gathered the data and presented it to them the next meeting. We asked teachers between that meeting and the next to do one thing – listen to their kids. We are working through root cause analysis on our next problem with our staff and students. Our kids who are the lowest 20% are the ones closest to the problem as they are this group, so it is up to us to learn from them and our teachers are the best trained and positioned to listen. This is how improvement science can come to life in a building and shift things from where those of us who are normally leading the charge from the front of the room with all the access to power set it aside to learn from those who hold the real power in knowing.

Conclusion

The focus on systems allows us to better serve people, and improvement science ensures we hear all voices as we untangle problems. As a leader, I have to remember that though I might be more familiar with the tools of improvement science, I most likely am not the most familiar with or closest to the problems we will continue to solve, and my ego and I must always step to the side to let the experts closest to the problem have the

loudest voice. This can be uncomfortable when leaders are also charged with accountability. After all, full control allows one fully to explain the results, good or bad. However, it is impossible to control what one does not know, and improvement science flips the power of the knowing how to solve problems by honoring the true power in a system and rarely is this with the leader. Therefore, leadership in improvement science can feel somewhat paradoxical. Leaders generally have access to power and resources, yet those who are most likely to be furthest removed from these elements are the ones who should be dictating how these tools are wielded often upon the very systems that impact their lives. Leadership in improvement science means to lean into vulnerability about what I do not know. It is not about leading harder or louder, but leading by listening and learning.

As long as I have been working in schools, I do not remember ever being taught how students acquire language itself and how that might have impacted my selection of strategies or assessment to best teach multilingual learners. I am excited that through the research of published literature there is much to be said on how students learn language and how teachers can help these students even more. I am most excited that this is what our teachers have asked us to provide for them and that as the improvement team, we learned to listen to those closest to the work.

I look forward to sharing with our teachers in ongoing professional development sessions as this will help reinforce to those who shared their expertise that we are not only listening, but we are leading with their valuable feedback. This flips the script on what normally happens when programs are launched by school districts and schools when teachers are told what they will be doing. In our current teacher shortage, we must make

it evident that we value the voices of those closest to the work even more, and I look forward to the pattern from this dissertation in practice becoming the model for how we learn from our teachers on what they need versus us telling them what they need. Improvement science can be done in K12 schools as part of how teachers and schools do their work, not as a “something else” a teacher or school does.

As long as a leader is willing to be vulnerable to the realities of his or her systems, improvement science can find a crack in the door to open the possibilities of change for students. We thought one thing about our staff needs, they told us another, and our students are better for it as we continue to help support our teachers as they work to help our MLs show what they know no matter where they are in their language acquisition journey. Improvement science can be messy as a leader navigates what needs to be measured and how to keep the processes practical, but anything too neat in education should probably be suspect as our students and teachers are not widgets. Improvement science respects the human side of our work, and in doing so, helps us develop more respectful changes for our people. It works.

The most liberating prospect of writing a concluding chapter for a dissertation in practice is that it is not the grand finale or finish line of the work. In fact, it is in many ways just the beginning. After all, we will not be able to gauge the direct impact of our work until months or years after the words have been filed away. Therein lies the power of improvement science as it lives on well beyond one person or one story and teaches leaders that it was never about them to begin with. It is about honoring those whom we serve and getting out of the way of those who are closest to the problem with the expertise needed to truly make a change.

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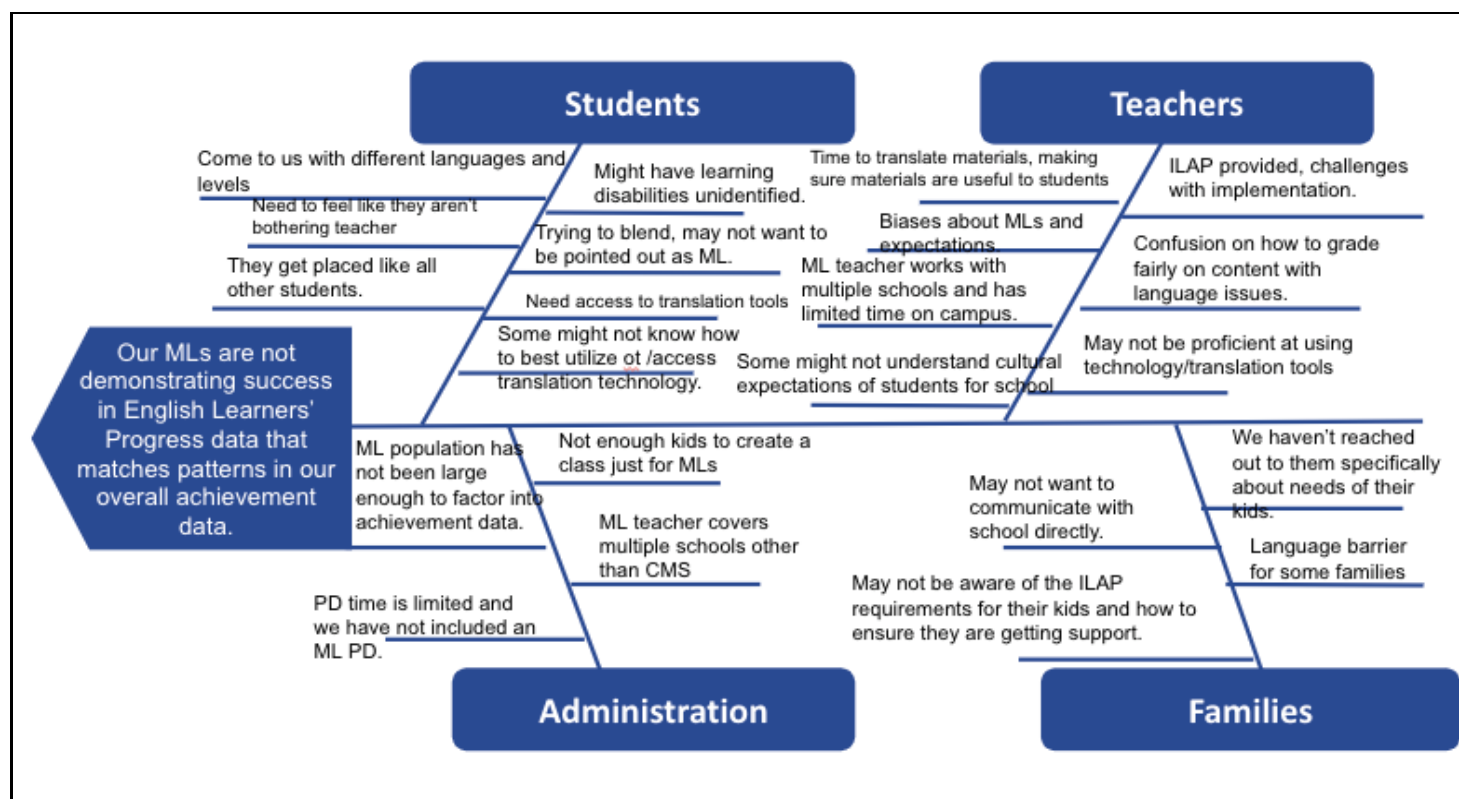
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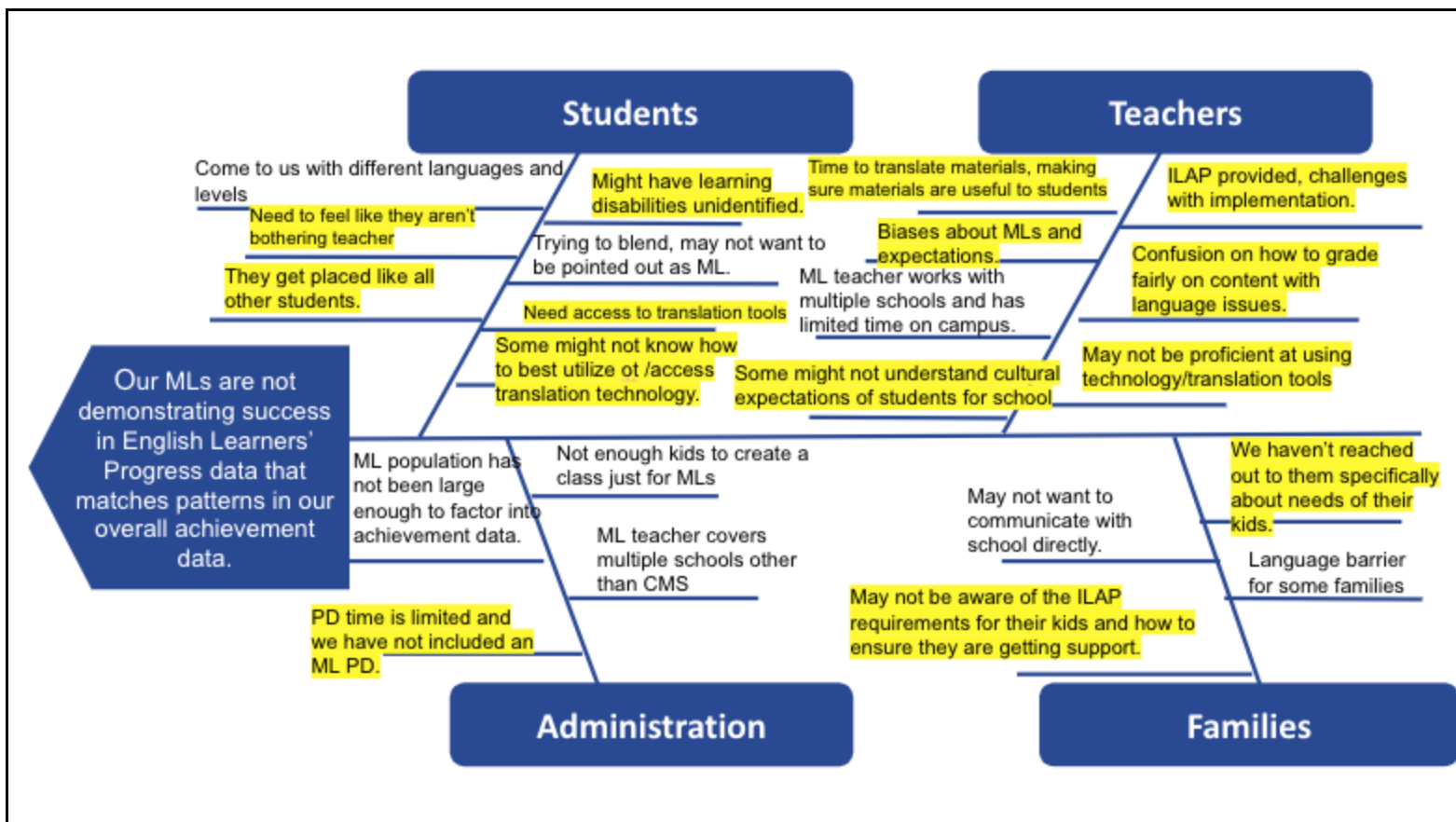
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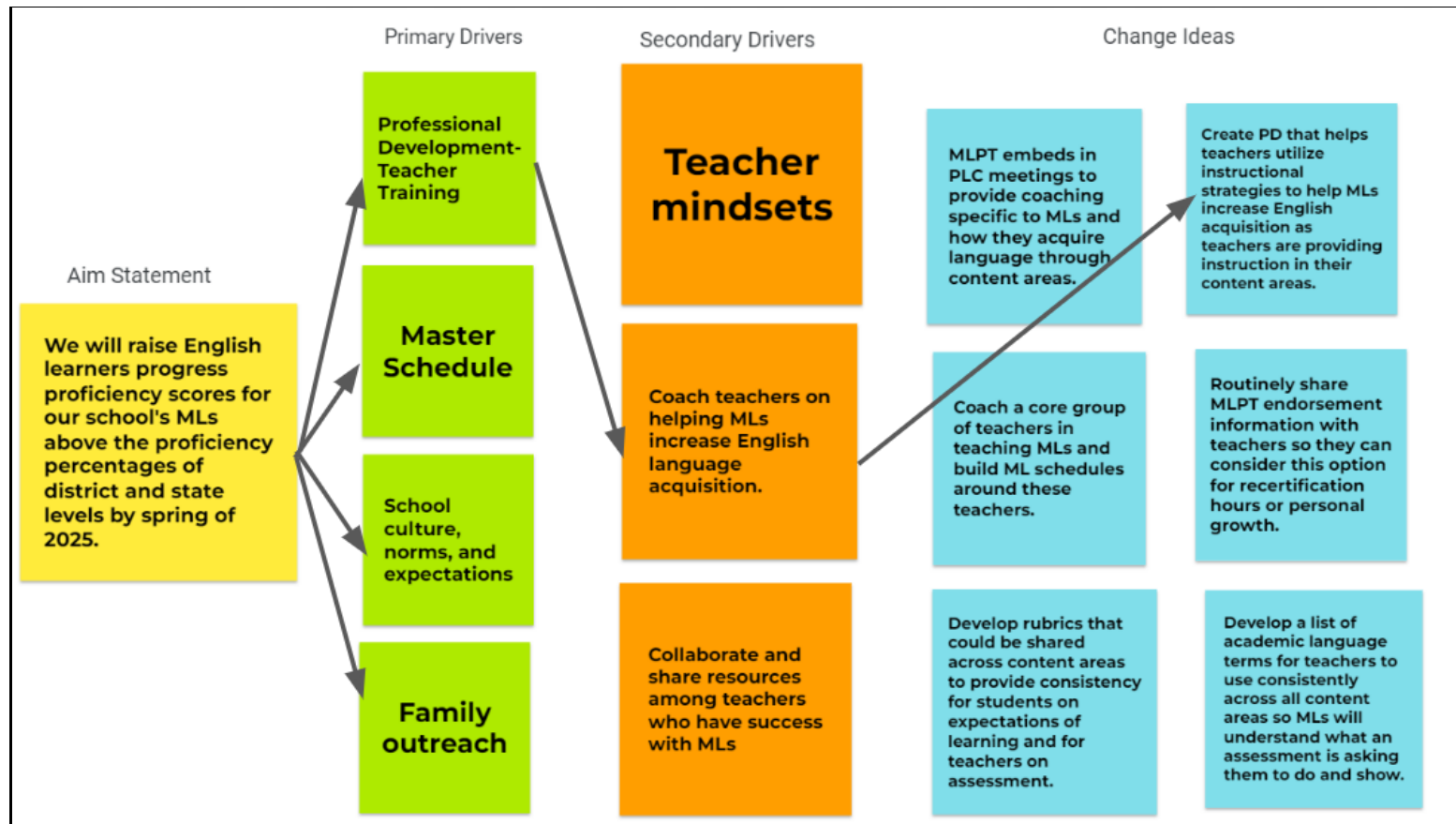
APPENDIX A: FISHBONE DIAGRAM



APPENDIX B: FISHBONE DIAGRAM WITH HIGHLIGHTED AREAS OF INFLUENCE



APPENDIX C: DRIVER DIAGRAM



APPENDIX D: SELECTED RESOURCES TO SUPPORT TEACHING MULTILINGUAL LEARNERS

Cultural considerations of schooling for multilingual learners
<p>ESL and Culture Resource. https://sites.sandiego.edu/esl/learning-about-cultures/, (Alexandrowicz, 2016)</p> <p><i>Four gestures to reconsider when teaching an ELL class</i> https://k12teacherstaffdevelopment.com/tlb/4-gestures-to-reconsider-when-teaching-an-ell-class/ (2022)</p> <p>The Silent Period of Second Language Acquisition https://www.eslbase.com/teaching/silent-period-second-language-acquisition (Foppoli, 2022)</p> <p><i>What Teachers Should Know About Instruction for English Language Learners.</i> https://educationnorthwest.org/sites/default/files/resources/what-teachers-should-know-about-instruction-for-ells.pdf (Deussen, 2008).</p>
Coaching of teachers with multilingual learners
<p><i>English Learner (EL) Coach Toolkit.</i> https://www.louisianabelieves.com/docs/default-source/english-learners/el-coach-toolkit.pdf?sfvrsn=4d03991f_6 (Louisiana Department of Education, 2022)</p> <p><i>If it doesn't work for teachers, it doesn't work.</i> https://hthunboxed.org/podcasts/if-it-doesnt-work-for-teachers-it-doesnt-work (Patton, 2021)</p> <p>Instructional Coaching for Teachers of ELs in Inclusive Environments: Practical Insights for a Low-Incidence EL Setting https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1263581.pdf (Nuss, 2020)</p> <p>Typical Language Development and Second Language Acquisition https://www.pathstoliteracy.org/typical-language-development-and-second-language-acquisition/ (Cushman, 2022)</p> <p>Preparing Content Teachers to Work with Multilingual Students: https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1336&context=teachlearnfapub (Viesca and Teemant, 2019)</p>
Instructional strategies to support multilingual learners
<p>Challenges for English Language Learners (ELLs) in Content Area Learning by Judie Haynes</p>

https://sac.edu/AcademicProgs/ScienceMathHealth/MathCenter/PDF/Tutor%20Training/Module%204/Challenges_%20Tips%20for%20English%20Language%20Learners.pdf (Haynes, 1997)

High Impact Language Development Practices: Breaking Down Language Barriers for English Learners

<https://www.corelearn.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/ELD-Webinar-Resources.pdf> (Youngren, 2017).

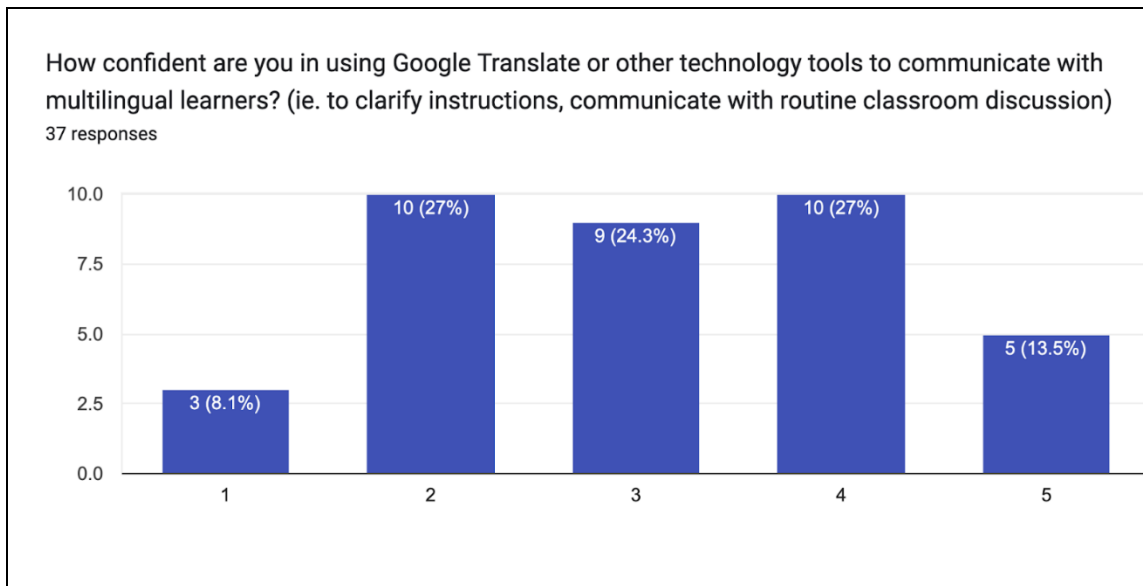
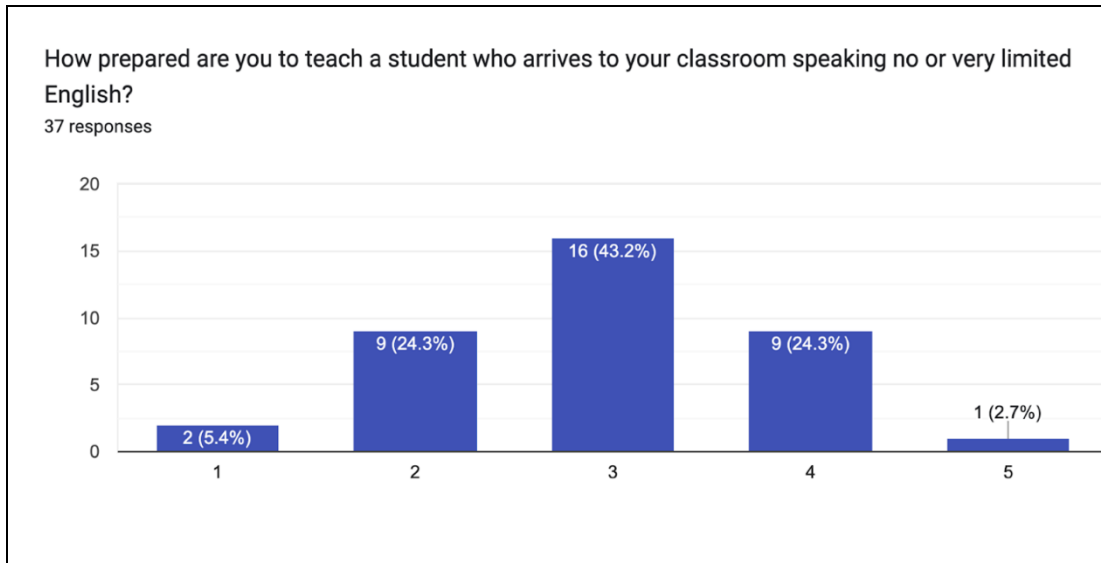
7 strategies for teaching math to students who are learning English.

<https://www.hmhco.com/blog/strategies-for-teaching-math-to-english-language-learners-ells>, (Blankman, 2022)

Why UDL Matters for English Language Learners

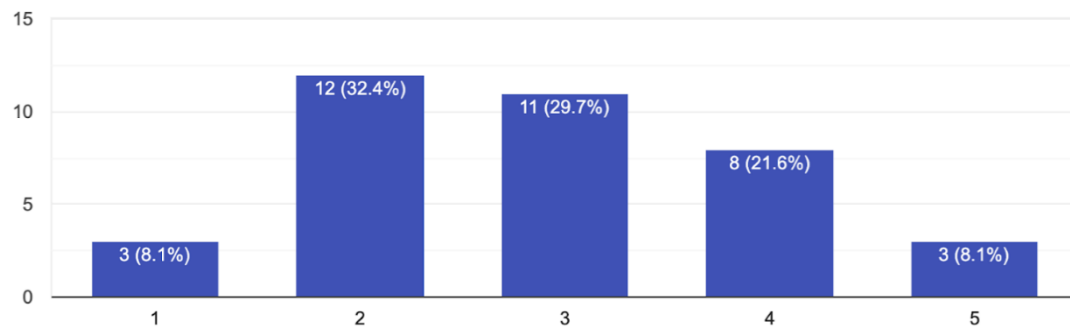
<https://www.languagemagazine.com/2018/03/09/why-udl-matters-for-english-language-learners/> (Novak, 2018)

APPENDIX E: SCHOOL-WIDE TEACHER SURVEY



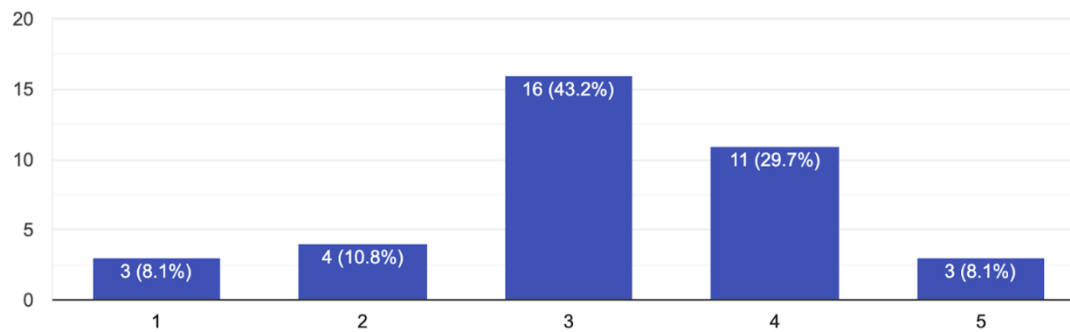
How confident are you in grading the learning of multilingual learners?

37 responses



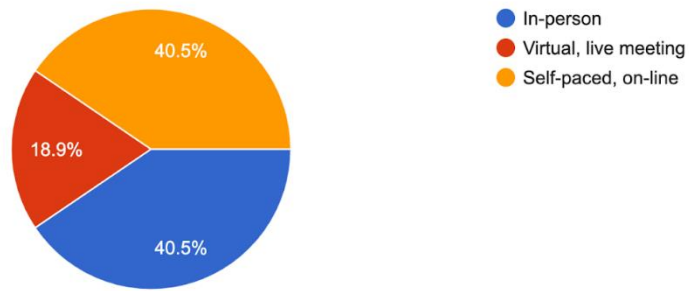
How confident are you in your ability to deliver modifications in instruction based on a student's ILAP (individual learning acquisition plan)?

37 responses



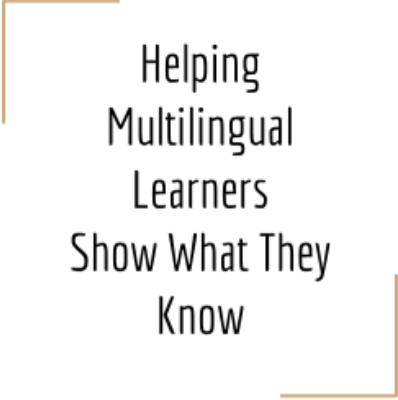
Which type of professional development do you most prefer?

37 responses



APPENDIX F: PDSA CYCLE 1 SLIDES

Section 1



Helping Multilingual Learners Show What They Know

1

Goals:

- Become familiar with language acquisition and how MLs can show what they know.
- Uncover challenges for MLs in specific content areas.
- Learn technology tips for working with MLs
- Learn how to connect and partner with our MLT, Barbra Hunter.

2



Multilingual Learners Updates for South Carolina



3

Terminology update as of June 2022

English Learner (EL)

Dually Identified English
Learner with a Disability (ELD)

ESOL Teacher

ESOL Coordinator

Multilingual Learner (ML)

Multilingual Learner with a
Disability (MLWD)

Multilingual Learner Program
Teacher (MLPT)

Multilingual Learner Program
Coordinator

4

ELs to MLs - Updates in terminology from the SCDE

The South Carolina Department of Education (SCDE) is taking an asset-based approach by referring to English learners (ELs) as multilingual learners (MLs).

A ML brings diverse cultural identities and new perspectives to strengthen classrooms and communities. MLs achieve the South Carolina College and Career Readiness Standards while navigating between native and instructional languages. MLs provide the global perspective that is needed of the South Carolina Graduate and emphasize the advantages of bi-/multilingualism to honor students' identities as strengths rather than deficits.

June 7, 2022, South Carolina Department of Education

5

Multilingual Learners across the globe

Almost one in four students in public K-12 schools across the United States speak a language other than English at home according to census reports (Anderson, 2015).

According to one recent study, 80% of European students in equivalent K12 education were studying one or more foreign languages while in the United States that number was 20% (Devlin, 2018).

Between 60-70% of the entire world's population speaks at least two languages and many speak three or more languages (Martinez, 2018).

Here at CMS one of our MLs has been taking Japanese lessons on the weekends as she has also been learning English.

6

How are students identified as MLs?

ML students are identified by a survey given to any family of a student upon initial enrollment in South Carolina public schools. There are three questions on the survey:

1. What is the language that the student first acquired?
2. What language(s) is spoken most often by the student?
3. What is the primary language used in the home, regardless of the language spoken by the student?

If a family enters anything other than English for any of those questions, the student is automatically given an English Proficiency Screening. Students must score a proficiency level of 4.4 on this test and reach a 4.0 or higher in listening, speaking, reading, and writing on the ACCESS test which is the test utilized by the State of South Carolina. Students are then monitored for four years after they reach proficiency (South Carolina Department of Education, 2022).

7

Section 2

Student Experience of Language Acquisition

9

Why would a regular classroom teacher need to know about language acquisition?

Knowing where a student is in the process of language acquisition can help teachers

- know how to best assess MLs to help take confusion out of grading.
- understand where students are on a continuum of learning a new language as they are also learning content.
- give themselves grace and patience when it seems a student has gone silent and is not learning English as fast as we might expect.
- create a shared vocabulary to best plan for and support our MLs as a team.

10

Language Acquisition: Five main phases

Students acquiring a second language progress through five predictable stages:

1. Preproduction
2. Early Production
3. Speech Emergence
4. Intermediate Fluency
5. Advanced Fluency

11

Stage	Characteristics	Approximate Time Frame	Teacher prompts to help students show what they know
Preproduction	The student: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Has minimal comprehension. • Does not verbalize. • Nods "Yes" and "No." • Draws and points. 	0–6 months	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Show me ... • Circle the ... • Where is ... ? • Who has ... ?

12

The Silent Period of Preproduction: The volume is loud on learning!

- Can range from 2-6 months or even longer
- A student in this phase understands much more than he/she can speak.
- Comprehension precedes production. Students might be able to follow along in class, but producing the same content or skill could be much more challenging.
- If a student is not able to produce, often he or she needs more time in the silent period to process the new language.

13

Stage	Characteristics	Approximate Time Frame	Teacher prompts to help students show what they know
Early Production	The student <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Has limited comprehension • Produces one- or two-word responses. • Uses key words and familiar phrases. • Uses present-tense verbs. 	6 months–1 year	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Yes/no questions • Either/or questions • Who ... ? • What ... ? • How many ... ?

14

Stage	Characteristics	Approximate Time Frame	Teacher prompts to help students show what they know
Speech Emergence	The student <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Has good comprehension. • Can produce simple sentences. • Makes grammar and pronunciation errors. • Frequently misunderstands jokes or idioms. 	1–3 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Why ... ? • How ... ? • Explain ... • Questions requiring phrase or short-sentence answers

15

Stage	Characteristics	Approximate Time Frame	Teacher prompts to help students show what they know
Intermediate Fluency	The student <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Has excellent comprehension. • Makes few grammatical errors. 	3–5 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What would happen if ... ? • Why do you think ... ? • Questions requiring more than a sentence response

16

Stage	Characteristics	Approximate Time Frame	Teacher prompts to help students show what they know
Advanced Fluency	The student <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • has a near-local level of speech. • has mastery of grammar. 	5–7 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Decide if ... • Retell ...

17

Questions to coach MLs to show what they know...

1. Help students share, expand and clarify their own thinking: Give time to think, Can you say more about that? What do you mean by that? Can you give me an example?
1. Help students listen carefully to one another. What did your partner say? Who can repeat what ___ just said?
1. Help students deepen their reasoning. Why do you think that? What's your evidence? Is there anything in the text that made you think that? Does it always work that way? How is your idea like ___'s idea?
1. Encourage students to think with others. Do you agree or disagree with ___? And why? Are you saying the same thing as ___? Who can add onto ___'s idea? Can anyone take that idea and push it a little further? Who can explain in their own words what ___ means?

18

Section 3

Challenges for MLs across content areas

19

ELA

Most literature is culture bound. We expect students to have prior knowledge of literary genres such as fairy tales, myths, and legends. If the teacher has not activated prior knowledge or built background information, knowing the vocabulary will not solve the problem. MLs may be able to read the words but it doesn't mean they will understand the text. They are not aware of information that the author left unsaid - the information that "everyone knows."

20

Here are some specific challenges MLs may face when learning to read material in English:

- an abundance of idioms and figurative language.
- density of unfamiliar vocabulary.
- use of homonyms and synonyms.
- spelling rules and grammar usage especially the "exceptions to the rules" (i before e, except after c...weird).
- word order, sentence structure and syntax that are completely unfamiliar.
- difficult text structure with a topic sentence, supporting details and conclusion. Not all languages and cultures follow this pattern of storytelling.
- unfamiliarity with the connotative and denotative meanings of words.
- MLs may not have practice in expressing an opinion about text.
- literary terms for story development are abstract without full understanding of what they mean as we apply them in English.
- unfamiliarity with drawing conclusions, analyzing characters and predicting outcomes.
- imagery and symbolism in text are difficult, especially if their language and culture do not share common themes.

21

Math

Mathematics is not just arithmetic. There are considerable challenges for English language learners in math. We may find that our MLs use different processes to arrive at answers. Problem solving is not just language but a thought process. Students from other cultures may be more concerned with getting the correct response than with the process. They may not be able to justify their answers as required in many classrooms.

22

Here are some specific challenges MLs face when learning Math:

- formation of numbers varies from culture to culture
- use of decimal point and comma vary from culture to culture
- Students have no experience with our measurement system; it is an abstract to them. (inches vs centimeters, miles vs. kilometers, etc.)
- Math is not spirally taught in many cultures. So students may not know a lot about geometry, for example.
- Many students have never seen or worked with manipulatives. They may not take a lesson using manipulatives seriously.
- Math curricula in their countries may be primarily calculation.
- Word problems may not be introduced until much later if at all.
- Estimating, rounding, and geometry are not often taught as early in other cultures.
- Mathematical terms do not always translate well.
- Mental math may be the norm in their prior school. Students may not show work in addition, subtraction, multiplication and division or they may show work in a different way.

23

Science

MLs may lack of background knowledge in science. Our "hands-on" approach can be different from what they are used to. Drawing conclusions on their own may be difficult for MLs. In some cultures, students are not trained nor expected to make guesses.

24

Here are some specific challenges MLs face when learning Science:

- The vocabulary of science presents a huge difficulty. There are specific terms for the student to learn.
- Material is covered quickly.
- Directions are often multistep and difficult
- There are many concepts explained on each page of a science text.
- Cooperative learning may not fit in with student experiences in learning as in labs.
- Visuals may be confusing and difficult to understand.
- Sentence structure is complex and the passive voice is used in textbooks.
- Students may lack background in scientific method.

25

Social Studies

Social studies and U.S. history may be challenging as not all countries spend so much academic time focused on their own country or on a region as small as a state. Keep in mind that MLs may need more support in understanding background history that explains the significance of what is studied in our schools.

26

Here are some specific challenges MLs face when learning Social Studies:

- Lack of familiarity with historical terms, government processes, and vocabulary.
- Social Studies text contains complex sentences and passive voice.
- MLs may not be used to expressing their personal opinions.
- Concepts which do not exist in all cultures are difficult. This includes privacy, democratic processes, rights of citizens, free will.
- No concept of movement within the structure of a society or how their previously known structures do or do not exist in the United States.
- Use in our schools of "timeline" teaching vs. learning history by "dynasty" or "period."
- Amount of text covered and the inability to tell what is important in the text and what is not important.

27

Exploratory/Electives

- Performing and Visual Arts are often areas where our multilingual learners step into coursework seamlessly as the “language” of music and art does not present challenges as in most classes.
- Exploratory/Elective classes that require highly specialized knowledge such as vocabulary should not be avoided as with the correct supports, a multilingual learner will be able to succeed.

28

Section 4

Technology Tips to help support your MLs

29

Technology Tips for working with MLs

- <https://translate.google.com/>
- Google Docs --->Tools--->Translate Document
- Google what you are trying to do with translation and it will most likely tell you.
- Quizziz will allow students to change the language.
- Dreambox and Progress Learning - Spanish options

30

If you need to call home with translation support please use this service. We are happy to sit with you while you make the call!



How to Use Interactive Voice Response (IVR)

- Step 1:** Call 1 877-963-7466
- Step 2:** Enter Account Number [redacted] followed by # sign
- Step 3:** Select 1 to be connected directly to your Spanish interpreter, or
Select 2 to be connected directly to your Vietnamese interpreter, or
Select 9 for all other languages
- *If you require a 3rd party call, press 9 to reach a Customer Service Representative**
- Step 4:** Enter School Location Number (School ID), followed by # sign

The CMS school ID is [redacted]

31

Partnering with our MLPT (Multilingual Learner Program Teacher)

- Assistance with understanding a student's phase of language acquisition
- How to help students show what they know in your class
- Tips for implementing ILAP plan
- Ideas for technology
- Resources to help support your content area

MLT's contact information included here

32

References

- Anderson, M. D. (2015, November 5). *How politics and bilingualism collide in the classroom*. The Atlantic. Retrieved December 6, 2022, from <https://www.theatlantic.com/education/archive/2015/10/history-bilingual-education/412543/>
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- Foppoli, J. J. (2022, April 1). *The silent period of Second language acquisition*. ESLbase. Retrieved December 19, 2022, from <https://www.eslbase.com/teaching/silent-period-second-language-acquisition>

33

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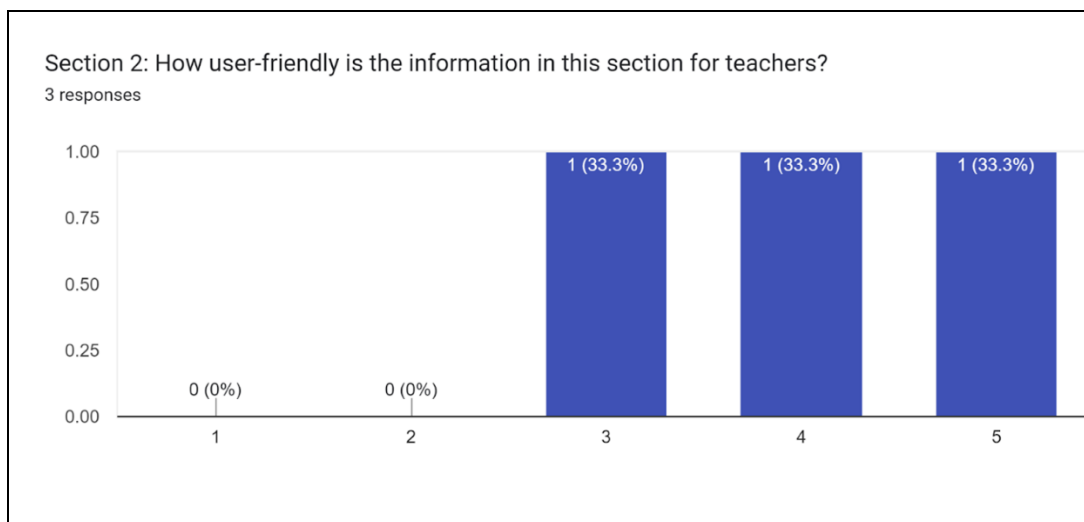
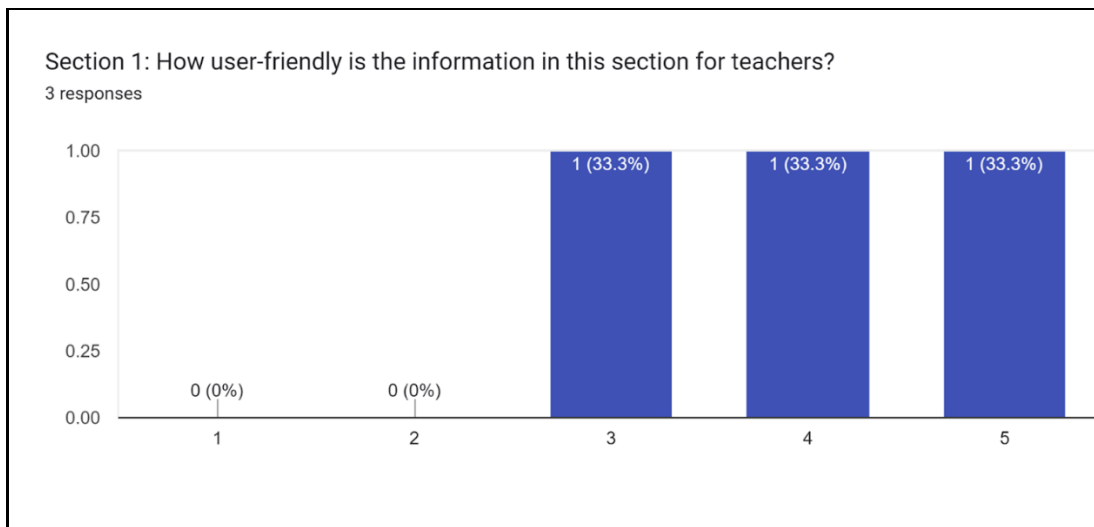
Krashen, & Terrell, T. D. (1983). *The natural approach : language acquisition in the classroom* (1st ed.). Pergamon Press.

Martinez, R. A. (2018). Beyond the English learner label: Recognizing the richness of bi/multilingual students' linguistic repertoires. *The Reading Teacher*, 71(5), 515–522. <https://doi.org/10.1002/trtr.1679>

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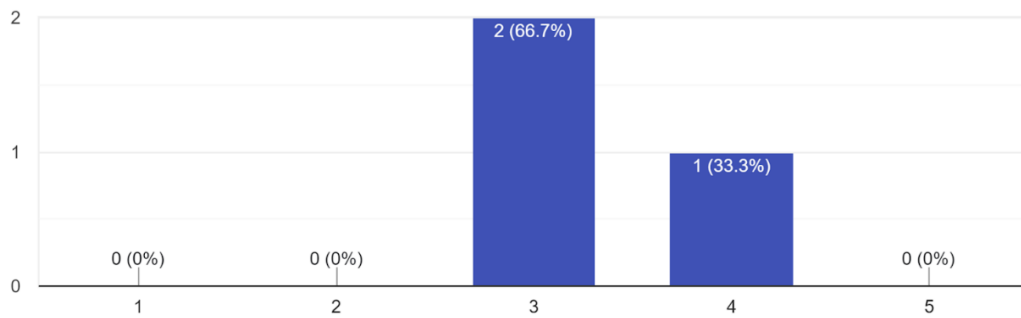
Consortium on Reaching Excellence in Education. Retrieved December 5, 2022, from <https://www.corelearn.com/>

APPENDIX G: PDSA CYCLE 1 QUANTITATIVE SURVEY RESULTS



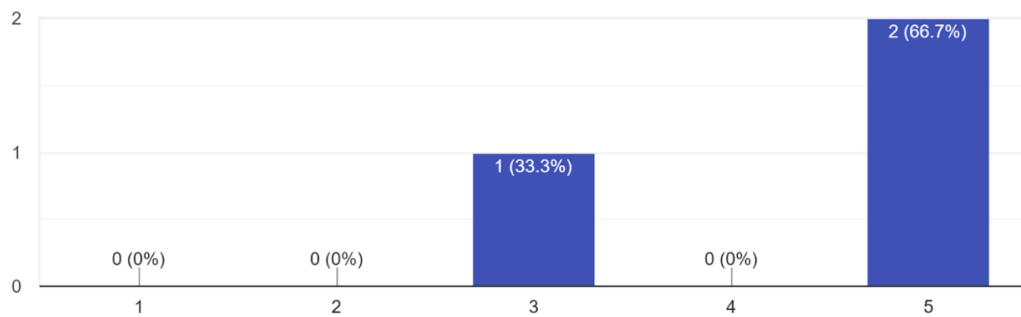
Section 3: How user-friendly is the information in this section for teachers?

3 responses



Section 4: How user-friendly is the information in this section for teachers?

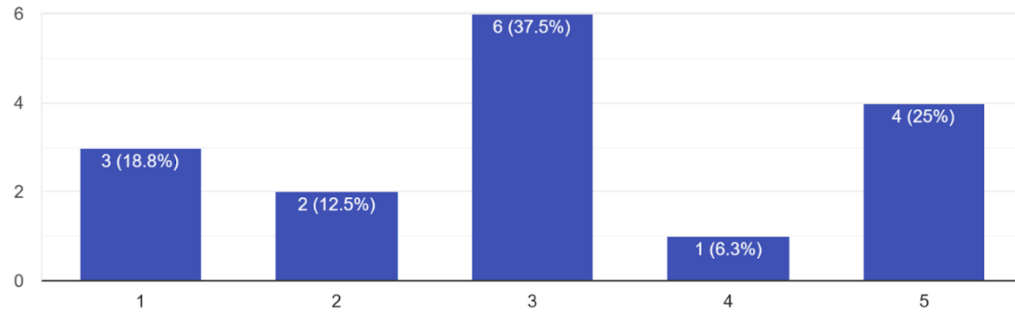
3 responses



APPENDIX H: PDSA CYCLE 2 QUANTITATIVE SURVEY RESULTS

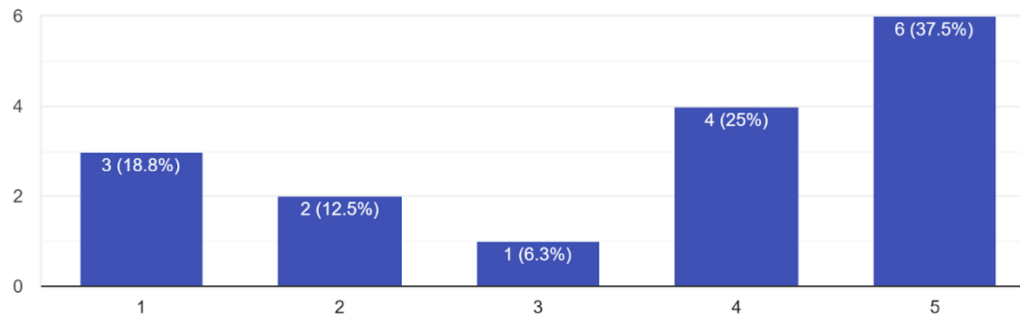
1. Do you think it would be helpful for teachers to learn why the SC Department of Education changed terminology from ESL (English as a Second Language) to ML (Multilingual Learner)?

16 responses



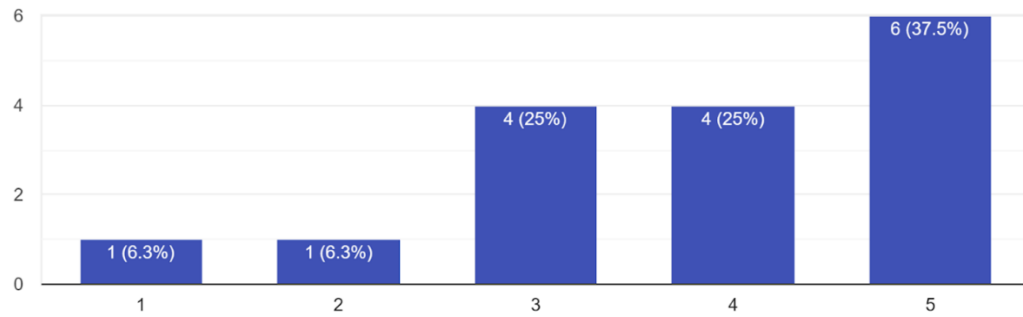
2. Do you think it would be helpful for teachers to learn about multilingualism across the world and how South Carolina compares?

16 responses



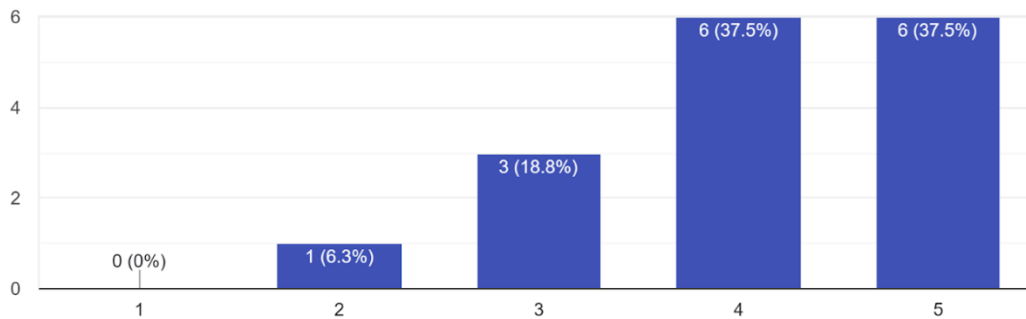
3. Do you think it would be helpful for teachers to learn how multilingual learners are identified in SC public schools?

16 responses



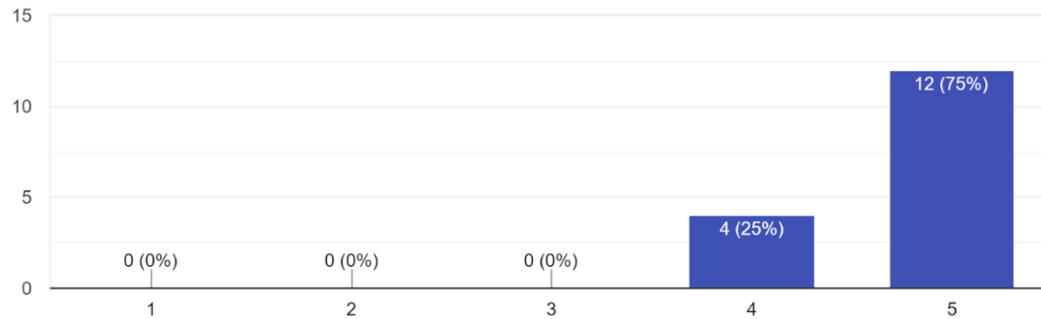
4. Do you think it would be helpful for classroom teachers to learn how many CMS students are identified as multilingual learners?

16 responses



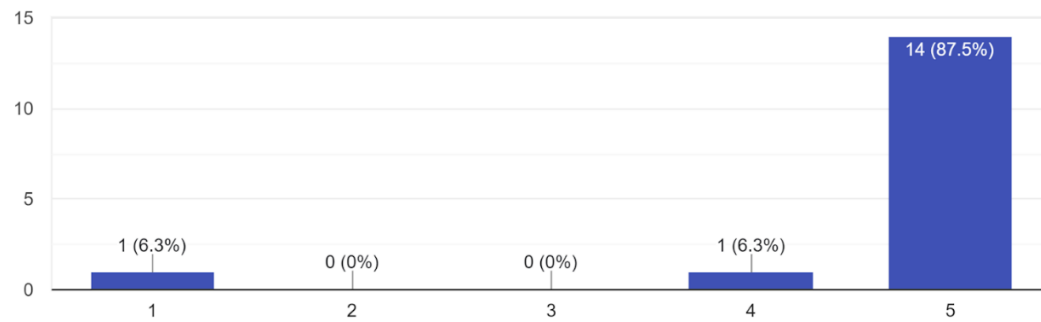
5. Do you think it would be helpful for classroom teachers to learn about the process of language acquisition and ways they can help students show w...dents are in the process of language acquisition?

16 responses



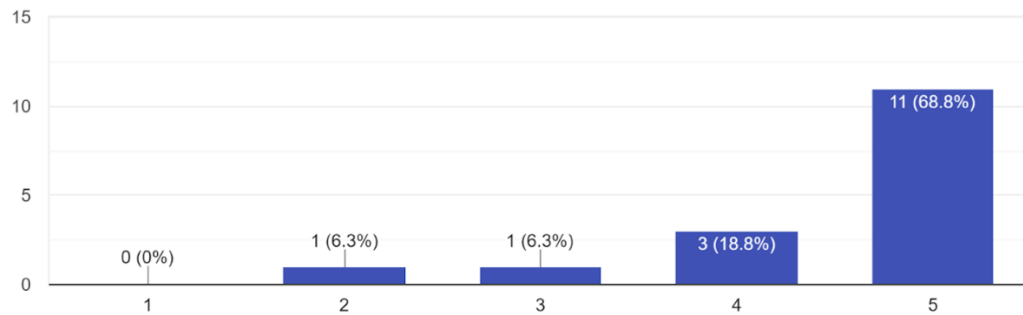
6. Do you think it would be helpful for classroom teachers to learn strategies to help assess/grade the learning of MLs?

16 responses



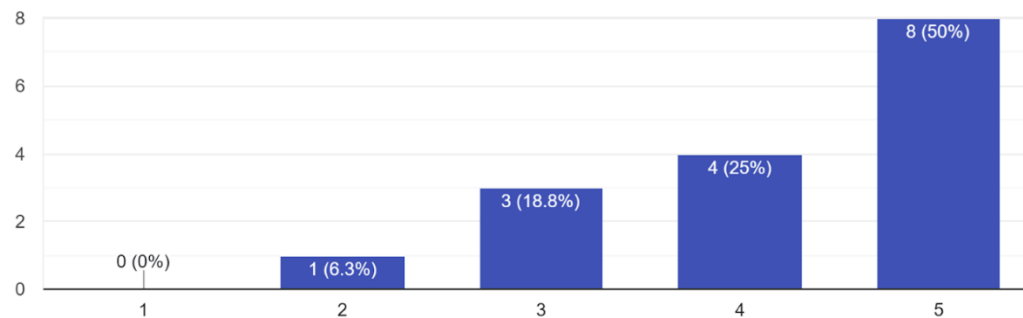
7. Do you think content-specific coaching on challenges MLs may experience in a particular course would be helpful for teachers? (For example, idiom... state or country with our systems of government.)

16 responses



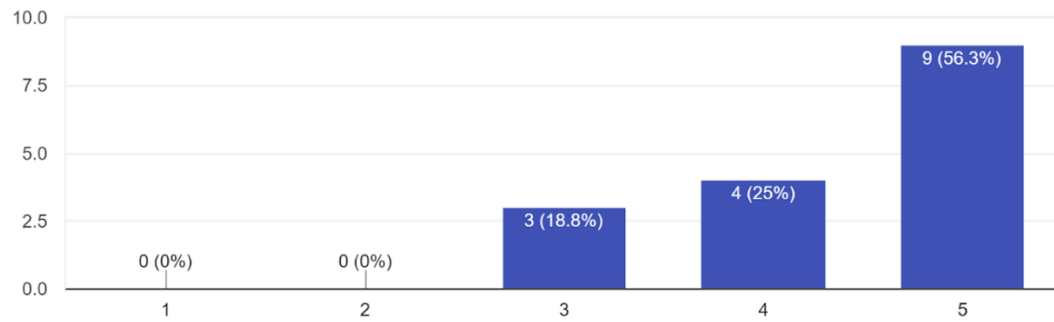
8. Do you think technology training specifically coaching teachers on how to best help multilingual learners show what they know would be helpful?

16 responses



9. Do you think technology training to help teachers communicate with families utilizing translation services via telephone or an app would be helpful?

16 responses



APPENDIX I: PDSA CYCLE 3 PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

ML Update

Multilingual Learner Program Teacher (MLPT)
Language Acquisition Overview
Assessing MLs
Questions about your kids?

Partnering with our MLPT (Multilingual Learner Program Teacher)

- Assistance with understanding a student's language level
- How to help students show what they know in your class
- Tips for implementing ILAP
- Ellevation
- Ideas specific to your content area

Email: xxxxxxxx@xxx.org

Phone:xxx-xxx-xxxx

Schools: XES, XHS, XMS, XHS, XXS, XXT

Student Experience of Language Acquisition

+

Ideas for Assessing Learning

Why would a regular classroom teacher need to know about language acquisition?

Knowing where a student is in the process of language acquisition can help teachers

- know how to best assess MLs to help take confusion out of grading.
- understand where students are on a continuum of learning a new language as they are also learning content.
- give themselves grace and patience when it seems a student has gone silent and is not learning English as fast as we might expect.
- create a shared vocabulary to best plan for and support our MLs as a team.

Language Acquisition: Five main phases

Students acquiring a second language progress through five predictable stages:

1. Pre-production
2. Early Production
3. Speech Emergence
4. Intermediate Fluency
5. Advanced Fluency

There is no exact schedule indicating when a student might move from one phase to the next. A student might appear to be in different phases according to his or her familiarity with the content of a class.

Pre-Production

Characteristics	Approximate Time Frame	Teacher prompts to help students show what they know
The student: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Has minimal comprehension.• Does not verbalize.• Nods "Yes" and "No."• Draws and points.	0–6 months	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Show me ...• Circle the ...• Where is ... ?• Who has ... ?

"Show what they know" = Assessment
If your MLs are unable to show what they know with your routine assessments, look at this column for alternate ideas.

The Silent Period of Pre-production: The volume is loud on learning!

- Can range from 2-6 months or even longer
- A student in this phase understands much more than he/she can speak.
- Comprehension precedes production. Students might be able to follow along in class, but producing the same content or skill could be much more challenging.
- If a student is not able to produce, often he or she needs more time in the silent period to process the new language.



Early Production

Characteristics	Approximate Time Frame	Teacher prompts to help students show what they know
The student <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Has limited comprehension• Produces one- or two-word responses.• Uses key words and familiar phrases.• Uses present-tense verbs.	6 months–1 year	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Yes/no questions• Either/or questions• Who ... ?• What ... ?• How many ... ?

Speech Emergence

Characteristics	Approximate Time Frame	Teacher prompts to help students show what they know
The student <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Has good comprehension. • Can produce simple sentences. • Makes grammar and pronunciation errors. • Frequently misunderstands jokes or idioms. 	1–3 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Why ... ? • How ... ? • Explain ... • Questions requiring phrase or short-sentence answers

Intermediate Fluency

Characteristics	Approximate Time Frame	Teacher prompts to help students show what they know
The student <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Has excellent comprehension. • Makes fewer grammatical errors. 	3–5 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What would happen if ... ? • Why do you think ... ? • Questions requiring more than a sentence response

This might be the phase when you have a student who is a MASTER at social English and can clearly communicate well with peers and adults struggle on assignments in your class. These students often truly have gaps in how to translate their oral skills to the Chromebook or to paper and lack in comprehension because they do not speak in "academic language" which is the language of school.

Advanced Fluency

Characteristics	Approximate Time Frame	Teacher prompts to help students show what they know
The student <ul style="list-style-type: none">• has a near-local level of speech.• has mastery of grammar.	5–7 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Decide if ...• Retell ...

Tips for Speaking with Multilingual Learners

- Speak clearly, naturally and avoid slang.
- If a student has trouble understanding you, write down what you are saying. If you have trouble understanding the student, ask him or her to write down what he/she is saying.
- Thank the student for questions. Some students are afraid to ask a question, so praising a question is a good way to encourage more.
- Don't speak too slowly; it might tend to raise your voice volume and/or to make your speech unnatural. Although it might be hard to understand your normal speech pattern, with practice the student will become familiar with it and in the long run, it will help him/her understand other native English speakers.

Reports

- ILAP
- Individual Student Report
- Ellevation Accounts

Leakington-Richard School District 5, SC
Individualized Language Acquisition Plan (ILAP)
9/29/2023

Student: Aaron Traylor
Student ID: 1000000000

Students at this level:
• Match icons or diagrams with words/concepts
• Identify characters from the literature, etc.

Students at this level:
• Identify facts and explain messages from the literature, etc.

Sample ILAP form

2023-2024
This ILAP is for:

Student Info
Student:
Student ID:
Home Language:
Years in US:
Date of Birth:

English Learner
Each EL, even domain-based domains, and domains.

Test Results
ACCESS No:
2/1/2020

Disciplines
Ar, EL, etc.

Domain

Listening

Speaking

Reading: 1.6 Emerging 2. Emerging

How do I grade a student who is struggling with English?

- Begin by ensuring that you are honoring modifications provided in the ILAP plan. These usually include
 - Oral testing
 - Extended time
 - Alternative formats
- You are the teacher. You can decide how to assess. Another option could be to assess the skill or knowledge included in the standard by asking the student to point or gesture.
- PLCs. Does someone on your team already have experience teaching MLs the current standard? Harness the expertise on our teams!
- Please reach out to MLPT or API if you need help on how to modify instruction or assessments.

- Our MLPT has her own room to help support our MLs. If you have any international flags/decor you would like to donate, please feel free to share!
- Do you have a question about your ML students or how to best support ILAP modifications? Our MLPT is available NOW to help answer!

Thank you for loving and growing all of our students!

APPENDIX J: UPDATED DRIVER DIAGRAM

