**Professional Learning Communities to Support Adult English Language Learners Who
Are Emergent Readers**

by

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The US Census Bureau estimates large numbers of adult English Language Learners (ELLs) in the US, of which only a fraction is enrolled in Adult English for Speakers of Other Languages programs. Many of these learners are emergent readers in their first language (L1) making the development of literacy in a target language challenging, yet high literacy skills are critical in accessing family-sustaining wages. Two challenges adult ESOL educators face are that 1) second language acquisition theory is predicated upon learners being able to transfer their L1 literacy skills to the target language, and 2) much of the research on building literacy skills is based on learning in L1. This leaves educators serving adult ELLs, who are emergent readers in their L1, having to adapt evidenced-based reading strategies and rely on trial and error to learn what works with this population.

This study attempted to provide a mechanism for professional learning to help build teachers' capacity and knowledge in delivering evidenced-based reading instruction (EBRI) in L2 for adult learners who are emergent readers in L1. The mechanism, an optional, literacy-focused Professional Learning Community (PLC), included a structure by which teachers would 1) engage with research on EBRI to build their knowledge, 2) discuss the application of the learning given their context of adult ELLs, many of whom are emergent readers in their L1, and 3) analyze formative assessment data to understand learner progress and make instructional decisions.

While teachers reported progress in building their knowledge of EBRI practices and recording learners' successes in meeting reading comprehension objectives, they lacked a centralized system to track student learning. Strong data systems are a critical component of a consistently productive PLC. Effective measurement to support teachers' practice as they apply and modify EBRI to match their context of adult ELLs who are emergent readers is needed to measure what is and is not working. Where these systems do not exist, this teacher-focused activity can build demand for institutional capacity for effective and appropriate data analysis systems.

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Preface

I would like to thank the teachers at School 2Gen for their hard work towards and dedication to serving immigrant families. Their commitment to life-long learning, demonstrated through their work in the PLC in addition to all they were doing to teach through the effects of a global pandemic, is inspiring. I would also like to thank friends and colleagues who from the beginning shared their resources and talent, spent hours talking effective literacy strategies, and celebrated milestones with great meals and conversation. Chantal, Kristy, Selvon, Sue, Annie and Theresa, I am so grateful for your friendship. To my committee members, Dr. Monroe, Dr. Perry and, in particular, Dr. Delale-O'Conner, thank you for your wisdom and practicality. Finally, I would like to thank my husband, Steve, for not only reading and patiently editing every paper I wrote on my journey of earning this EdD, but for encouraging me to keep going when I was sure I wasn't going to finish.

1.0 Naming and Framing the Problem

1.1 Broader Problem Area

The National Council of State Directors of Adult Education (2017) has identified approximately 93 million adults in the US as eligible for adult basic education (ABE). ABE is defined as "an instructional program for the undereducated adult planned around those basic and specific skills most needed to help him or her to function adequately in society" (Legal Information Institute, n.d.). Eligible individuals are at least 16 years of age, are not enrolled or required to be enrolled in secondary school under state law, and are either basic skills deficient and lack a secondary school diploma or its recognized equivalent, or are English language learners. (Legal Information Institute, n.d.) Of the 93 million adults, approximately 44% are English language learners (ELLs), (National Council of State Directors of Adult Education, 2017) of which only a fraction are enrolled in an English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) program. The English language proficiency level designated as sufficient to "exit advanced ES[O]L" programs corresponds to a "low adult secondary" or 9th grade level of education (CASAS, n.d.). Data demonstrates that high literacy levels are critical for family-wage sustaining careers (Wrigley et al, 2009), yet by design, programs serving adult ELLs are not preparing learners to be highly literate in English. This lack of opportunity for adult ELLs to gain critical skills for success is my problem of practice, that is that significant numbers of *Adult English Language Learners do not gain the academic English literacy skills they need to access family-wage sustaining careers*.

In my place of practice, performance outcomes for our adult ELLs closely mirror national statistics (Van Duzer & Florez, 2003). The majority of the adult ELLs in our program are enrolled in our beginning levels of English with far fewer numbers at the advanced levels. Whether learners discontinue after the lower levels because they gain the necessary conversational English to serve them in obtaining a job or because they lack the academic skills to persist at advanced levels is unclear. However, this trend of discontinuing learning at the higher levels of English leaves learners unprepared to gain the academic English language they need to access family-wage sustaining careers that minimally require a high school diploma, post-secondary education, community college, or certification from a workforce program. While there are groups of learners who progress through advanced levels of our ESOL program, they typically have sufficient literacy levels in their first language (L1). Those who struggle with L1 literacy due to little or no formal education, or having experienced interrupted education in their home countries, are often either unable to attain the score required to exit the advanced ESOL program, or upon graduation, having satisfied the minimum requirement, find themselves academically unprepared to succeed in their next steps.

Adult ELLs face significant barriers in accessing and persisting through ESOL programs (Comings, J, 2007; Lansangan-Sabangan, 2019; Freso-Moore, 2021; World Education, n.d.). In considering my problem of practice, *that adult learners do not gain the academic English literacy skills they need to access family-wage sustaining careers*, I focus on addressing these barriers, as persistence is tied to improved learning gains (Comings, 2007). While my project will not directly address persistence barriers, it may indirectly positively affect learner persistence, as learners who build their literacy skills are more likely to succeed at higher levels of English. However, because my organization has deliberate systems in place

to mitigate barriers for learners, this will not be a focus of this study. Addressing barriers undergirds my school's mission to work in partnership with families and community organizations. Our strongest partnership is with a community health organization (CHO)[1] that encompasses a Social Change Model (SCM). CHO values a holistic approach to patient care including healthcare, education, and social services. CHO partnered with my place of practice to provide the educational component of the SCM. My place of practice and CHO share the same physical space in three sites throughout the city which enables our families to take advantage of health-care and social services to help reduce barriers.

1.2 Organizational System

1.2.1 Organization, Mission, and Relevant History

My place of practice is a two-generation (2Gen[2]) public charter school, located in an urban area in the mid-Atlantic region of the United States, that serves both adult ELLs and their children ages 0-5. Throughout this work I will refer to my place of practice as "School 2Gen" to protect the anonymity of the educators and program participants who are connected to this study. School 2Gen offers ESOL classes to adult learners, as well as a relatively small, bilingual, early childhood education program to their children. An adult learner at our school

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[1] For the purposes of this paper, I will refer to this partnership as CHO to protect the anonymity of the organization.

[2] Two-generation (2Gen) approaches build family well-being by intentionally and simultaneously working with children and the adults in their lives together. 2Gen approaches center the whole family to create a legacy of educational success and economic prosperity that passes from one generation to the next. (Ascend n.d.)

must be a parent of a child less than 19 years of age. Approximately 30% of our adult learners have children in our early childhood program, which operates at full capacity. An organization with a 30-year history serving first-generation immigrant families, our mission describes its approach as follows:

> Our school's 2Gen approach to education recognizes that parents are children's first and most influential teachers. As parents' literacy and educational levels increase, so does their children's academic success. School 2Gen is committed to strengthening families and communities through a learner-centered environment of trust, respect, and collaboration. (School 2Gen Public Charter School, n.d.)

Our mission is to strengthen families through culturally responsive 2Gen education. (School 2Gen Public Charter School, n.d.)

Our school evolved from an Even Start program, a federally funded program "to support local family literacy projects that integrate early childhood education, adult literacy, parenting education, and interactive parent and child literacy activities for low-income families." (Department of Education, 2014). Family literacy is a major component of School 2Gen's two-generation program, and ESOL class content includes weekly family-time where parents and children can learn together. Additionally, content focuses on building strong English skills, as well as skills to navigate systems within a new county, raise children without familiar supports and customs, and find family-wage sustaining work.

School 2Gen also offers a National External Diploma Program (NEDP), where learners can earn a US high school diploma in English, as well as two workforce programs, Medical Assistant and Child Development Assistant. The workforce programs enable participants to

earn entry-level credentials for high-demand careers, yet upon progressing through the entirety of our English classes, the majority of our adult learners do not meet the minimum literacy requirements to enter these programs This disconnect is my problem of practice. Learners are meeting the requirements to progress through our ESOL courses, but they are not prepared with the English skill level they need to gain entry into workforce or post-secondary education, opportunities that elevate their earning potential.

1.2.2 Organization Connection to my Problem of Practice

School 2Gen's organizational system is set up in ways that both help to mitigate and obstruct this problem of practice. While it is well documented that high literacy levels are needed to succeed in a family-wage sustaining career (Wrigley et al., 2009), within the last decade national studies have documented the low levels of academic progress for adult ELLs (National Coalition for Literacy, 2013). Consequently, the College and Career Readiness standards released in 2013, sponsored by the US Department of Education, (Pimentel, 2013) have shifted the curricular focus in adult ESOL programs from building life skills to building higher order thinking skills and increased literacy levels in both reading and writing to help learners meet the requirements of 21st century careers. Even so, School 2Gen continues to focus on strengthening families through a holistic programmatic approach which strives to address the academic, social, and economic needs of each learner. And while it is understood that barriers to learning must be addressed to support an adult learner's growth, this multi-pronged approach may be contributing to a lack of educational progress, in that educational rigor within our ESOL program is not the priority. Additional contextual factors contributing to my problem of practice include: indistinct promotion and retention policies that drive how learners move through the course offerings, accountability practices that are only loosely

connected to learner progress, lack of agreement on what should constitute School 2Gen's ESOL curriculum, and a practice of sentimentality toward learners which includes a hesitancy to allow them to be in the productive struggle which can cultivate an over-reliance on the teacher (Hammond, 2014). Furthermore, our classes meet for 12.5 hours of in-person and synchronous virtual learning per week, a standard difficult to meet for adult learners who often are primary caretakers and wage earners.

Conversely, as a result of the 2019 global pandemic, shifts in School 2Gen's programming have been adapting in ways that may support more academic progress. As a new policy, the school provides all adult learners with a laptop and supports them in gaining access to the internet in their homes. Additionally, adult learners are no longer required to come in-person, five days a week for their classes, but rather have three days of synchronous, virtual learning and two days of in-person learning. These changes could positively influence my problem of practice by facilitating learners' access to electronic resources that provide continuous, immediate feedback to their learning attempts. Virtual learning also allows a modicum of flexibility in alleviating some of the barriers to class participation by eliminating an in-person requirement. Additionally, the skills learners developed out of necessity to access their education on-line, through productive struggle, far surpassed what teachers believed were possible. This has positively influenced teachers' perceptions of what their learners are capable of doing for themselves.

Also contributing to the framing of my problem of practice within the organization are School 2Gen's espoused values, which include learner-centeredness, inclusiveness, trust, collaboration, and equity. These values (with the exception of equity) have been components of long-standing adult learning theory (Knowles, 1980; Vella, 2002), and adherence to all of

these principles, including equity, is critical to positive learner outcomes. School 2Gen staff would agree that they are central to the policies and practices of the organization.

1.2.3 Relevant Organizational Values and Power Dynamics

At School 2Gen, learner-centeredness is highly valued and is demonstrated in a variety of ways, including the process by which teachers determine class content and the existence of a student services department. Some teachers report that many learners' purpose in coming to English classes is for gaining a sense of community and belonging. They add that many learners want to gain conversational, and not necessarily academic, English skills. Additionally, a teacher reported that learners in their classes complained about the math content they were receiving at the expense of learning English. Yet lack of these basic numeracy skills can also be a significant barrier to achieving economic success, something that School 2Gen seeks to address in a holistic approach to education. What may be considered learner-centered and collaborative could also be preventing learners from gaining the high literacy skills needed for family-wage sustaining careers.

School 2Gen created the Student Services Department to work collaboratively with learners to remove as many obstacles to learning as possible, from childcare and transportation issues to financial and legal barriers. However, in an empathy interview a member of the Student Services Department acknowledged that for many of our learners the barriers that exist are connected to policies outside of our sphere of influence. For this staff member, achieving the goal of increased rigor would not necessarily lead to post-secondary education or a family-wage sustaining career opportunities, given the undocumented status of many of our learners and legal requirements necessary to access these. Yet within their department a student services staff member worked with a group of learners who successfully lobbied city council for

changes to the terms of the city's health insurance renewal. This example was celebrated within our school and throughout our social media channels. It is a clear example of a need to build academic English skills where adult learners can effectively lobby a government entity and should demonstrate to teachers that our learners do not need to be overly reliant on School 2Gen staff to advocate for themselves.

Additionally, an equity audit of the organization revealed gaps that belie a culture of inclusiveness, which in turn has implications for equity. As it relates to my problem of practice, the majority of the adult education staff are white, documented citizens, working with multi-racial, non-documented learners. Power dynamics and cultural differences are inevitably at work and must be considered in addressing lack of academic progress among our adult learners. Potential teacher bias around issues of learner capability must be examined, as school systems have historically responded to learners who were not performing up to standards through unproductive means such as lowering expectations, watering down curriculum (Deschenes et al., 2013).

1.3 Stakeholders

The perspectives and motivations of the users connected to my problem of practice must be considered to facilitate the attainment of sustainable academic English proficiency gains our adult learners require to succeed. These users include our adult learners, who are the end users of any programmatic change, as well as various program staff including teachers, site administrators, outreach and registration staff, student services, as well as governance members, including our executive director, accountability staff, and board members. While I

did not interview someone from each of these groups, the ideas from the dialogues I did have and my continued learning about organizational dynamics will help me in targeting future conversations.

1.3.1 Adult Learners

The adult learners are obvious stakeholders my problem of practice as they are the focus of the impact. Adult education is not compulsory, so their satisfaction is of utmost importance. If adult learners are not satisfied with the program, they stop coming. Because our funding is directly tied to attendance, close tabs are kept on adult satisfaction. Pedagogically sound programmatic changes that prove to be unpopular with our adult learners are likely to be discontinued. Additionally, getting accurate information from this group is complicated. Many of our learners come from countries where educators are upheld as all-knowing, students are considered "empty vessels" waiting to be filled with teacher knowledge, and criticism toward a revered professional is not encouraged (Freire, 1968/2000, p. 79). These learners are unlikely to reveal to their teachers their dissatisfaction with the program. However, their perspectives are critical to both understanding what to consider in building a program to increase language proficiency and how to implement it. While at School 2Gen this group is homogenous in that they are all parents (a requirement for adult learners in our English program) and all ELLs, they are heterogenous in that they have a variety of formal educational experience, come from over 40 different countries, and speak over 22 different first languages, although the majority's first language is Spanish. Their goals for learning English vary as well, from a desire to support and be part of their children's educational experience to gaining employment, or better employment, through workforce training or higher education. Understanding learner goals is critical to informing our programmatic choices and that the

goals require differing levels of English proficiency can obfuscate our own programmatic goals. One approach to satisfy adult learners is to ensure they understand how our program objectives are designed to align with their own objectives.

1.3.2 Teachers

Teachers are another obvious group connected to this problem of practice. From my empathy interviews it is clear they recognize that many of our adult learners do not have the proficiency skills they need to access a high school diploma or post-secondary education. As a new senior leader within the organization, I feel concern that my questions around learner progress may be construed by teachers as criticism of their job performance. One teacher revealed in an empathy interview that they had been previously told that attendance rates were connected to teacher effectiveness, and while there is some research that suggests a correlation, I want to make sure teachers focus on evidenced-based practices and the corresponding data that informs both student learning and teacher effectiveness from an improvement model point of view.

Currently 95% of the teachers are white, native English speakers and 90% are women. The majority of the teachers also speak Spanish which enables an easy relationship between most teachers and learners. However, teacher and student positionalities are vastly different, and the power dynamic between an undocumented ELL and a documented, native-speaking teacher (who perhaps gains a level of unearned trust through a shared language–Spanish) can generate an incorrectly interpreted level of adult learner satisfaction.

Additionally, approximately 30% of the teaching staff have been at the school for over 10 years, and a percentage of those, including the executive director, have been with the school since its inception. Longevity at any organization can be construed as loyalty, and School 2Gen

is no exceptions. The views of many long-time staff members are held in high regard by the executive director, and thus consideration of their views is important. One such teacher described their understanding of a learner's purpose in coming to English class as a way to gain a sense of community and belonging; gaining academic English was not the goal.

1.3.3 Student Services Department

The Student Services Department is also connected to my problem of practice, and it will be important to have the support of the Director of Student Services. Well-aware of the numerous barriers learners face in obtaining an education, they were clear in delineating what we as a school could affect and what lies outside of our sphere of influence. They acknowledged the problem of learners having low literacy rates and were eager to discuss ways to mitigate them. However, they were skeptical about the availability of the opportunities for learners who were academically prepared for them, given the barriers to access a person without legal status faces. Their expressed doubt around the boundaries of the school's influence to effect change for our adult learners contrasts with the support they lent one of their direct reports to work with a group of learners who successfully lobbied city council for changes to the terms of DC's health insurance renewal.

1.3.4 Organization Leadership

A final stakeholder interview from another senior leader was the most thought-provoking for me. In their role they have considerable influence over school-wide policies and have encouraged me to pursue the work of increasing literacy rates within the adult English program. They recognize the limited options our learners have without a significant level of English proficiency and have worked to make significant programmatic changes that would support greater English language proficiency gains. In our interview we discussed the tension

between two programming objectives, that of prioritizing learners' need for building a community while learning how to navigate the US public school system for their children versus prioritizing academic rigor to build a level of English literacy high enough to participate in a family-wage sustaining career. At the time I initiated a systems review to better understand my context and how to better support adult learners in reaching higher levels of literacy, I believed we did not have a clear guidance from our executive director as to which objective to prioritize.

This tension is not a new idea. Larabee (1997) argued that North American education has struggled to come to terms with defining its purpose. He defined three goals that have been interchangeably defined as the primary purpose of public education: 1) democratic equality, 2) social efficiency, and 3) social mobility. I was struggling to understand how hard to push academic rigor at what some might consider the expense of community building. Not having what I could see as clear program goals from our organizational leader was frustrating.

Returning to my final empathy interview, it was this senior leader's perspective that the executive director's guidance would be to filter programmatic choices through three main questions: 1) Are we consistently Tier 1 (the highest rating in the city's mandatory rating system for public schools, and thus access to sustained funding)? 2) Are learners satisfied (and therefore persisting in our programs)? and 3) Are our teachers and staff satisfied (and therefore not leaving the organization)? At the time, the realization that our executive director seemingly did not articulate their thoughts around this tension of a program focused on community building versus one focused on academic gain was significant to me. They are a critical user as their decision will ultimately dictate our direction. I revisit this understanding in Section 5.

1.4 Statement of Positionality

My own positionality is as a white, cisgender woman with over 20 years of experience in the field of education, and over 10 years of experience in the field of adult education. I am a native English speaker, a proficient Spanish speaker, and a US citizen. I am also a senior leader in my place of practice, and at the onset of this project, I had been with the organization for 15 months as the Director of Adult Education. While this intersectionality enables me to identify the goals for the adult education department with some academic and experiential authority, I want to ensure the teachers I work with are part of a collaborative process to facilitate improved learner outcomes rather than participating in a top-down process in which they feel obligated to be involved. I am also aware that my belief that our adult learners need to increase their literacy skills places a value on Western ways of thinking that may be seen as devaluing other life skills our learners have, especially those who come from strong oral traditions. While I posit that English literacy is a necessary, valuable currency that enables our adult learners, who are community members, employees, and parents of school age children, to fully participate in those circles, my dedication to the mission of School 2Gen, that of strengthening families through culturally responsive 2Gen education, leaves space to value the whole learner and engage in culturally sustaining practices.

1.5 Understanding the Problem of Practice

1.5.1 Connection to Root Causes

A tool to identify the many possible root causes of a given problem of practice is the fishbone, or Ishikawa diagram, named for its developer, Karou Ishikawa. It is a graphic representation used to analyze a single problem and identify root causes, that is, the many areas and sub areas within an organizational system that may be contributing to the problem's persistence. Several areas within my organization have emerged as potential root causes of the difficulty our organization has in facilitating high levels of literacy development among the adult learners we serve. The root causes I have identified include: Structure, Policies, People, Organizational Culture, Methodology, and Accountability (see Figure 1). Some of these root causes are outside of my sphere of influence, and while they are identified in the Fishbone diagram, I will not expand on them in addressing this problem of practice. The root cause I have labeled "People," in Figure 1 below, in bold text, includes staff interactions with their learners, staff beliefs about what their learners are capable of, and staff training. These are areas which I can affect as the Director of Adult Education and will elaborate on in the next section.

Fishbone Diagram

Structure

- Adult Learner responsibilities outside of class time
- Adult Learners w/ little to no formal education
- Body of scholarship around increasing literacy rates for Adult ELLs with limited literacy is limited.

Policies

- Adult placement tied to child's placement site; child's placement prioritized
- Open enrollment for first quarter
- Liberal attendance policy

People

- Staff empathy can enable dependency
- Staff beliefs of perceived student barriers can hinder evidence-based instructional/programmatic moves
- Teachers may have knowledge gaps in teaching reading to low literacy learners

Organizational Culture

- Limited communication around vision & program purpose
- Expectations around lesson planning and delivery
- Demands on instructional time

Methodology

- No fixed curriculum
- Insufficient time for institutional/individual reflection
- Lack of clarity around indicators for success within a course

Accountability

- Accountability measures lack relevance to learner goals
- Teachers not accountable for progress
- No formalized data tracking outside of summative/high stakes markers

Adult ELLs do not gain the academic English literacy skills in ESOL programs needed to access family wage sustaining careers.

Figure 1 Fishbone Diagram

1.5.1.1 People as Root Cause.

Under "People" as a root cause connected to insufficient skill progress among our adult learners are teachers and staff. Through their tendency to over-support adult learners, they may be contributing to this problem of practice. This kind of support denies learners the opportunity to productively struggle to gain the skills they need to progress (Dickey et al., 2018). Teachers, often white and privileged, express frustration at the many obstacles immigrant adult learners face in this country and step in to remove the obstacles. However, this can create and maintain a culture of dependency. By leaning over a computer and completing keystrokes for a learner, filling out their learners' forms, or reverting to L1 too rapidly, teachers can prevent their learners from having the opportunity to build the skills they need to be successful. The teachers come from a place of wanting to serve, but this kind of service can hinder learners' ability to

progress (Hammond, 2015).

Additionally, staff beliefs about perceived barriers learners face may prevent them from using pedagogically sound instructional practices. Teachers may choose to forgo project-based learning, a well-regarded practice, because they believe their learners cannot attend consecutive days of instruction. Teachers may also ascribe learners not meeting class objectives to these barriers, rather than looking at how might they adjust their instruction despite these barriers.

Finally, teachers do not have the training they need to teach reading in L2 to adult learners who are emergent readers in their L1. Many Adult ESOL teachers are trained to work with ELLs through certification in TESOL (Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages), however, this certification includes minimal instruction on how to teach reading to adult L2 learners who are emergent readers. TESOL certification relies heavily on Second Language Acquisition theory (SLA), a theory developed with the assumption that learners have literacy skills in their first language (L1), and that these skills can be leveraged to learn a target language (L2), (Tarone, 2010). However, many adult ELLs lack literacy in L1, making application of theory to practice difficult. Additionally, the field of adult education has only recently shifted its focus from teaching conversational English based on life-skills to teaching academic English, a skill set needed to access 21st Century jobs (Wrigley et al., 2009). The skill set of long-time teachers, of which there are many at my place of practice, and institutional accountability practices are still adjusting to this shift.

Related to the lack of preparation to teach adult learners, is the national debate as to what are the effective strategies to teach reading. This uncertainty, labeled the "reading wars" has left teachers grappling with how to work with emergent readers. Current research points to

the effectiveness of a systematic and explicit approach to phonics instruction; however, the research is lacking on the efficacy of this approach in teaching reading in L2 to adults who are emergent readers in L1. Two teachers in my place of practice have undergone training using an explicit and systematic approach to teaching phonics to support their learners, and they have shared the techniques with their colleagues. However, for several reasons, including: 1) that the research is silent on how this process works for L2 learners, 2) the practice is new for us, and 3) we do not yet have a system in place to understand the efficacy of the practice, their progress in this space is unknown.

In analyzing my problem of practice, that *Adult English Language Learners do not gain the academic English literacy skills they need to access family-wage sustaining careers,* from a systems approach, the area where I have the most leverage is in supporting teachers in their work with learners. I turned to scholarship to review evidenced-based effective practices in reading instruction knowing that the scholarship on teaching reading in L2 to adult learners with limited formal education in L1 is scant but growing. As such I also chose to review innovative practices including using Professional Learning Communities (PLCs). I wondered if PLCs would be a way to leverage the collaborative and motivated spirit of my teaching staff to dig into how the teaching of reading could work in our specific context. The next section, the *Review of Supporting Scholarship*, summarizes these findings.

1.6 Review of Supporting Scholarship

To gain a deeper understanding of factors that influence my problem of practice I conducted a literature review. I focused on scholarship around the following three areas: 1)

How adults learn, particularly adult ELLs with limited formal schooling experience, 2) the context in which adults learn, and 3) innovations within educational practices. Because the research on building literacy skills in L2 is scant, particularly on adult learners (Bigelow & Vindegrov, 2011; Tarone, 2010), my research included developing literacy in the early years in L1, as well as how that knowledge and understanding is applied to older learners in the K-12 setting.

1.6.1 How Adult ELLs Who are Emergent Readers Learn

1.6.1.1 Andragogy

Andragogy, a term to describe the "teaching" of adults, was popularized in the 1960's by Malcolm Knowles. Knowles distinguished "andragogy" from the term "pedagogy," that is the teaching of children. The principles of adult learning, while debated by scholars over the last half a century, can be broken down into six principles: 1) adults are self-directed, 2) adults draw from their own life experiences to build further learning, 3) adults' social roles help to determine their readiness to learn, 4) adults are problem-centered rather than subject-centered 5) adults are internally motivated to learn, and 6) adult learners need to know why they are learning a particular lesson (Finn, 2011). Additional principles of adult learning have been defined including ensuring adults feel safe and respected (Vella, 2002), and are especially important when working with adult ELLS in a white, Western hegemonic environment. Adult ELLs who have limited formal learning experience and limited literacy are a unique subgroup of adult learners and special attention needs to be given to them to facilitate their learning.

1.6.1.2 Second Language Acquisition (SLA) and Low Literacy

Much of the scholarship around practices to increase English language acquisition for adult learners focuses on second language acquisition (SLA) theory. Prominent research on

SLA describes the importance of literacy in L1 in acquiring the target language (L2) (Cummins, 1991). However, this research has been strongly influenced by studies of L2 learners who are literate in their L1 (Bigalow & Schwarz, 2010; Bigalow & Tarone, 2004). The contexts of these learners, when compared to adult ELLs who are not yet literate in their L1, are so vastly different that many of the findings in the SLA research do not apply (Mathews-Aydinli, 2008). Given that between 2004 and 2007, 17-21 percent of learners in federally funded adult ESOL programs had no to low literacy in L1, (Bigelow & Schwarz, 2010), the implications for program design are significant. In their own literature review, Bigalow & Schwarz (2010) affirmed the need for differentiated programming given the distinct difference between adult ESOL learners with some literacy and those with no literacy.[3]

1.6.1.3 Meta-cognition as a Practice

The meta-cognitive skills developed in becoming literate have a profound effect on oral language processing, as well as the ability to carry out other neuropsychological tasks. For example, readers process two-dimensional visual images differently than emergent readers. Using pictures as a way to ascribe meaning to content, an emergent reader may need to first learn how to interpret a picture (O'Neil, 2011). Additionally, the skills and experience an ELL brings into a US classroom, whether they be from formal or informal learning, influence the ways in which they interact in a classroom. The school routines and expectations of learners in the US system may contrast sharply with the learning experiences ELLs have had in their

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[3] Bigelow and Vinogradov (2013), in an effort to reorient deficit thinking from the attributes ELLs don't yet possess to those they do, use the term "emergent readers" to describe the sense of becoming literate. This orientation and naming is important in decentering a Western, colonizing culture where print literacy is hegemonic, and I have chosen to use it throughout this paper in places where other scholars have used non-print literate.

homes with immigrant parents or in their countries of origin. For learners who come from cultures where mentored and apprenticed learning through oral instruction is the norm, even the basics of "doing school" (DeCapua, 2016) may be unfamiliar. For these learners having to use notebooks, let alone process written information, sit for long periods in chairs, work independently and often competitively, and complete decontextualized and often abstract tasks required of learners in the US system, are likely to be challenging.

To train learners to consider their learning processes, research supports the explicit teaching of metacognitive skills as a way to build control over and motivation for their own learning. Strategies are numerous and include one such as building and using background knowledge, making learning visible through think alouds (Fisher et al., (2016), and interleaving, that is working through a mix of related ideas and concepts (Yan et al., 2017). Hattie (2012) argues that self-awareness and self-regulation, that is, understanding one's learning goals and what is needed to achieve them are the ultimate goals of learning.

1.6.1.4 Funds of Knowledge

While the studies on the impact of literacy levels in L1 demonstrate a significant impact on becoming literate in L2, there is a compelling body of research on the "funds of knowledge," that is the life experience, formal and informal schooling, and out-of-school learning that learners possess and can use to connect to new learning (Moll et al., 1992). Centering of these "funds" to co-construct new knowledge is a culturally sustaining practice (Paris, 2012). It honors the different, complex thinking adult ELLs engage in and values their identities. It is empowering and motivating and can be drawn upon as culturally relevant tools to support language acquisition (Bigalow & Schwarz, 2010; Espinoza-Herold, 2007; Gonzalez et al., 1995;).

1.6.2 Context in Which Adults Learn

There are many contextual factors that contribute to a lack of academic progress sufficient to realize next steps for the adult learners in my place of practice which I will review here. They include: 1) trauma, 2) age, 3) sentimentality toward learners, 4) deficit view of ELLs and 5) lack of flexibility of class scheduling that demands 12 hours of synchronous learning per week.

1.6.2.1 Trauma

In addition to formal levels of education mentioned in the previous section, factors such as trauma a learner has experienced is contextually relevant. In my place of practice many of our learners are likely to have experienced and/or continue to experience trauma due to difficult living situations in a country where the work that is available to them is generally low paying and often physically demanding. Trauma, defined as sudden and unplanned relocation, acculturation, and/or willful physical harm (Adkins et al., 1999), may influence an adult ELL's capacity to acquire another language. In her study of adult refugees Finn (2010) citing Kosa & Hansen (2006) attributed memory loss and lack of concentration to victims of trauma. Finn (2010) reported that the effects of trauma negatively impact academic achievement and, in particular, language acquisition. Because both short and long-term memory are required for successful SLA (Finn, 2010) traumatic stress negatively impacts SLA.

1.6.2.2 Age

Learners over the age of 40, of which there are many in my place of practice, have been categorized by scholars as "advanced age" learners. At this age and beyond, SLA can be difficult and attaining native-like fluency can be extremely challenging. While there is debate about the timing, according to SLA theory there exists a "critical period" in acquiring language,

and once learners are past this period, generally after adolescence, acquisition becomes more difficult (Bigelow & Tarone, 2004). Kurvers et al., (2010) found that advanced age and low literacy levels necessitated additional time for SLA. In her study of adult refugees in the Netherlands Kurvers (2010) found that low literacy and advanced aged learners needed as many as 850 additional hours of instruction to attain basic proficiency skills than their younger, more literate peers.

1.6.2.3 Sentimentality and Low Expectations

Many of our adult learners are newcomers to the country and the demands to navigate unfamiliar systems in an unfamiliar language are significant. Adult ESOL instructors can easily fall into the role of all-knowing expert, as they are more easily able to navigate US systems than are their learners and are often excited and willing to assist them with any of their myriad of challenges. Adult ESOL instructors can inadvertently disempower adult learners by fixing their problems rather than supporting the learner in building on their own skills to address the challenges themselves. This behavior on the part of adult ESOL instructors can escalate into an overdependence on them by the adult learner and serve as a deterrent to their learners' ability to see themselves as, or build on being, independent and capable learners (Cercone, 2008).While purportedly promoting a low affective filter to build learner confidence, a principle of both adult learning and second language acquisition, teachers can inadvertently impede learner progress when allowing this practice that centers the teacher (Lin, 2008).

1.6.2.4 Deficit View of ELLs

There is a body of research on teacher beliefs and how they shape their instructional practices as well as their expectations of their learners (Petit, 2011; Macnab & Payne, 2003). Teacher beliefs drive instructional practices that have been shown to influence learner behavior

and achievement (Mantero & McVicker, 2006). When teachers hold low expectations of what a learner is capable of, they rob their learners of their autonomy, their agency, and their opportunity to build the skills they need to fully participate in our democratic society.

1.6.2.5 Rigid Schedules and Learner Persistence

Another prevalent, although less complex, contextual factor contributing to a lack of academic progress of adult ELLs in my place of practice is the inflexible requirement of "in-seat" attendance. Prior to COVID, learners were expected to attend 10-month classes, five days per week, for 2.5 hours per day in-person. Per our Performance Management Framework (PMF), an official measurement of the school's effectiveness, a learner who did not maintain an adequate attendance rate could be dropped from their class. Adult learners have numerous demands outside of pursuing their own education, and maintaining stringent attendance rates is difficult for many. While data supports that adult ELLs need 100 hours of instruction to gain a level of proficiency (Spurling & Chisman, 2008), a lack of options for meeting this statistically significant mark is problematic.

1.6.3 Innovations within Educational Practices

1.6.3.1 Hybrid Learning Schedules

A silver lining in the COVID-forced shift to on-line learning has illuminated alternate paths to delivering instruction that may meet the demands of in-seat attendance from outside authorizers. Hybrid learning, where learners participate in classes that have an in-person as well as virtual component, has been identified as a successful way to support adult achievement (Graham, 2013). Many programs, including my own, now offer hybrid options that allow learners to access their classes without having to be physically present in the school. Currently our hybrid program demands in-person learning and synchronous learning where the class

meets virtually for a specific amount of time. However, asynchronous classes, where a learner can access their learning on their own time, may be another way to improve learner persistence. In an asynchronous model, adults can access learning while on a bus, on a break at work, or from home, where they may have childcare responsibilities that prevent them from attending an in-person class. As the world emerges from the COVID-19 pandemic where virtual learning became the norm, learned strategies to encourage learner persistence will be informative. Finally, technological innovation in educational programming has also led to many learning opportunities with targeted, immediate feedback built into the programs.

1.6.3.2 Developing Literacy in L1

There is a body of knowledge that supports building literacy in L1 as a way to support emergent readers in learning the target language; however, the reality of providing instruction in every L1 is not feasible, or even possible, given that some adult learners come from oral traditions where a written language is non-existent (Ethnologue Languages of the World, n.d.). In a study conducted with a group of adult ELLs who were emergent readers, a program focus on alphabetics instruction (phonemic awareness and phonics) demonstrated greater effectiveness for those with no literacy experience than it did with the group who had some literacy experience (Trupke-Bastidas & Poulos, 2007). This finding, while a single study, supports the conclusion Bigalow & Schwarz (2010) reached, which is that these distinct groups demand distinct programming options.

1.6.3.3 The Role of Rigorous Content

This literature review also included research on successful practices in incorporating more rigorous content in adult ESOL programs. Additionally, content that addresses learner goals must be built into a successful program (Center for Applied Linguistics, 2010). Because

adult ESOL programs are not compulsory, adult learners vote with their feet; they stop attending programs that do not meet their goals. As discussed previously, many adult ESOL learners have little formal school experience and consequently need significant support to increase their language skills, particularly in reading and writing (Ellis, 2005). In the program year 2006-2007, nationally, approximately 48% of adult ELLs tested at the bottom three of six ESOL levels of English proficiency (Beginning Literacy, Beginning Low, and Beginning High) as measured by the National Reporting System (NRS) (US Department of Education, 2008, cited in Burt et al., 2008). As a result, Ellis (2005); Fernandez et al. (2017); and Zafft et al. (2006) concluded that these learners needed focused instruction to help them increase their reading, writing, and oral proficiency in English. Additionally, teachers required professional development to develop skills needed to teach academic writing (Fernandez et al., 2017; Zafft et al., 2006).

The College and Career Readiness standards released in 2013, sponsored by the US Department of Education, have shifted the curriculum focus in adult ESOL programs from building life-skills (such as reading a bus schedule, filling out job applications, making doctor appointments, etc.) to building higher-order thinking skills with increased literacy levels in both reading and writing (Pimentel, 2013). While not all adult ESOL learners have college or careers as goals for themselves, the necessity of high literacy levels for family-wage sustaining work remains a reality (Wrigley et al., 2009).

In a national survey to determine how the recent demands for increased academic content were being met in adult ESOL programs, Fernandez et al. (2017) researched the scope of academic writing included in these courses. They found that the majority of teachers surveyed spent less than 4 percent of their class time on writing for beginning and intermediate

classes and less than 10 percent of their class time for advanced and General Education Diploma (GED) classes. Additionally, the types of writing that were prioritized were primarily note taking and expository writing and were of inadequate lengths and depths, most of which were only a paragraph. Adult learners need to develop writing skills "to present evidence for their ideas and the knowledge they acquire from texts in clear academic and professional language" (Fernandez et al., 2017, p. 2). Furthermore, teachers were not typically using the writing process to scaffold writing instruction, and the feedback teachers reported giving was not of the caliber expected for college writing. The majority of teachers surveyed were assumed to be highly qualified ESOL teachers as measured by their teaching credentials and ESL/TESOL endorsements and degrees. However, many of them reported they did not have adequate training in teaching academic writing, and that because writing was not a skill for which they are held accountable to outside authorizers, it was not prioritized. (Fernandez et al., 2017). In their report discussing the need to increase academic skills in adult ESOL programs, Johnson & Parrish (2010) also found that teachers lacked the training to prepare learners for academic contexts.

1.6.3.4 Systematic and Explicit Reading Instruction for Adult Emergent Readers

To address the many adult ELLs with low literacy in my place of practice, my literature review included the scholarship around the teaching of reading. The National Reading Panel report, commissioned by the US Congress in 1997, presented the findings of 14 reading experts on the existent researched-based knowledge of and effective approaches to the teaching of reading to children. The bulk of scholarship is focused on building literacy for emergent readers in the PreK through the third-grade years, as well as for children with disabilities. It highlights the importance of systematic and explicit phonics instruction along with developing

vocabulary and fluency to build reading comprehension (Report of the National Reading Panel, 2000; Burt et al., 2008; Burt et al., 2005; Bigelow & Vinogradov, 2011; Lambert, 2020-present). Kurvers (2015) found that adult learners with no formal school experience, who were emergent readers, were similar to children who had not yet learned to read and different from adult learners with some school experience, on average four years, in their approach to literacy learning. She posits that having some exposure to the written language enables learners to conceptualize written and oral language differently. This is an important finding in considering how to design L2 literacy instruction with adult learners who are emergent L1 readers.

Significant differences exist between teaching children and teaching adults to read, including the amount of time adults are able to dedicate to studies and the emotional trauma and shame adults experience given their perceived "failure to learn." Understanding these differences is important in my context given the numbers of adult learners who are emergent readers. There is some research on reading instruction for Adult Basic Education (ABE) and Adult Secondary Education (ASE) learners, however the research on adult ELLs is quite limited (Kruidenier et al., 2010). Important distinctions exist between ABE/ASE learners and adult ELLs that require distinct programming decisions. Most significantly, ABE and ASE learners have grown up speaking English and can communicate orally quite proficiently. In learning to read, once they can decode simple words, ABE/ASE learners most likely understand the word meanings. Adult ELLs on the other hand must learn to decode while simultaneously learning the meaning of those words. While this difference is not as pronounced between highly, formally educated adult ELLs and their ABE and ASE counterparts, due to the transferability of reading skills from L1 to L2 (Cárdenas-Hagan et al., 2007), stark differences exist between adult ELLs with little formal education and ABE/ASE

learners. ABE/ASE learners typically have several years of formal education. They are generally familiar with the English alphabet, have a sense of phonemic awareness, and typically have a store of site words they can utilize. For Adult ELLs, many of whom are at or below a basic level of formal education, this is often not the case. This is particularly pronounced if the writing system from their country of origin is logographic, or a word-based system that uses characters, like Chinese, for example. In an effort to identify and evaluate evidenced-based reading instructional practices for adult learners, including ABE, ASE and adult ELLs, the Adult Literacy Research Working Group (ALRWG) produced a report entitled *Adult Education Literacy Instruction: A Review of the Research* (Kruidenier et al., 2010) as a way to identify and disseminate relevant researched-based practices to support professionals, policy makers and scholars working in the field of ABE, ASE and adult ESOL programs.

1.6.3.5 Professional Learning Communities

A final area of research in innovative practices included in this literature review was on Professional Learning Communities (PLCs). The effectiveness of well-facilitated Professional Learning Communities (PLCs), ones that center student learning, have the support of school leadership, and are committed to faculty collaboration and accountability, has been extensively documented as an effective driver for improved learner outcomes (Brown et al., 2018; Hoaglund et al., 2014; Dufour, 2004). PLCs provide meaningful, on-going, contextualized professional development to support educators in improving their instructional and school practices to lead to improved learner outcomes. Successful PLCs include school leadership working directly with teachers to create policies and procedures that provide teachers the leadership structure to directly impact school improvement (Brown et al., 2018; Carpenter, 2015). In PLCs, educators come together to collaborate for a specific purpose.

Participants examine what it is that students will learn, the evidence of student learning, and the ways in which teachers will respond when students are not learning. The collaborative learning and shared personal practice are leveraged to build teachers' own practices and processes, include peer observation, and coaching and debriefing to build effective instructional delivery (Ning, 2015).

In their article *The Futility of PLC Lite,* DuFour & Reeves (2016) outline five critical tenets of successful PLCs. First, the group takes responsibility for student learning, second they work collaboratively to establish scaffolded practices to meet the needs of learners, third they develop appropriate assessments and know how to use the resulting data, fourth, common formative assessments are utilized to learn who needs more support, who would benefit from expanded learning, and what are the strengths and weaknesses in instruction, and fifth, a system is developed to support learners without their losing instructional time.

Throughout their meeting time together, PLC participants utilize evidence-based practices and assessment data to focus the direction of professional development as a way to support their learners, as well as how to respond when learners are not making the desired gains. While it is a space to develop the instructional practices, it is also a space to influence positive changes in the teaching culture at the school that ultimately lead to improved learner outcomes. Leadership involvement is critical to ensure reform initiatives that may emerge from the work the PLC are supported.

2.0 Theory of Improvement

To address the insufficient level of literacy the adult ELLs have attained when they leave our ESOL program, I developed a theory of improvement based on my understanding of my organization, including the policies and the stakeholders, as well as the relevant research. My theory of improvement centered around improved gains in Educational Functional Levels (EFL) for ELLs, which are divided into six categories: Beginning Literacy; Beginning Basic; Low Intermediate; High Intermediate; Low Adult Secondary; and High Adult Secondary. My aim is that by the end of SY 2024/2025, there will be a 5% increase from SY 21/22 in the passage rate of all ELLs moving to the next EFL. This will be determined by learners' reading scores using CASAS, the national standardized test our program currently uses to demonstrate learner progress to our authorizing agency.

2.1 Driver Diagram

2.1.1 Drivers

In considering this aim from a localized, systems orientation, I developed a driver diagram to illustrate the theory (see Figure 2). To achieve my aim, I identified three primary drivers, that is, things I hypothesized would be key levers to improving the literacy levels for learners in my place of practice. Additionally, I identified six secondary drivers, which encompass areas where change can occur to activate the primary drivers. Finally, I identified

seven change ideas that could be implemented, studied, and refined through a series of small tests of change to positively affect the passage rate.

The first primary driver I identified was quality teaching, specifically, ensuring teacher use of effective evidenced-based reading strategies that are targeted to learners at every level. There is a comprehensive body of research on effective reading strategies to develop reading comprehension for L1 learners and some research on adapting those strategies for L2
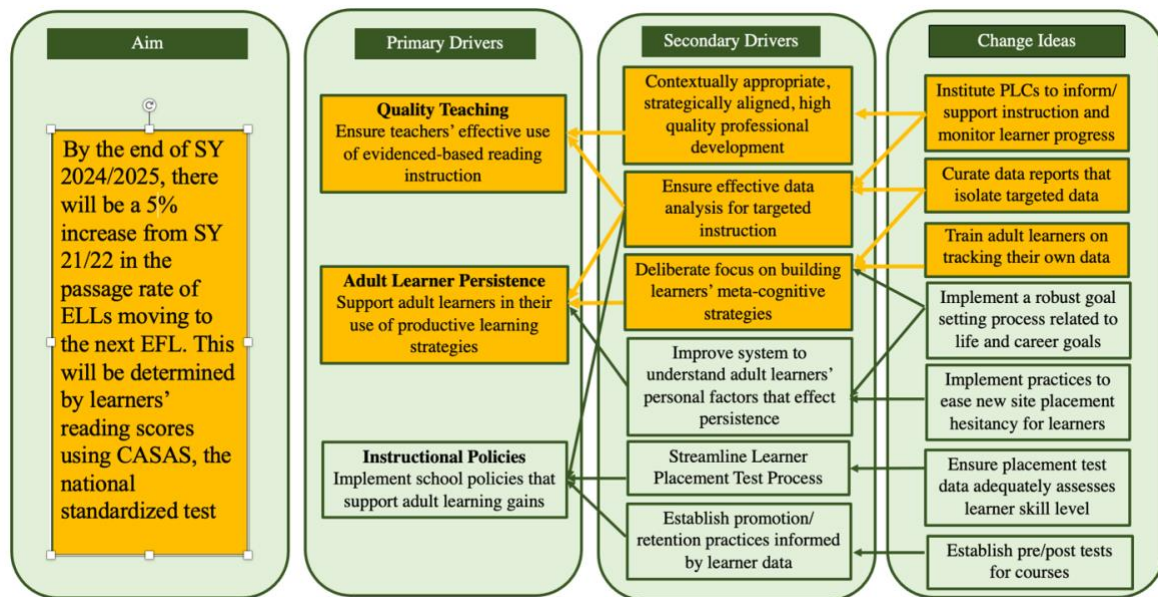
Figure 2 Driver Diagram

learners (Alyousef, 2006; Bigelow & Tarone 2004; Burt & Schaetzel, 2008; Wrigley et al., 2009). I identified two secondary drivers that I believed would build quality teaching: 1) ensuring contextually appropriate, strategically aligned, high quality professional development to enable teachers to anchor their practice, and 2) ensuring the use of effective data analysis protocols to monitor the efficacy of their efforts.

The second primary driver I identified focused on adult learner persistence strategies that ensure adult learners partner with their teachers in their educational journey to build the metacognitive skills that facilitate progress toward their goals. Research has found that self-

efficacious learners, those who utilize metacognitive skills of self-assessment, are more strategic and perform better than learners who do not have these skills (Imel, 2002). Furthermore, a positive relationship has been found among self-efficacy beliefs, self-regulated learning strategies, and academic achievement (Wang & Bai, 2017). I identified two secondary drivers that affect adult learner persistence. The first was facilitating learner's deliberate use and development of metacognitive skills. This would include explicit instruction of both how learning works and understanding the importance of learning strategies. Some examples include, utilizing strategies that making learning visible through think-alouds, pre-, during- and post-reading strategies, and interleaving, that is the learning of multiple topics or different types of problems. The additional secondary driver was a focus on improved data collection and analysis to support learner persistence. The identified secondary drivers support more than one primary driver. In considering the drivers, I posited that ensuring effective use of data by students and teachers would not only enable students to build the skills to own their learning, but also support quality teaching through better informed instructional decisions.

The third driver I identified was comprised of the institutional policies that influence academic program decisions and, by extension, adult learning gains. Because we are a 2Gen school, we have two distinct groups of learners, adult learners and their children. The needs of these groups are not always aligned. For example, hybrid learning, where learners can access their learning asynchronously, allows adult learners the flexibility to access their learning on their own time; however, children benefit from in-person learning and children's online learning has myriad implications for their adult caregivers. Additionally, our program is spread across four sites, three of which are not large enough to hold more than two adult classes simultaneously. Because we offer nine distinct classes, placement can be challenging. A decision may be made to place an adult learner in a particular class because there is also room

for their child at that particular site. However, a different placement site might be more appropriate for the adult learner. Furthermore, attaining the literacy levels needed to access post-secondary training and/or higher education requires a level of rigor in our English classes that can demand significant amounts of time for our adult English learners. Yet in serving immigrant families our practice is to recognize that our adult learners are parents who need flexibility in programming so that they can attend to adult and parental responsibilities. This flexibility may include periods of time where a learner may arrive late, leave early, or simply be absent. Flexibility in an attendance policy, which can help learners persist over a long run, needs to be coupled with creative ways to ensure learners can stay connected. As a senior leader of the organization, I can voice the effects of these considerations on the adult academic program, but our 2Gen program model must take into consideration the needs of early childhood learners as well.

Because I have a greater influence on the first two primary drivers, highlighted in yellow, I had intended to focus my theory of improvement on them, the connected secondary drivers, and the related change ideas also highlighted in yellow (see Figure 2 above). However, while the second primary driver, Adult Learner Persistence, was tangentially addressed in my study, I decided early in the study to omit this second driver due to unexpected demands on teachers' time. Consequently, I only ended up with substantive activities explicitly related to the first primary driver, Quality Teaching. This is further discussed in Section 4.

2.1.2 Change Idea

To affect the primary driver of Quality Teaching, my proposed change idea was the implementation of Professional Learning Communities (PLCs). The topic of study centered around improved literacy instruction and the use of learner provided data to inform

instructional decisions. Well-facilitated PLCs center student learning, have the support of school leadership, and are committed to faculty collaboration and accountability based on learner data. PLCs have been extensively documented as a useful tool for improved learner outcomes (Brown et al., 2018; Hoaglund et al., 2014; Dufour, 2004). To address the persistent low literacy levels of the adult learners at my place of practice, I proposed PLCs as a promising change idea to build teacher knowledge in reading instruction, and, by extension, drive positive learner outcomes.

This structured learning format was particularly well-suited for building teachers' instructional practices for L2 emergent readers, as the extant research on literacy instruction for L2 learners is not abundant. Research on effective reading instruction has been done with L1 learners and the strategies have not been extensively tested with L2 learners who are emergent readers for similar outcomes. The PLC was to allow cycles of learning, implementing, and refining based on learner data, enabling participating teachers to test reading instructional theories within their particular context.

At the time of my research, the teaching staff at my place of practice consisted of 23 full-time adult education teachers who instructed one or two classes of 12-25 learners, daily, Monday through Thursday.[4] Teachers had various experience and education within the field of Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL). While many of them held MAs in TESOL or other education-related fields, instructors at my place of practice, in response to a survey, indicated that reading instruction was not a comprehensive focus of their teacher training programs, especially reading instruction for adult learners who are emergent readers

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[4] Friday classes include child-development programming, which is delivered in L1 and advanced English. Teachers do not necessarily instruct the same students on Fridays.

in L1. Fortunately, all the teachers in my place of practice were highly motivated and deeply committed to supporting the adult immigrant learners and their families within our 2Gen model. They regularly engaged in outside learning opportunities and willingly shared their learning with their colleagues in an effort to improve instruction. There were a few influential teachers who had studied and shared effective strategies to use with emergent readers, yet there was not a formal process for this endeavor.

The use of research-based literacy instructional practices was formalized through group accountability, a tenet of successful PLCs. Research suggests this professional learning-and-sharing cycle should improve content knowledge and instructional delivery and will enhance student outcomes (Darling-Hammond et al., 2009; DuFour & Reeves, 2016). PLCs fit into our current model of providing professional development for staff members. Annually, five days are dedicated to professional development in addition to time during a two-week ramp-up to the beginning of the school year; however, given the demands of a 2Gen program up to 50% of PD time is dedicated school-wide needs. Finding time for the PLC was challenging, and I discuss this phenomenon in Section 4.

Building buy-in for teachers to participate in a PLC was not difficult. As stated earlier, due to the collaborative spirit the teachers already possessed, their interest in supporting emergent readers, and because it would build on learning they had already been engaging with many teachers were initially enthusiastic about participating. My thinking was that as the teachers began to systematically implement strategies to build reading literacy, they would regularly engage with data to measure outcomes. While teachers utilize informal data gathering, the school relies almost exclusively on quarterly CASAS reading scores to demonstrate learner progress. I hypothesized that more frequent data analysis would help to

highlight policies and practices that were not effectively supporting learner gains, an example being the current practice at my organization of placing all learners with low English language skills in the same class, regardless of their level of formal education. I posited that when teachers could see data that supports, for example, utilizing a different policy for learner placement, I expected they would lend their support to prioritizing the implementation of new data-supported policies. While I have considerable influence in the adult applicant placement process as part of the senior leadership team, teachers' support will be valuable.

2.2 Inquiry Questions

Improvement science involves "identifying key work processes, gathering data about those processes and learning from small tests of change" (Bryk et al., 2017, p. 118). There were several inquiry questions that drove my theory of improvement and proposed change idea (see Table 1). This section outlines the questions, my hypotheses, and the data I would collect to understand if and how the change was working.

Table 1 Inquiry Questions and Metrics

Question	Measure	Evidence-Gathering Activities	Hypothesis
Does a PLC focused on literacy support teachers in implementing effective instructional practices with L2	Driver	PLC cycles: • assess teachers' current practice of reading instructional strategies • provide coaching through peer observation and feedback • document teachers'	Teachers engaged in the PLC will feel better equipped to provide literacy instruction for L2 learners who are emergent readers.

learners who are emergent readers?		satisfaction of process • document teachers' change in practice	
Do teachers develop a reading instruction routine, incorporating reading strategies for L2 learners to build literacy skills?	Driver	PLC process will include: • peer observation feedback • teacher reflections • formative assessment artifacts	Peer observations and feedback will support teachers in building and utilizing specific and consistent reading strategies to support L2 emergent readers
How do teachers adapt reading strategies designed for L1 learners to be successful for L2 learners?	Process	PLC process will include: • lesson plans on reading instructional practices • peer observations • formative assessment artifacts • teacher reflection	Teachers will experiment with adaptations based on PLC content and personal experience working with L2 learners.
Do teachers have a way to track learners' acquisition of the decoding skills they need to be successful readers?	Process	PLC process will include: • teacher artifacts • teacher reflections • formative assessment artifacts	Teachers will need to develop checklists to note which phonemic skills have been covered
Do teachers incorporate metacognition skill-building routines into their instruction?	Driver	PLC process will include: • peer observations • teacher reflections • formative assessment artifacts	Teachers will build metacognitive strategies into their practice.
Will teachers feel their participation in PLC's had a positive net gain in their practice?	Balance	PLC process will include: • teacher reflections	Teachers will report their participation enhanced their practice and developed their understanding how to support L2 emergent readers, and that the time was well-spent.

2.3 Measures and Analysis

The practical measures I used to determine if my proposed change was an improvement included outcome measures, driver measures, process measures, and balance measures (see Table 1, above). The data collected within the Plan Do Study Act (PDSA) cycles, which I will describe in the section that follows, was to answer the questions, "Did it work?", "How did it work?", and "Did it work as I intended?".

2.3.1 Outcome Measures

Outcome measures are lagging indicators that measure if a change worked. In my problem of practice, the outcome measures will be learners' scores on the CASAS exam. I did not expect to see outcome measures that indicate the change was working during my PDSA cycle as there was not enough time for a change in outcome measures to be directly connected to my change idea.

2.3.2 Driver Measures

Driver measures are leading indicators that can help predict if the change is working. Within this project they would reflect the change in the teachers' knowledge and implementation of reading instructional strategies. To measure this change, I collected surveys and discussion notes on teachers' increased use of and comfort with reading instructional strategies. Observation notes on teachers' instructional practices were to also serve as driver measures; however, because I did not include peer observations within the PDSA cycles, for reasons discussed in Section 4, I did not formally collect these.

2.3.3 Process Measures

Process measures answer how well the change idea is working. The process measures I collected to inform the progress of the change idea included the formative assessment teachers shared in the PLC meetings that demonstrated learner understanding of the accompanying reading instructional objectives. Hinnant-Crawford (2020, p. 145) claims "process measures are essential in showing you what to do next." These data informed next steps for subsequent PLC meetings.

I had also planned to use as evidence data from peer observations and learner artifacts produced during those observations. Due to the timing of the PLC and teachers' need to balance the many demands of teaching in a time influenced by the COVID-19 pandemic, I chose not to include peer observations within the PDSA cycle. Further discussion of this decision is presented in Section 4.

2.3.4 Balance Measures

Balance measures indicate if the change idea is working as intended, and not having detrimental effects in other areas of the organization. An important balance measure would have been whether the teachers believe the work in the PLC was having a net positive impact on their practice. Because the findings on effective reading strategies for L1 learners have not been proven to extend to L2 learners, teachers may feel that the amount of time they are spending to research, demonstrate, and implement reading strategies may not be worth the effort, and in fact are taking time away from planning classes utilizing instructional tools with which they are more familiar. Because the PLC extended beyond the PDSA cycle, at the time of this writing, I did not yet have that data. A final understanding of balance measures would not be known until the end of the PLC for SY 22.23.

2.4 PDSA Cycle

To ascertain if my change idea worked, I led a series of PDSA cycles designed to measure progress and inform successive action steps in achieving my aim. The PDSA cycles were designed to answer the three questions at the center of a theory of improvement, namely, "What are we trying to accomplish?", "How will I know that a change is an improvement?", and "What changes can we make that will result in improvement?" (Perry et al., 2020, p. 122).

My PDSA cycles included four monthly iterations of PLC meetings, focused on building teachers' reading instructional practices through inquiry, discussion, reflection, and further inquiry. As the Director of Adult Education, I was responsible for the annual professional development plan for the Adult Education Department. I spent part of the last school year, my first in this organization, learning about and observing the literacy work the teachers were engaged in with their learners. The PLC provided a structure that guided this work by grounding it in research, data analysis, and reflection to help inform next steps.

In spite of the value I believe PLCs bring to quality teaching and learner persistence, and ultimately learner outcomes, teacher participation was voluntary because participation required a time commitment outside of the designated professional development days within the school year. To generate interest in the PLCs and determine a baseline level of the knowledge our teachers possess in the teaching of reading, three of our professional development sessions in the lead-up to the opening of the school year were dedicated to understanding ourselves as reading instructors, reflecting on our learners as readers and an overview of reading instructional theory. A fourth session was dedicated to introducing PLCs as an on-going model of professional development for the year. At the end of the initial sessions, teachers were surveyed to determine their interest in participating in the PLCs.

While the PLCs spanned ten months of the 2022-2023 school year, for the purposes of the Dissertation in Practice (DiP), the PDSA cycle focused on four iterations, over five consecutive months, starting in October 2022 and ending in February 2023. This time period spanned just over 150 instructional hours and allowed for analysis of at least two CASAS reading tests score per student (one of which will be from September). CASAS scores measure Educational Functioning Level (EFL) gains, a data point used nationally to demonstrate progress in language proficiency. While positive EFL gains for adult ELLs are correlated to increased numbers of instructional hours, with statistically significant positive gains starting at 50 hours (Miller & Johnson, 2020), I did not expect this lagging indicator to be affected in this short period. I did expect, however, to observe changes in teacher's knowledge and instructional practices around the teaching of reading, particularly with emergent readers. In the following section I will summarize the different phases of the PDSA cycle, as displayed in Table 2 below.

Table 2 PDSA Cycle

Plan	**Do**
Create surveys and journal prompts; plan meetings with lead teachers and outside reading consultant; Gather relevant data and research materials	Administer pre/post surveys; organize and maintain PLC document hub; Facilitate PLC meetings; conduct observations
Act	**Study**
Plan subsequent PLC meetings; present findings from surveys and rubric data to operationalize contextualized practices	Analyze and code survey data, synthesize journal reflections and observations rubrics; evaluate artifacts of Ss learning

2.4.1 Plan

The Plan phase of the PLC included meeting with two facilitators, an outside reading specialist and an in-house teacher leader. The teacher previously served as the professional development specialist at School 2Gen. To develop a baseline of teachers' knowledge of reading instruction, we developed a survey to learn about teachers' reading instructional training and practices, how those practices support their learners as developing readers, and what support teachers believe they need to continue to build their practice. The survey also included questions on teachers' beliefs about their learners as readers and the perceived barriers their learners encounter that may affect their literacy development. Analysis of the survey data provided a launching point for the focus of the learning content of subsequent PLC cycles. The content was further honed as the process progressed. The lead teacher and I planned the meeting days and times and developed the overall structure of each meeting.

2.4.2 Do

The Do phase consisted of my facilitating the PLC meetings with the teacher leader. In the meetings we engaged with evidenced based reading instruction research. Additionally, the participants were to determine the reading instructional strategies they wanted to try in the classroom and choose what formative assessment they would use to measure effective implementation of the instructional strategy, that is the observable and measurable artifacts they would collect to demonstrate learners had achieved the strategy objective. Teachers were to come to the subsequent meeting prepared to discuss the strategies they implemented and present learner evidence of progress with the objective. This work informed their next instructional steps.

2.4.3 Study

During the Study phase, I analyzed and coded the survey data and discussion notes to inform planning for the next PLC meeting. I designed each survey using Google Forms through which responses were exported into Excel for coding. For closed questions, such as "*The PLC meeting today was helpful to me in thinking about how to check Ss progress, given my instruction implementing a reading strategy/activity*" I was able to use the direct percentages of teachers' selection to the choices of "*Yes*", "*No*" or "*Undecided.*" For open-ended questions I coded the responses. I conducted the initial coding by reading through teachers' responses to each survey to get an overall sense of the comments. This allowed me to see themes and trends and consider not only how teachers were processing the content of each session but also whether there were any unexpected ways through which they were filtering their understanding. By unexpected I am referring to instances where teachers' expressed instructional choices or understanding of andrological principles and reading instructional theory that deviated from my experience as an educator and research scholar. Unexpected responses led me to consider two things: 1) whether a question was worded unclearly or 2) if there were underlying issues around the topic I had not considered. For example, in the first PLC meeting teachers in one group indicated in the survey that, rather than meet the PLC meeting objective to implement a reading strategy with their learners and use the subsequent formative assessment to evaluate their learners' understanding, they would use a pre-assessment activity. The knowledge of this deviation from the meeting objective allowed me to circle back to teachers to understand their choice and adjust the content of the upcoming meeting.

In a second review of each set of survey comments I coded for use of individual words, phrases, or concepts and then calculated the frequency of these occurrences. The percentage of occurrences became the percentages in the figures displayed in section 3. The coding process is exemplified below in Table 3 using a survey question designed to learn how teachers approached their own knowledge building. In analyzing meeting notes, I used the same process of conducting an initial and then more focused coding.

Table 3 Coding Example

Question: As an adult educator, what do you think about drawing on reading research and practice from both the perspectives of pedagogy and andragogy? Explain.	
Conceptual Label	**Code**
Leans on pedagogical research because there is not a lot of andragogical research	P due to insufficient A
Uses both pedagogical and andragogical research	P and A
Pedagogical research not appropriate for adult learners	P not appropriate
Andragogical and pedagogical research is largely the same	Little difference
Answer was unclear	Unclear

The coding revealed emergent themes as teachers implemented new practices and processed the value of the PLC. I tried to ensure the data I collected emerged, as much as possible, from an organic process of teachers' work to build their instructional practice and was not seen something additional to support my data collection. Teachers participating in the PLCs tracked formative assessments connected to their reading instructional objectives, a practice they are not ordinarily required to follow. Coding and analyzing the survey data

through the lens of this added work, that is teachers collecting formative assessment articles to be analyzed in PLC meetings, even though participation was optional, was important as there were teachers who began to feel overwhelmed by what they perceived as an additional responsibility of documenting and reporting on their leaners' progress. Several teachers opted out of the PLC after the initial meeting, and others expressed needing more time to be prepared for PLC meetings. I discuss this further in Section 4.

2.4.4 Act

In the Act phase of the PDSA cycle, I compiled resources that addressed some of the discussion questions teachers raised in the PLC meetings. I tried to make sure these resources were available to teachers in multi-media formats and were provided ahead of time. I adjusted two of the PLC meetings to better align with teachers' expressed need for additional time to attend to their teaching responsibilities. Adjustments included providing substitute teachers for PLC participants on one meeting day so that they did not lose their planning time and providing space for teachers who were not able to do their pre-reading to do so and then join the discussion groups. Allowing time for reading in the PLC meeting was not ideal as our meetings were only scheduled for 90 minutes, but it was important that teachers felt supported.

In section 3 I discuss the PDSA cycles in detail.

3.0 The PDSA Cycles

This section describes the four PDSA cycles I used to promote more informed reading instructional practices that I hoped would ultimately, improve learner outcomes. I designed the PDSA cycles around monthly PLC meetings. These meetings would take participants through iterations of four cycles: 1) knowledge building in the area of reading instruction, 2) strategy design and implementation, 3) assessment of learner progress, and 4) reflection, a combination of practices through which teachers[5] could build learners' literacy levels, particularly learners who are emergent readers in their L1. The PLCs were held either on established professional development (PD) days or Friday afternoons during the 2022-2023 school year. I describe four PDSA cycles from October 2022 through February 2023 as well as the PD offered at the start of the school year, which was designed to get a baseline of teachers' knowledge of and experience with evidenced-based reading instruction and to build interest in participation in the PLCs.

3.1 PDSA Cycle 1: Plan

In preparation for forming PLCs, a lead teacher and I planned four sessions as part of the August PD offered to teachers prior to the start of the school year. The first and second

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[5] Unless otherwise indicated, in this paper, the term "teachers" includes lead teachers and paraprofessionals. Out of a teaching staff of twenty-six, twenty-three are lead teachers and three are paraprofessionals. These numbers do not include teachers from the evening workforce program.

sessions were developed in coordination with a reading instructional specialist. The first session was dedicated time for teachers to complete a survey to understand who they were as readers, who they believed their learners were as readers, and what training they had experienced that focused on the teaching of reading. The survey also asked teachers to name the barriers they faced in delivering reading instruction as well as those they perceived their adult learners faced in building reading skills. Additionally, it served to get a baseline of the knowledge the teachers had of evidenced-based reading instruction and what was informing their reading instructional practices. This data would be used to inform the content of the second session, a reading instruction workshop which the reading specialist would facilitate. Eighteen of twenty-six teachers responded to the survey.

3.1.1 Session 1: Survey Results

The survey, reproduced in Appendix A as August Survey 1 and represented in Figures 3.1-3.5 below, contained nine open-ended questions and revealed several interesting insights from the teachers.

3.1.1.1 Teachers as Readers.

The majority of teachers (72%) either had no problem learning to read (44%) or did not remember learning to read (28%). Similarly, the majority of the teachers (77%) read a lot outside of school when they were growing up. This relatively smooth experience with text is an experience that the majority of their learners do not share (see Figure 3).
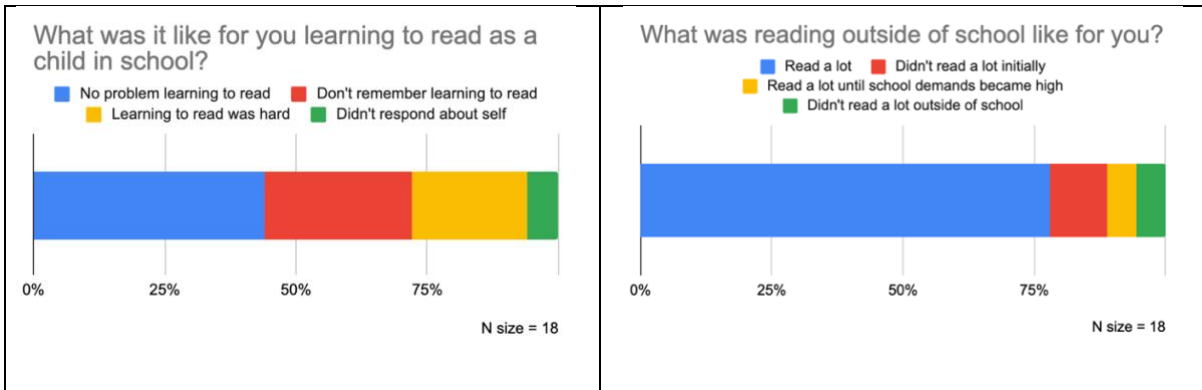
Figure 3 Teachers' Childhood Reading Experiences

3.1.1.2 Training in Reading Instruction

Regarding training in reading instruction, 33% reported they had an extensive amount of training, 38% reported having had a moderate amount of training, and 23% of teachers reported that they had little to no training (one teacher's response, or .06%, was unclear as to how much training they had). Given this level of training it was unsurprising that 72% of the teachers named the five pillars of reading (phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary development, and reading comprehension) as what should be included in teaching reading comprehension. When asked to describe what they knew about the pillars, 50% of the teachers could explain all of them, 17% could explain the four pillars, 11% were able to explain 2-3 pillars, and 22% of teachers either did not know, or their answer was unclear (see Figure 4).
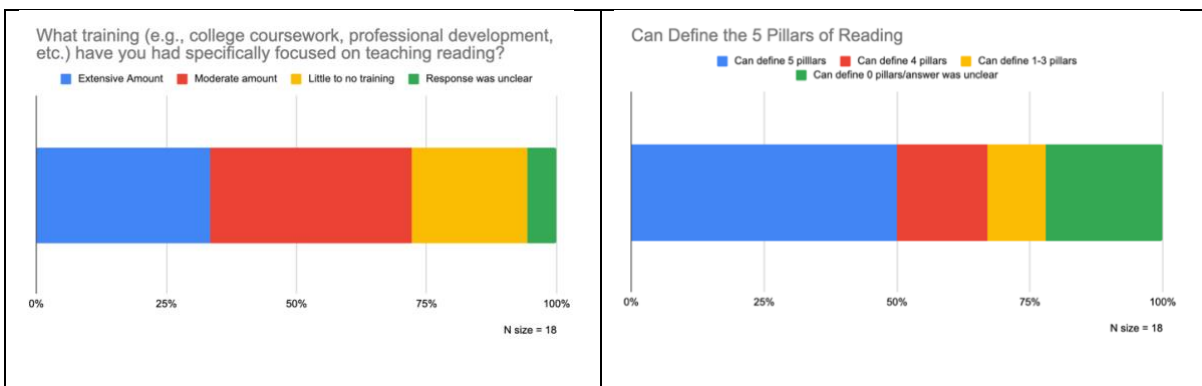
Figure 4 Teachers' Training in Reading Instruction

3.1.1.3 Processes Utilized to Make Instructional Decisions.

Regarding how teachers described their processes for making instructional decisions, 17% mentioned a cycle of assessing needs, designing instruction based on those needs, and monitoring instruction, 39% of teachers mentioned 1-2 of these elements, and 44% made no mention of them. While this question was open ended, that teachers did not report some kind of cycle of assess, design, and monitor was important baseline information to affirm, as an objective of the PLC was to build teachers' practice of utilizing learner data to inform their instruction (see Figure 5).

How do you determine what to teach your students in reading lessons? What process or processes do you follow to make instructional decisions?

Mention 3 elements ■ Mention 1-2 elements ■ No mention of elements

N size = 18
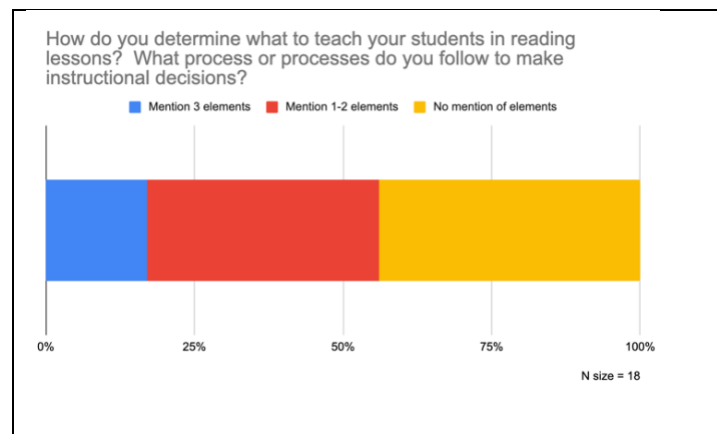
Figure 5 Teachers' Process for Instructional Decisions

Barriers Teachers Faced as a Reading Instructor

Of the 18 teachers responding about contextual barriers that make teaching reading difficult, 72% cited learners' lack of time to study, and 50% cited the diversity of learner needs. It is unclear from this second statistic whether the barrier the teachers are referring to was their inability to respond to learners with diverse needs or the span of learners' needs (see Figure 3.4). In one survey response a teacher wrote:

As several of the podcasts stated, I am one of many teachers who has walked into the classroom feeling ill-equipped to teach emergent readers and have admittedly (though subconsciously) blamed some of that on low background

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education, language barrier, and poverty, etc. All the podcasts I listened to, together with the training, have changed/challenged my thinking here. I believe with the right tools and systematic efforts, I CAN (emphasis in original response) help my students learn to read.

Additionally, 11% of teachers reported that they needed more professional development in reading instruction, 5% reported learners' personal (unspecified) barriers, and another 5% reported that they didn't know as they were new to this process.

3.1.1.4 Teachers' Perceptions of Barriers to Reading Learners Faced

Regarding the barriers they believed learners faced in learning to read, teachers cited learners' lack of formal education most often (78%), followed by a lack of time to practice (66%), physical or cognitive challenges learners faced (33%), a lack of familiarity with alphabetic print literacy (28%), and an inadequate English vocabulary (17%) (see Figure 6). In both questions regarding barriers, teachers were not limited to a specific number and listed as many as three teacher-facing barriers and six learner-facing barriers.
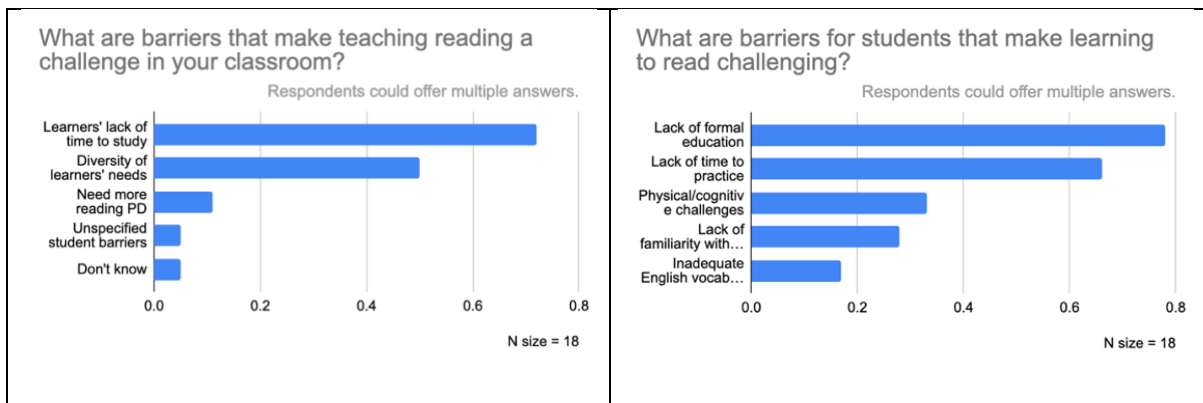
Figure 6 Barriers

3.1.1.5 Teachers' Approach to Knowledge Building

We wrote the final two survey questions to understand teachers' approach to building their knowledge of ERBI, especially because the majority of reading instructional research has

targeted K-5 learners learning to read in their L1 (see Figure 7). Regarding the teachers'

approach to knowledge building, the majority of teachers (55%) reported that they drew from

the research on K-12 learners as they believed there was not much research based on adult

learners, especially those who are emergent readers in their L1. Another 16% reported that

they refer to pedagogical research because research specific to adults is not abundant; however,

they reported approaching pedagogical research with the understanding that it may not apply

to adult learners. Of the remaining responses, 5% reported that pedagogical research was

possibly not relevant for adults, 5% believed the pedagogical and andragogical research were

largely interchangeable, and 5% reported they had not been trained to use research. Another

11% responded in ways which were unclear as to which research they drew on. Regarding in

what area of reading instruction teachers wanted to deepen their knowledge, the majority of

teachers (72%) identified wanting to learn how to teach 1-5 of the pillars of reading.
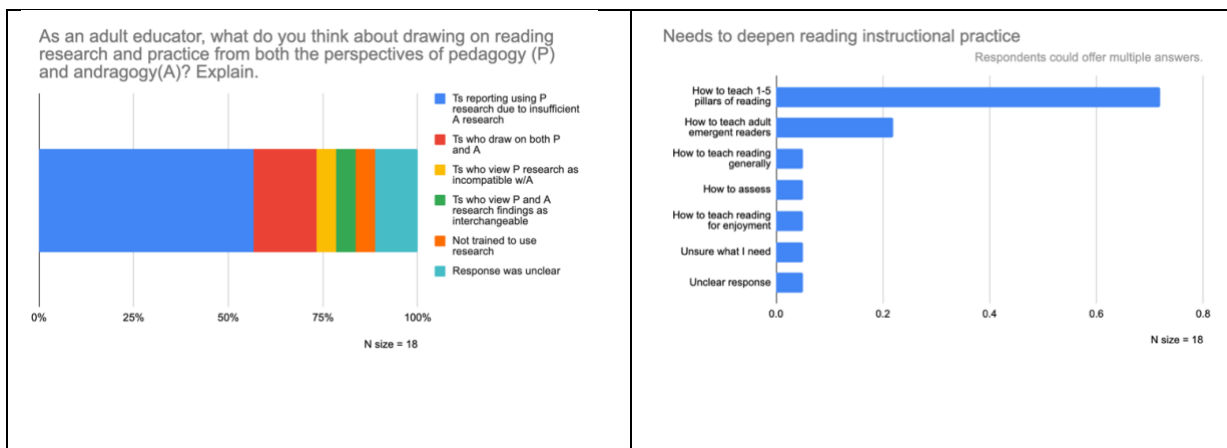
Figure 7 Teachers' Approach to Knowledge Building

3.1.2 Session 2 Reading Instruction Workshop Survey Results

The second session was an all-day, interactive, in-person workshop comprising three

parts: 1) an overview of reading instructional theories, 2) a review of the research on teaching

reading to adults, and 3) a discussion around questions the teachers could consider about their

learners to help guide their reading instructional decisions. After the session, teachers responded to a four-question survey which I designed to understand what teachers had learned in the session and how comfortable teachers were with reading instructional theory. I also wanted to know what, if any, questions they still had about what was presented and if there were any additional resources they might need, given what they learned. Fifteen of 24 teachers responded (see Figure 8).

3.1.2.1 Takeaways from Session 2

Teachers were asked to name one takeaway from the session, and while some named more than one, 40% of the responses mentioned the three different theoretical models of reading instruction they engaged with during the session. They also reported on the connections they made to the importance of assessment (14%) and of addressing all 5 of the pillars (14%) in identifying where to focus instruction. Four additional takeaways were mentioned, each by one respondent: 1) an affirmation of what one respondent already knew, 2) an appreciation for both an andragogical and pedagogical approach to reading instruction, 3) making a connection on how to help learner progress by including metacognitive strategies instruction for learners, and 4) an appreciation for the importance of phonics instruction.

3.1.2.2 Comfort with Reading Instructional Theory

The majority of respondents (53%) indicated that they were "comfortable" with the information presented around reading instructional theory, while 20% indicated that they were "fairly comfortable" and still another 20% indicated they were "very comfortable." It was unclear from 7% of the respondents as to how comfortable they were with the material, although they reported the session was "helpful/useful." These statistics was not surprising

given the information teachers self-reported about their training in reading instruction in the survey from the initial session.

3.1.2.3 Remaining Questions Given Session Content

Only 10 teachers responded to the next question asking for what, if any, additional information they wanted. Teachers indicated they had questions about reading instructional strategies they could use in the classroom (80%), and how to assess their learners on the five pillars of reading (60%). Additional questions were about how to apply research to learners in our context of adult ELLs with limited formal school experience (10%), and what reading instructional supports the school could offer to the teachers (10%).

3.1.2.4 Supports Needed

All the teachers responded to the final survey question regarding what more they needed related to this second session. Teachers were not limited to a single response. Of the respondents, 53% reported they needed strategies to teach reading and 27% asked for more research on reading instruction. Teachers also indicated they wanted more knowledge about assessment (20%) and to be part of a PLC (13%). Additional identified needs included opportunities to collaborate (7%), and access to resources (7%). A final 7% reported they were processing what they described as "a lot to learn" from the session.
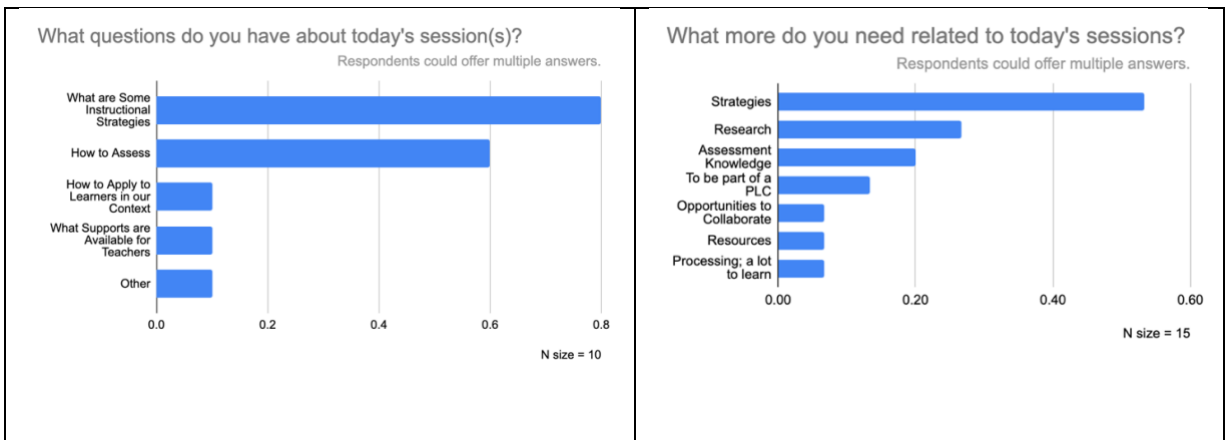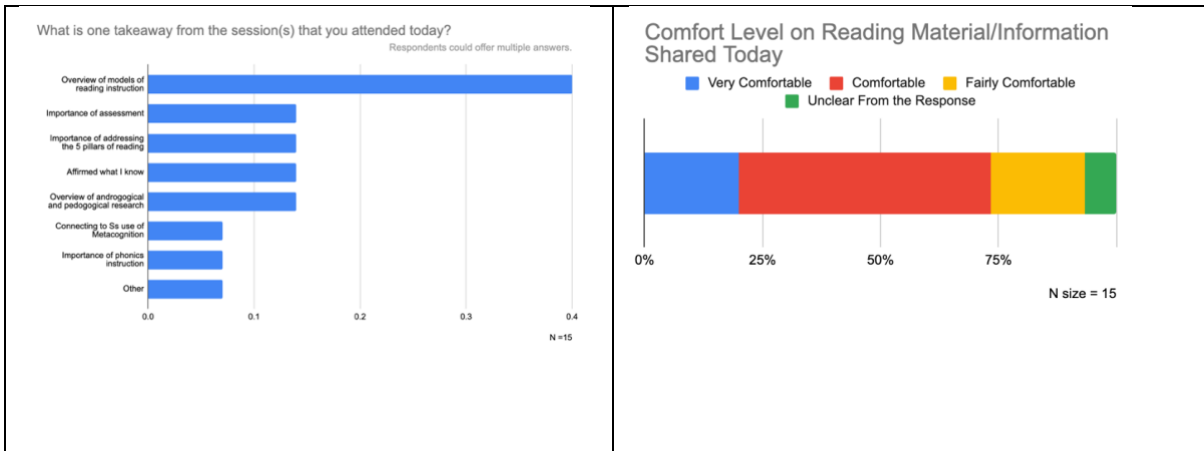
Figure 8 Reading Instruction Workshop Feedback

3.1.3 Session 3: Independent Learning

For the third session, teachers were assigned a selection of podcasts, videos, and articles on topics related to reading instruction, from which they were to choose one to listen to, watch, or read. Our intent was to use their learning to generate conversations that could pique their interest in participating in PLCs as a way to engage in further research and discussion. This variety of media both provided multiple entry points to a conversation we facilitated in the fourth session around evidenced-based reading instructional theory and practice and helped to build a common vocabulary with which teachers could discuss what they were learning. Time was provided during PD for teachers to engage with the media, and they were encouraged to

take a walk while listening to a podcast or go outside to watch a video or to read. Teachers were then given time to summarize, in a survey, key takeaways and note what surprised them, as well as what challenged, changed, or confirmed their thinking, using the questions posed by Beers & Probst in their book *Reading Non-Fiction: Notice & Note Stances, Signposts, and Strategies* (2015). Additionally, they were asked to connect what they learned to their reading instructional practices and what more they would like to learn about the topic. Finally, they were asked to express any questions they had about the topic. Sixteen teachers responded to the survey.

Because teachers engaged with over 21 different reading instructional resources, and three teachers reported engaging with two or more, in this paper I have included broad trends from the survey data as opposed to including the learning teachers reported for each individual resource. Not surprisingly, teachers' takeaways were as varied as the ideas that surprised them. Their responses indicated a wide range of experience with reading instructional theory. Responses that demonstrated less experience included teachers being surprised by ideas such as "Ss reading comprehension is different depending on their background knowledge on the topic," while those that demonstrated more experience included ideas such as "The human brain in normal adults changes with the advent of specifically alphabetic (not logographic--i.e. character-based languages) print literacy." As mentioned in previous surveys, when teachers were asked what more they would like to learn about the topics they engaged with, they repeated a desire for more strategies and techniques (27% of respondents), research (20% of respondents), resources (20% of respondents) and assessment tools (13% of respondents). (20% of teachers did not respond to this question).

3.1.4 Session 4: Introducing the PLC

The fourth session, held virtually, was an introduction to the PLC. This session included all our adult ed team, but participation in the PLC, which would start in October, would be optional. As a warm-up activity for this session, teachers were put into breakout rooms by the level they taught to discuss who they thought their learners were as readers. They had already reflected on this in the previous week's survey, and the breakout sessions were an opportunity to process their thinking with their colleagues. They were also asked to consider what additional information they might want to understand about their learners as they thought about their shared instructional practices. The second part of the session involved a jigsaw activity[6] where teachers were put into breakout rooms with two additional colleagues who had chosen a different selection to read, watch, or listen to in the previous week. In these triads they shared what they had learned and how it connected to their practice as reading instructors. Notes from both parts were kept recorded on the presentation Google Slides that teachers could access in their breakout rooms. The final part of the session was an introduction to the workings of PLCs and their utility in deepening the collective learning through research and a shared practice that would lead to stronger teaching practices and ultimately improved learner outcomes (Kruse et al., 1994). At the end of the session teachers completed a survey that asked them to indicate their interest in participating in a PLC focused on building our reading instructional practices. Sixteen teachers out of 26 indicated they wanted to participate in the PLC. The survey data revealed that several of the teachers did not have the bandwidth to participate in the PLC. I believed a contributing factor was that we were entering a second,

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[6] A jigsaw activity is one where small groups of learners are formed and each learner, having a unique part of the whole, is responsible to teach their part to the group.

complete academic year in the global COVID pandemic. Having to teach virtually, most teachers were still working long hours adapting to engage learners, the majority of whom had limited formal school experience and few, if any, of the technology skills required to access learning on-line. Further discussion of this fatigue will be covered in Section 4. We set the first meeting for October.

3.2 PDSA Cycle 1: Do

3.2.1 PLC Meeting 1

I scheduled our initial PLC meeting to be held in-person, in October, where we were able to utilize three hours of a PD day. The teachers participating in the PLC spanned the levels of courses from pre-literacy (which in this paper I include when I reference Basic classes/teachers) to advanced English. To engage teachers at each level, the work we did in the PLC would need to be tailored to the reading instructional needs of the learners teachers were serving at each level. For this reason, I encouraged teachers to choose a component of reading[7] that they were interested in focusing on for their work within the PLC.

With my co-planner I identified three objectives for the first meeting: teachers were to 1) discuss reading activities they have tried during this school year, 2) identify a reading activity that they are doing or will do before our next meeting, and 3) make a plan for how they

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[7] The five pillars of reading can also be referred to as the four components of reading. For the purposes of this paper, the distinction I make is that in the components of reading, phonemic awareness and phonics are combined into one category termed alphabetics. Because our Basic level teachers teach both phonemic awareness and phonics, for the rest of this paper I will use the phrase components of reading instead of five pillars of reading.

would collect data about students' learning given the identified reading activity in objective two. Teachers were to discuss strategies they were utilizing to build reading comprehension in the areas of alphabetics, fluency, vocabulary, and/or comprehension. Because teachers meet regularly in level cohorts, cross-level groups were organized as a way for teachers to hear about reading strategies used at other levels. Within these groups, teachers were given 30 minutes to discuss the following:

1. What strategies/activities are you using when you focus on this component?

    a. How are those working?

    b. Are there adjustments you want to make?

    c. Is there additional information you want?

    d. What questions do you have about your strategy/activity?

2. Recognizing that the combination of the four components of reading support the goal of making meaning of text, in which component of reading do you believe your learners most need to build skills?

Within the groups, teachers were directed to decide on reading instructional strategies they would implement in their classes. The teachers in the group were not instructed to use the same strategy, but they were to use a strategy that targeted the component of reading on which the group was focused. They were also to discuss how their learners would demonstrate their understanding of the strategy, through some kind of formative assessment of the learning objective that corresponded to the component of reading. Teachers would share the evidence with their group members at the next meeting. This evidence would be the basis of discussion to determine next steps to support learners who 1) needed more practice 2) required a different way to meet the objective, or 3) met the objective and were ready to move on.

3.3 PDSA Cycle 1: Study

Within the PLC, four groups formed, each with a focus on a different component of reading. One group chose to focus on alphabetics. This group consisted of six teachers and three teaching assistants, all of whom taught the basic levels of English. A second group was made up of three teachers focusing on vocabulary. The final two groups consisted of two teachers each. One group's focus was fluency and the other's was reading comprehension. While this was an attempt to differentiate the PD for teachers, it was going to add a level of complexity to facilitating the conversations. With only two facilitators, ensuring each group understood and followed the instructions was going to be a challenge. To address this, the survey that teachers would complete at the end of the session was designed to capture both the component of reading the teacher would focus on and what they would bring back to the group as evidence to support their instruction.

The first group, whose focus was alphabetics, chose to use pre-assessment phonics assessments they had designed for each of their levels. They chose to implement them and bring the results back for the November meeting. This focus on pre-assessment was a deviation from the PLC objective to use formative assessment, but the group believed this would serve them in deciding where to focus their instruction on alphabetics. Because we practice open enrollment during the first term[8] of the school year, the teachers decided to wait until the second term began, when enrollment is generally closed to new students, to implement any kind of baseline testing outside of our initial placement test. Given their decision and that the

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[8] Each term is approximately nine weeks of school.

second PLC meeting was scheduled to be held early in second term, I did not intervene to ask for examples of data based on classroom instruction.

The second group, focused on vocabulary, reported they were using an array of vocabulary activities including matching activities at the lower level of English to self-directed vocabulary journals at the advanced levels. They reported using quizzes to assess learning. One teacher utilized peer teaching and learning through a jigsaw strategy. It was unclear from the survey how the learning from the jigsaw activity would be assessed.

The group focused on fluency consisted of two teachers who reported different activities they would try. One reported they would use a fluency-focused lesson around a short dialogue. Students would record themselves reading the dialogue as a pre-assessment. They would then have the opportunity for repeated readings with attention paid to intonation and punctuation. A final reading of the dialogue would serve to measure progress. The second teacher wanted to utilize Microsoft Reading Progress, a program where students could read a given text and get built-in AI feedback on their fluency and pronunciation. The teacher reported they would need support from our digital integration team to implement this process as they did not have experience with Microsoft Reading Progress.

The final group, focused on reading comprehension, wanted to utilize Question-Answer Relationship (QAR), a questioning strategy that explores the relationship between questions and their responses. One of the teachers reported they would have their learners write their own questions, focusing particularly on questions of inference, as a way to assess understanding. The second teacher did not report how they would assess learners.

The post-October PLC session survey revealed that teachers were generally satisfied with the session. The average score was 4.25 out of 5, with 100% of the 16 teachers responding.

The survey also revealed that in response to the questions around what would have made this session more helpful, and suggestions for the next session, 44% of the teachers responded that they would like 1) more research and/or resources to help build their knowledge and/or implementation techniques and 2) more knowledge in assessing adult ELLs' progress within the components of reading. Another 44% of the teachers responded they would like more time to collaborate with and learn from their peers. The remaining 12% of the teachers asked for more time with the reading specialist we worked with in August and more time with current student data.

3.4 PDSA Cycle 1: Act

In response to teachers' requests for more resources, I compiled a list of research articles that contained practical strategies on the components of reading that individual teachers were focused on. I sent each teacher a check-in email to see where they were with the work they were considering for the PLC and if there was anything I could do to support that work. The email included the relevant links to the resources for them to review if they so desired. I was also going to have to rethink how to support the teachers who were using preassessment data rather than a quick formative assessment of how learners were meeting daily or weekly reading instruction objectives. For this reason, I decided to include a data protocol in the next cycle, to allow teachers to look at large trends in aggregated data.

3.5 PDSA Cycle 2–Plan

Our November PLC meeting was originally scheduled for either Friday, November 4, a day designed for department meetings, or Friday, November 11, a PD day. The date was to be finalized based on participants' preference; however, due to a series of organizational logistics, detailed in Section 4 of this paper, our final decision, with teacher input, was to hold the meeting on Friday, November 18. This late-in-the-month meeting, combined with a short month in December due to the winter holidays, made scheduling a December PLC meeting challenging; however, because teachers were signaling that their workloads were overwhelming, it was important to honor their request. Friday afternoons are generally left open for teachers to plan and complete other administrative tasks. In order to hold what would be an additional Friday afternoon meeting, I arranged for sub coverage for their Friday morning classes which included PLC-participating teachers not having to produce sub plans.

The format of our October meeting made it difficult to effectively track the various conversations taking place within the four groups. From the October survey, we knew that half the teachers were looking to bring a pre-test assessment to help inform their instructional strategies. While these data were valuable, reviewing aggregated data of a preassessment did not meet the objective outlined in the October meeting, that of having formative assessment data to evaluate learners' ability to meet the objectives of a given reading instructional strategy.

The November PLC meeting was initially designed to allow teachers the opportunity to evaluate formative assessment artifacts. Understanding of this empirical evidence could help them adjust daily strategies accordingly. However, three points surfaced to alter that design. The first was half of the participants were going to be looking at pre-test assessment data which focused on learners' understanding of the phonemic and phonological awareness objectives

for the entire course, rather than the effectiveness of daily reading instructional strategies. The meeting therefore would need to be structured to support the teachers in the work they were doing in addition to guiding next steps toward monitoring progress using formative, rather than summative, assessments. The second point was the survey results from the October PLC meeting indicated that teachers wanted to engage with more research and resources to deepen their practice to build reading comprehension. The third point was teachers indicated an appreciation of and desire to work collaboratively.

Given the challenge of facilitating several groups focused on different components of reading I wanted to provide research and resources that would be applicable to all the teachers. In consultation with the reading instructional specialist, I decided to focus the research portion of the meeting on vocabulary development for ELLs. Because vocabulary development for ELLs is of particular importance in developing reading comprehension at all levels, I chose to share a chapter of Calderon's vocabulary research, *"Teaching Reading & Comprehension to English Learners, K-5"* (2011). This would enable us to have an all-group experience.

3.6 PDSA Cycle 2–Do

3.6.1 PLC Meeting 2

The November PLC meeting was held virtually[9] on Zoom and was scheduled for 90 minutes. Eleven of sixteen teachers were present. Three teachers had decided not to continue,

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[9] While I preferred to hold the PLC meetings in person, teachers teach virtually from home on Fridays. Almost all of them do this from home, as the school has provided them the equipment to do so. Because we are

citing overwhelming workload, and two were out that day. The eleven teachers were members of three of the four initial PLC groups. The largest group continued to be the one focused on alphabetics. The second group was the fluency group; however, of the two teachers who initially chose to focus on fluency, one decided to change their focus from fluency to alphabetics so that they could work with their level cohort who were all focused on alphabetics. The third group were teachers focused on vocabulary. The fourth group comprised the two teachers who were absent and did not meet.

The November PLC meeting included four objectives. The first was that teachers would use a data protocol adapted from the School Reform Initiative Atlas Protocol (School Reform Initiative, n.d.) with their colleagues to assess the data they had gathered to inform their next steps. The second and third objectives were to review a synthesis of vocabulary development research and practice one vocabulary development strategy that was presented from the research. The final objective was to reflect on the learning by completing a post-session survey.

The groups had 35 minutes to review their data using the data protocol, where they were to describe and interpret the data and then consider the implications for classroom practice. We utilized three breakout rooms for the three groups to review their data. The first group consisted of the Basic level teachers who were focused on alphabetics. This group was facilitated by my PLC co-leader who is also a basic level teacher. As previously mentioned, the second group, focused on fluency, was now down to one teacher. Because they were working alone, I chose to spend the group time with them. This teacher had not started any fluency work in their class. They were getting help from our digital integration team to

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across four sites, there isn't the space or equipment at one site for all teachers to be on-site to teach virtually so that they can also then be together for an in-person meeting. Additionally, the time to commute between classes and potential in-person meetings is significant for some of our teachers.

implement Microsoft Reading Progress, a program to measure fluency, and hoped to be ready with data for the next meeting. As they did not have any formative assessment to look at, we chose to look at the data from CASAS, a summative reading assessment that all learners take four times each school year. I was curious about their questions which affirmed for me the need to provide more opportunities to look at data to help teachers build data analysis practices to inform their instructional choices. The final group looked at their data on the vocabulary work their learners were engaged in within their classes. All groups were to take notes that would be shared with me.

The second part of the PLC meeting was used to provide teachers an opportunity to engage with research on reading comprehension practices, in particular vocabulary development. I had prepared a slide deck with the highlights of chapter 6 of Calderon's *Teaching Reading & Comprehension to English Learners, K-5*, (2011), which included a synthesis of the literature on vocabulary strategies for ELLs. This section of the PLC also included time for pairs of teachers to meet in breakout rooms to practice Calderon's 7-step vocabulary routine. Teachers had 40 minutes to review the vocabulary research and practice a vocabulary strategy. The final 10 minutes were designated time for teachers to complete the survey.

3.7 PDSA Cycle 2: Study

For the second PLC session we had ambitious objectives for the allotted time and teachers' responses to the survey (described below) affirmed this. Several responses mentioned

there not being enough time to cover the objectives. In trying to honor teachers' requests for both time to review research and look at data, we had planned too much.

Of the eleven participants in the PLC meeting, eight completed the survey. The survey was divided into three parts which gave teachers the opportunity to reflect on 1) how the data protocol process went and what the data revealed to them, 2) the next instructional steps they would take in the classroom and the supports they might need for implementation 3) what they learned from the vocabulary research. Teachers responded to 14 questions, 11 of which were open-ended.

3.7.1 The Data Protocol Process and What the Data Revealed

All the teachers responded that the data protocol was at least helpful in highlighting patterns of learner progress; however, one teacher added that while they appreciated the protocol they "felt very underprepared to do formal assessment of fluency due to the lack of information we received and time to develop my own assessment and then grade all of them." Regarding what the data protocol revealed, 63% of the teachers commented that they appreciated collaboratively processing the data across levels and identifying trends in learners' progress. One of these respondents reported that it was "interesting to see the patterns in phonics errors, especially with the significant challenge students had with vowels," while another reported it was helpful to go through the data and consider contextual implications such as learners' L1 and educational level. 25% of the teachers reported that this process was new for them and that they would continue to use data in this way, while 13% of the respondents said this process affirmed what they had suspected about the phonemes they needed to explicitly teach (see Figure 3.7).

One quarter of the teachers thought standardized assessments would be helpful in processing the data. Another 25% felt that while the protocol was helpful, they wanted more time on techniques and resources to support instruction. Additional remarks included wanting more time to study the data (13%), wanting to learn more about the data protocol process (13%), and wanting to spend time looking at disaggregated data (13%). One teacher did not respond to the question (see Figure 9).
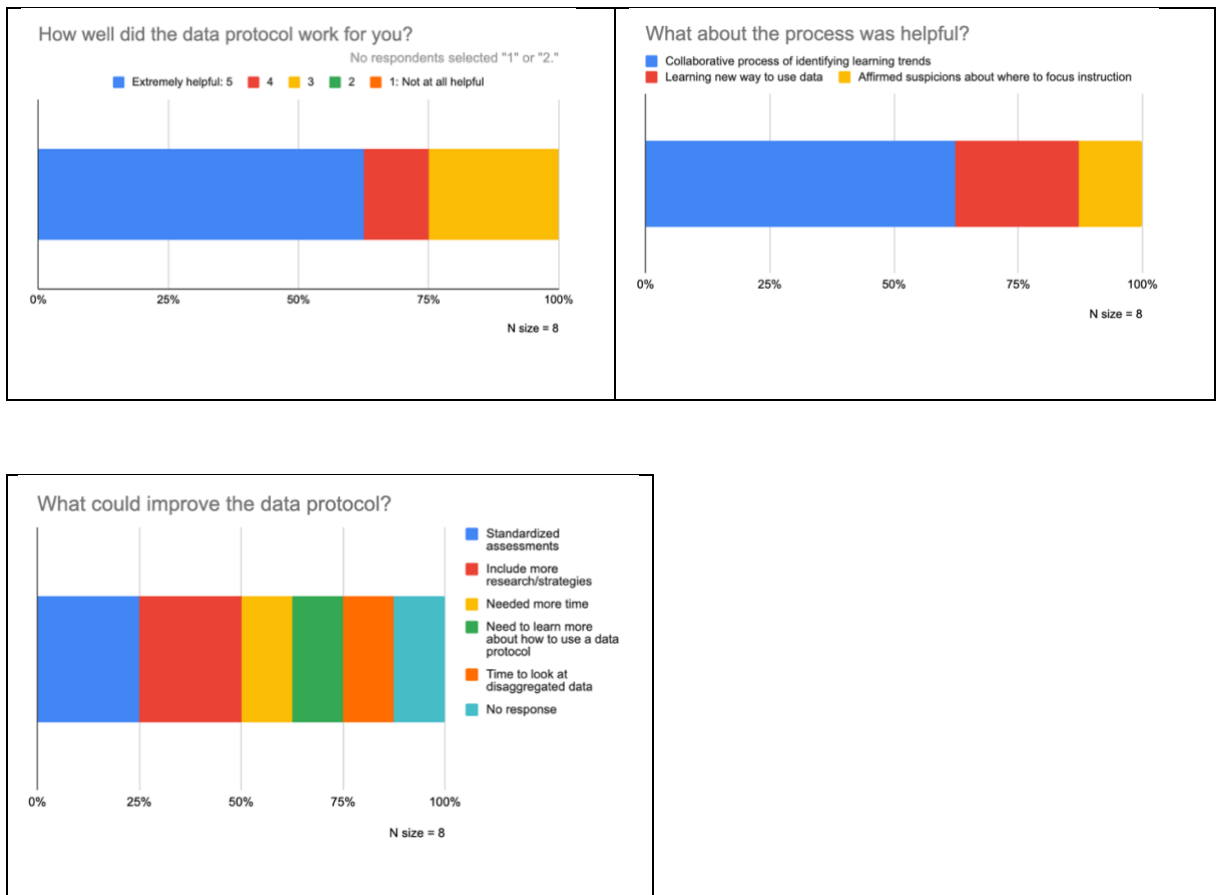
Figure 9 Data Protocol Efficacy

3.7.2 Questions Prompted by the Data Analysis

In regard to the questions the data protocol prompted for them, 68% of the teachers wondered about the order they should follow in teaching phonemes, given that learners encountered so much text that included phonemes not yet covered (long vowels, for example).

Additional questions included: 1) how much of an emphasis should be placed on developing Spanish literacy, as it was possible that learners' L1 was interfering with their learning of phonemes in English (13%), and 2) what they could do to better analyze the data (13%). Again, one teacher did not respond to this question (see Figure 10).

Regarding how to address the questions raised by the data protocol, 37% of the teachers thought continuing to analyze learner data would be helpful to inform their instruction, another 37% thought standardized teaching resources and processes like common textbooks and teaching strategies would be helpful, and 25% thought continued peer collaboration would be useful (see Figure 10).
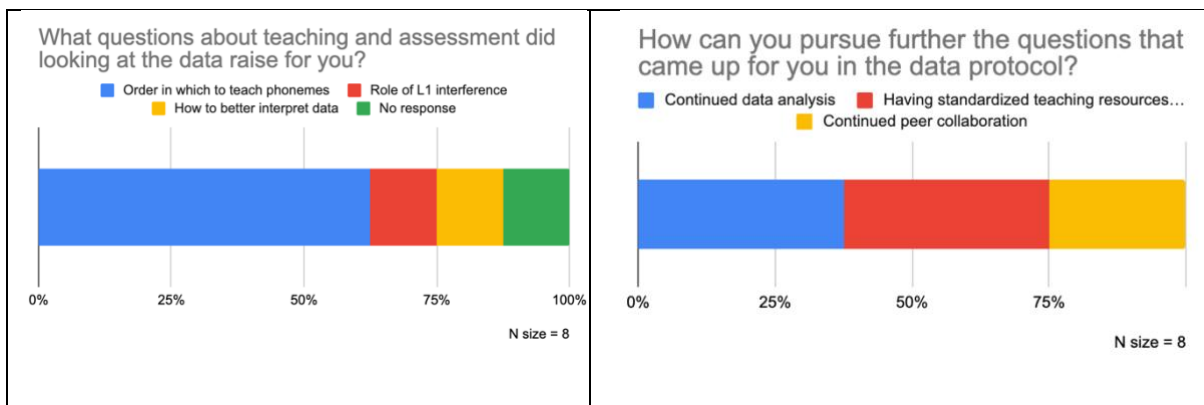
Figure 10 Considering Questions Attributed to the Data Protocol

3.7.3 Data Informed Instruction

Teachers were asked to report on the strategies they would try or continue using in the classroom given the review of the data. Survey responses revealed that 63% of the teachers reported wanting to continue with specific reading comprehension strategies (phonics 25%; vocabulary 25%; fluency 13%), and 37% reported they wanted to use data to inform instruction. To encourage teachers to monitor instruction, teachers were asked to report on the formative assessment they would gather upon implementing the strategy they referenced in the prior question. In response, 75% of the teachers listed different ways they would assess,

including technological programs like Microsoft Reading Progress, Mote (embedded in Google forms), Edpuzzle, or Kahoot to capture learners' progress. The remaining 25% of the teachers were unsure what formative assessment they would use (See Figure 11)
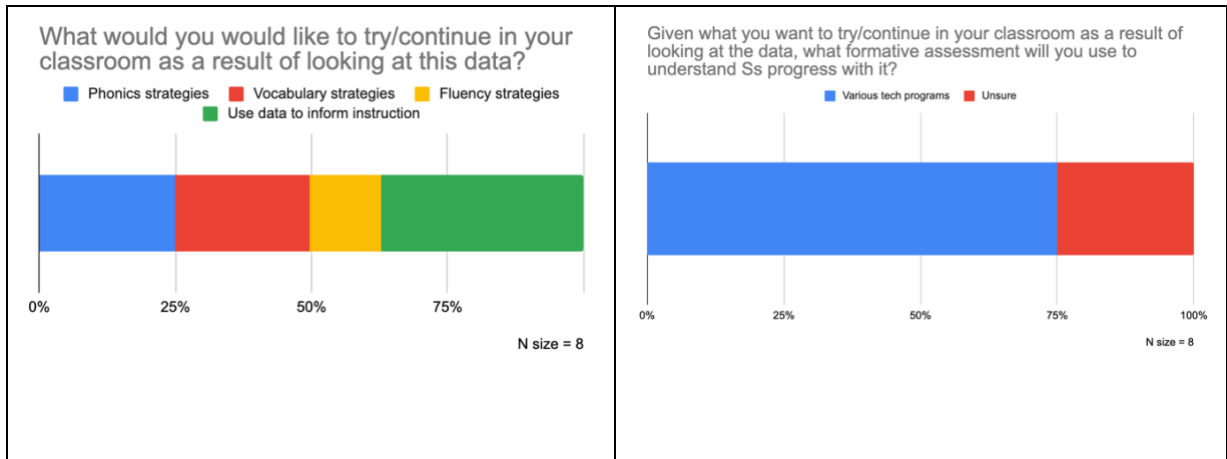
Figure 11 Responding to Learner Data

3.7.4 Instructional Support for Teachers

In response to questions about potential instructional support teachers might want, teachers were not limited to a specific number of responses, and 75% of teachers identified two or more supports, while 13% of teachers stated they did not need any support. The majority of teachers (88%) reported wanting support to implement strategies, and 50% of teachers indicated they wanted support gathering or identifying formative assessment. Because the selection "support with gathering/identifying formative assessment" was worded to include two options, it was unclear as to which aspect of formative assessment teachers were referring. Thirty-eight percent of teachers wanted thought partnership and 25% wanted support identifying strategies to use. Another 25% wanted additional research on the components of reading and 13% wanted more time to be able to design and grade assessments. This last response raised two questions for me: 1) Was the PLC objective to use formative rather than summative assessment unclear for this respondent? and/or 2) Was there an understanding that

formative assessments are low-stake assessments, designed as a quick and informal check on learner progress? (See Figure 12).
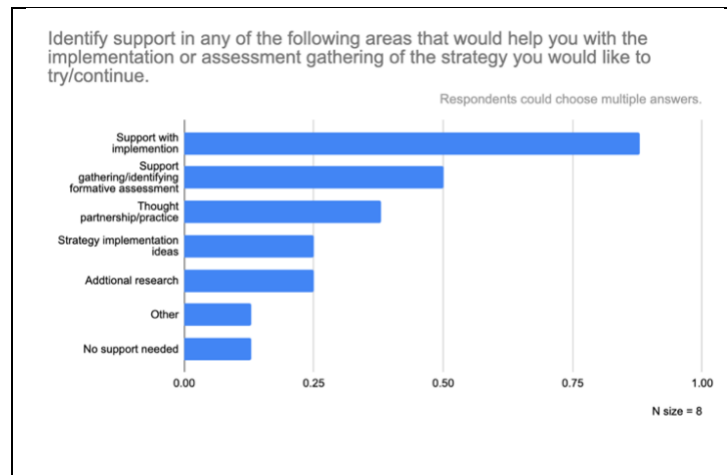
Figure 12 Evaluation of the Vocabulary Research and Demonstration

Additionally, teachers were asked to report on what from the session was helpful for working with ELL vocabulary development. The majority of the teachers (88%) responded that the vocabulary section of the meeting contained new information for them and 63% reported that they felt better equipped to implement vocabulary development strategies as a result of the session. In terms of what was useful to them, 63% reported they had learned a new strategy, 25% appreciated the demonstration and the accompanying resources, and 13% indicated it was helpful to know the research we discussed in the session was carried out with ELLs in grades K-12, although how the teacher was considering it for the adult education context within which we work was unclear from this response.

Responding to what teachers would apply to their practice given what they had learned in the session, 63% indicated they would incorporate the demonstrated vocabulary strategies, while 13% indicated they were unsure of what they would use. Another 13% included a response from which it was unclear what they intended to apply while the final 13% did not respond to this question.

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Regarding how the section of the PLC meeting on vocabulary development could have been improved, 37% of the teachers felt the information was not directly applicable to their learners and another 37% felt there was not enough time to cover the information. 13% of the teachers thought more examples would have been helpful and another 13% thought the session did not need to be improved. Teacher responses are represented in Figure 13 below.
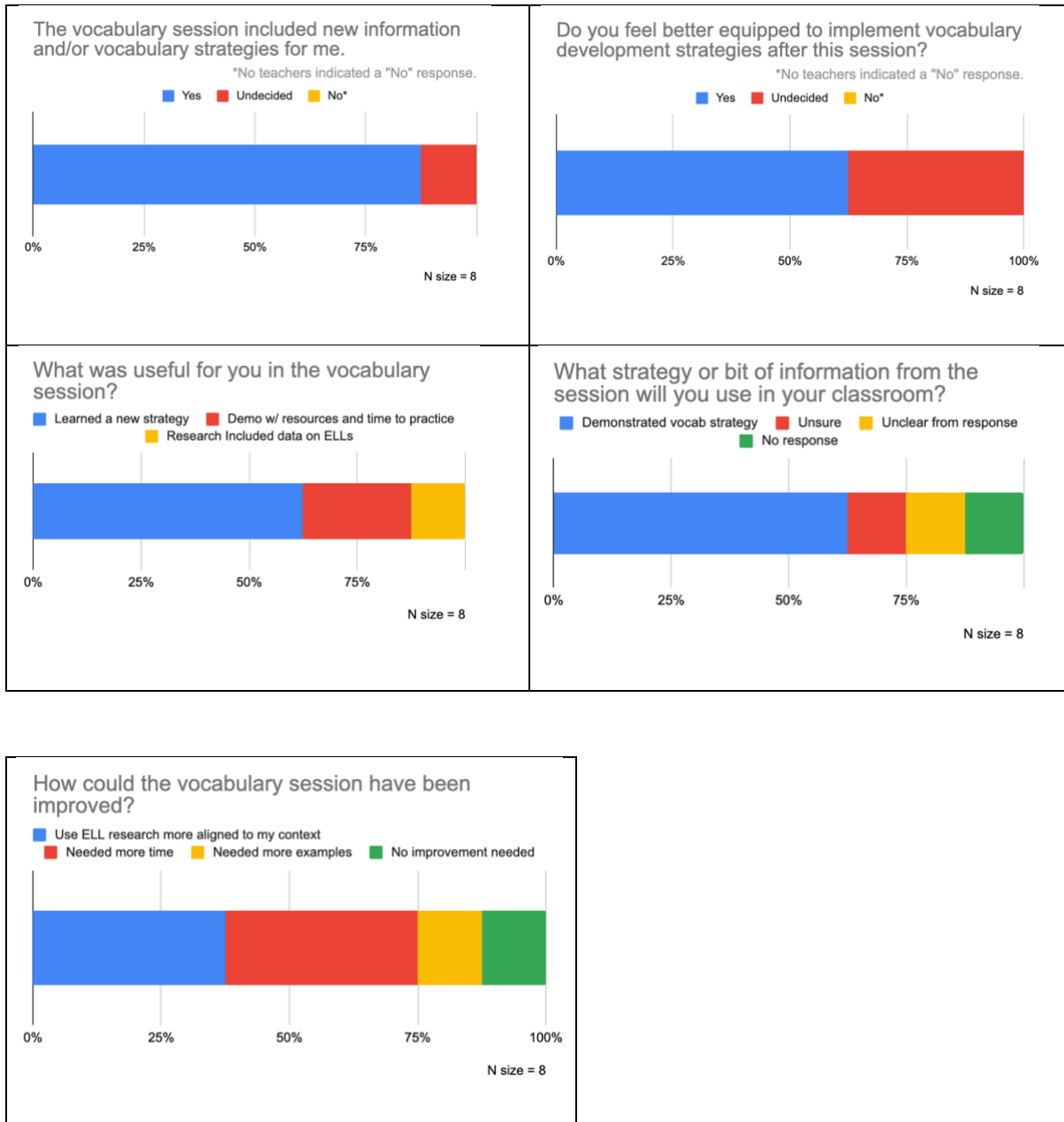
Figure 13 Feedback on Vocabulary Development Session

I also asked teachers a question on what, if any, equity issues arose. One teacher noted their learners' lack of access to education given familial or societal resources as an equity issue. A second teacher raised a concern around minority language access. They noted that because most of our ESOL teachers speak Spanish this understanding helps them to support Spanish-speaking ELLs in a way they cannot support speakers of other languages. They also noted that the similarities between English and Spanish phonemes was an inherent advantage that learners of minority languages (in my institution's case, non-Spanish speakers) did not share.

It was noteworthy that one teacher took from the data that phonics instruction in context did not seem to be working and that they should be using the presentation of phonemes in the order proposed by the phonics training program they had undergone; however, a second teacher indicated they wanted to teach phonics in context. This uncertainty about the order in which to teach letter sounds was echoed by several teachers, however they indicated the data was helpful in knowing the phonemes they didn't need to teach. It was curious to me that the alphabetics group choose to focus on aggregated data when using the data protocol. Clearly they had disaggregated data, but it was unclear to me what they meant by "knowing the phonemes they didn't need to teach." Would this influence large group instruction aimed at some percentage of the class, or individualized instruction informed by disaggregated data?

3.8 PDSA Cycle 2–Act

In reviewing the survey data as well as conversations with teacher supervisors, it seemed like two phenomena were occurring that were influencing the direction of the PLC. First, I was unsure about teachers' clarity on how to meet the objectives of the PLC. Half of

the participants were using summative assessment, and while I understood their reasoning, the focus on summative data serves a different purpose, acting on summative data is a much longer game. The second, and perhaps more important reason, was that teachers were signaling that the workload of the school year was becoming too much (I offer a fuller discussion of this latter point in Section 4, in section Organizational Culture). In light of these two factors, I decided that for the next PLC session, rather than hold the December meeting as planned, I would substitute a 30-minute check-in with each group in lieu of a 90-minute PLC meeting. I would meet with each group to discuss their understanding of what their next steps would be given the data they were collecting.

3.9 PDSA Cycle 3–Plan

3.9.1 Individual PLC Group Meetings

I decided to hold virtual meetings throughout the month of December with each group from the PLC. I wanted to confirm that teachers' instructional choices were informed by their understanding of their learners' progress at both the individual and aggregate level. This was proving difficult for me to assess within the PLC meetings given four groups working on four different components of reading. The survey responses were helping to inform me about the groups' thinking, but it was not always clear what specific strategy teachers would implement and what data they would collect to demonstrate learner progress.

My goal in meeting with the alphabetics groups was to learn what they had discovered from their data protocol and how that was informing their instructional practices. I knew from both the November PLC meeting notes and the post-PLC survey that the alphabetics group had

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wanted more time with the data protocol in the session. I also knew from working with them over the past year, that they were continuing their work analyzing the data in their weekly meetings to inform their instructional planning.

My goal in meeting with the fluency, vocabulary, and reading comprehension groups was to learn how the formative assessments they were using were informing the implementation of the strategies related to the components of reading on which they were focused.

3.10 PDSA Cycle 3–Do

The alphabetics group spanned three cohorts of teachers at the Basic level, which includes Basic 1, Basic 2, and Fundamentals of Reading and Writing, a course designed for learners who are emergent readers in their L1. In an attempt to honor the teachers' time by not creating an additional meeting, I met virtually for 30 minutes during the second half of their weekly team meetings. Because there is only one Fundamentals teacher, they joined the Basic 1 cohort meeting for this purpose. While not all members of the Basic teams were part of the PLC, they were all part of the meeting, and thus all the Basic teachers were part of the discussion about how the data from their summative assessment was informing them about their learners. In these two meetings my questions for the teachers were the same: 1) What did they glean from the data about their learners' progress? and 2) What would be their next instructional steps given this understanding?

My third meeting was with the vocabulary group, which consisted of three teachers from three different levels. My questions for them were: 1) What vocabulary strategies were

they using? 2) How did they choose the vocabulary words they would explicitly teach? 3) What formative assessment were they using? and 4) How was the formative assessment informing their instruction?

My fourth meeting was with the fluency group. As stated earlier in this section, one of the two members decided to switch their focus to alphabetics. Focusing on fluency within the PLC felt additional and overwhelming to them as they were already doing the alphabetics work as part of the Basic level cohort. The remaining teacher in the fluency group told me they were preparing to train their learners on Microsoft Reading Progress, a program that enables a user to record themselves reading a text. Through the program learners are measured on their pronunciation and speed as a way to develop reading fluency. The program can be adjusted for more or less sensitivity to rate "accurate" pronunciation, a helpful feature for ELLs. However, they had not started this process due to technological issues our IT team needed to resolve. We discussed that once the program was ready to be used, the teacher should establish a baseline fluency level for each learner to allow learners to demonstrate their fluency progress.

3.11 PDSA Cycle 3–Study

3.11.1 Alphabetics Group

3.11.1.1 Understanding of the Data

Teachers of the Basic levels of English, many of whom were part of the alphabetics group, had indicated that learners demonstrated continued progress in phonemic awareness as they moved through the Basic levels. They also noted that while there was a positive progression of phonemic awareness as learners matriculated to the next level, some learners

continued to struggle with the same sounds regardless of the level. They observed that learners consistently struggled with vowel sounds, particularly short vowel sounds. When I asked them about the similar summative test results their data showed at each the Basic level and in what ways the learning objectives for teaching alphabetics differed in each of these classes, the teachers noted that in the Fundamentals and Basic 1 classes learners were building their receptive skills in alphabetics while their productive skills were being built with the same material in the Basic 2 class. The teachers repeated the comment made earlier in this section that having Spanish speaking teachers working with native Spanish speakers learning English gave the latter an advantage speakers of other languages did not share.

3.11.1.2 Next Steps

The data indicated that the Basic 1 teachers believed their next steps were to teach long vowels, incorporating the "silent e" (vowel-consonant-e), and that they would use short stories focused on a particular sound to reinforce the learning. Due to the pre-assessment data they had gathered, the Basic 2 teachers indicated they had a better idea of which sounds to focus on for their learners. From the survey, I knew that the Fundamentals of Reading and Writing teacher thought the Orton-Gillingham method of teaching sounds in the prescribed order, rather than as they arose in context, was something they should try. I also knew from the survey that the teachers planned to use the same or similar assessment tools to understand learner progress.

3.11.2 Vocabulary Group

3.11.2.1 Strategies and Word Choice

The Vocabulary group consisted of teachers of three different levels of English, one at the low intermediate level and two spanning classes within the high intermediate level (CASAS EFLs for ESOL Programs, ND). Each used different vocabulary strategies. They described

their work building vocabulary systems, as there is no system used consistently across the levels. The teachers explained that they decided on words they would teach in a variety of ways. Two teachers chose words that their learners would encounter in the unit they were covering, although one noted that they also included high frequency words from academic word lists. Both these teachers chose five words per week and included a variety of activities throughout the week for learners to practice the words. The third teacher wanted their learners to develop self-directed language learning practices. This teacher had their learners build an electronic journal into which they would add words they wanted to know. Given the large amount of vocabulary needed for adult ELLs, the teacher believed this was a way for learners to build this habit.

3.11.2.2 Formative Assessment

All three of the teachers from the vocabulary PLC group indicated that they used quizzes to assess learners' progress. One teacher had observed that learners were not retaining words using a weekly process, so they had moved from a weekly word list to focusing on 25-30 words per unit. The teacher who had learners choose their words reported that building an electronic journal was having the unintended consequence of learners' spending a lot of their cognitive energy focused on the technology needed to create the journal, rather than the learning of new vocabulary. They reflected that next year they would start with providing word lists rather than having learners choose their own words and use something other than an electronic journal as a vocabulary learning tool. This teacher also mentioned that in the next month they would be more intentional about specific vocabulary to focus on in class, rather than relying solely on the words learners were adding to their journals on their own.

3.12 PDSA Cycle 3–Act

I wanted to use what I had learned from these meetings along with the November survey data to focus teachers more explicitly on formative assessment to continue the work we were doing to understand learner progress. From both these avenues, I knew the ways teachers intended to assess their learners' progress, so this analysis would be part of the meeting. Given the teachers' expressed desire for research on reading instruction and collaborative time to share what they were doing in the classroom, in the next PLC meeting, I would include ways to meet these two requests as well as time for them to analyze their formative assessment.

Teachers had indicated in the survey that an improvement to the previous PLC meeting would have been to include research relevant to their specific level of ELLs, rather than my choice of a topic generally applicable to all levels of ELLs. For this reason, I chose to include a seven-page journal article that discussed EBRI for adult ELLs with limited literacy skills. In response to teachers' requests to have the reading ahead of time, I sent the articles out 10 days prior to the meeting. The relatively short article would allow time for groups to discuss strategies teachers in other levels were implementing, collaborative time they indicated they valued.

3.13 PDSA Cycle 4--Plan

The third PLC meeting was originally scheduled for January 25th, 2023, which was a PD Day for our school. PD days include a lengthy all-staff meeting and an all-staff lunch, so in general, departments are only able to take advantage of approximately three hours for PD

on these days. Our reading specialist was scheduled to deliver PD on that day, and given we just had an all-staff meeting, my co-planner and I decided that we would use our adult ed department meeting time on Friday, February 3rd for the PLC meeting. Again, we wanted to honor teachers' time by not adding another meeting, and removing the monthly adult ed department meeting would give all teachers, including those not in the PLC, additional time to plan or attend to administrative tasks.

This next meeting was planned for 90-minutes on a Friday afternoon. While previous surveys indicated teachers wanted more time to complete the objectives of the PLC meetings, we did not want the meeting to exceed 90-minutes, as Friday afternoons are designed for teachers to catch up on planning and other administrative tasks. From the survey data, I knew I wanted to honor the requests for both reading research applicable to adult ELLs and time to collaborate on their instructional practices.

To help teachers prepare for the third PLC meeting, 10 days prior to the meeting I sent out a short article, "Exploring the Essential Components of Reading" (Tindall & Nisbet, 2010), which discussed the components of reading in an ESL context. Teachers were told that some meeting time would be dedicated to discussing it. Teachers were also instructed to bring their assessment data and be prepared to discuss: 1) what the data revealed about how learners had met the objective, 2) what further information, if any, they needed to understand their learners' progress, and 3) given the data, what their next instructional steps would be. If teachers did not have formative assessment to share at the meeting, they were to bring a lesson they implemented that focused on a component of reading. This group should be prepared to discuss: 1) the strategy they tried, 2) whether they believed learners had met their objective, and 3) how they knew, or how they could know, if the objective was met. The third aspect of

the meeting would be for teachers to discuss a reading strategy they would implement and what formative assessment they would use to understand their learners' progress. They would be instructed to bring this data to the subsequent meeting.

3.14 PDSA Cycle 4--DO

Eleven teachers were present for the February PLC meeting, and four of the eleven had brought assessment data to evaluate. We started the meeting with time to discuss the article "Exploring the Essential Components of Reading." Teachers expressed feelings of affirmation for strategies they were using as well as frustration around the lack of research that addressed specific issues they were having with learners who were emergent readers in their L1. Teachers were asked to describe "what challenged their thinking" (Beers & Probst, 2015). Teachers pointed to the article's recommendation to teach phonics in context. At least one teacher had been using this strategy but observed that her learners were not retaining their gains from one lesson to the next. Another teacher mentioned an intentional focus on teaching cognates in Spanish, a strategy mentioned in the review of vocabulary in the November session.

I then put teachers into three small groups and had them discuss either the assessment data they had collected or reading strategies they were trying in their respective classes. The group who had brought their formative assessment data was made up of four teachers, two from the alphabetics group and two from the vocabulary group. The alphabetics teachers had created spreadsheets that showed whether an individual learner had demonstrated mastery of a given phoneme. This disaggregated data was an important artifact, as its specificity provided insight the aggregated data teachers had used in the previous meeting did not. They indicated

they would use this to guide them in their understanding of the phonemes each learner still needed to learn. The teachers from the vocabulary group shared their data, which was in the form of quiz results. Both vocabulary teachers' data demonstrated their learners had a receptive understanding of the vocabulary (they could match definitions) and a discussion ensued about how they might change their quizzes to allow learners to demonstrate productive mastery (using the words in essays, or poetry, etc.).

The teachers in the other two groups discussed reading strategies they were using in class and either how they knew if their learners met the objective or what could help teachers to know. One group, consisting of all Basic level teachers, compared their experiences using short stories focused on the phoneme introduced in a given week. One teacher shared their use of ChatGPT to create short texts that focused on a particular vowel sound. Others shared the positive results they were observing on learners' ability to distinguish between short and long vowel sounds; however, they shared from anecdotal rather than empirical data. In their notes they emphasized the need for significant amounts of repetition and that one teacher in their level cohort, who was not a PLC participant, was having success with learners doing "a lot" of writing in their virtual classes, through Zoom's chat feature. It was unclear from the notes what exactly the teacher was finding successful. The second group consisted of two teachers in the alphabetics group and one teacher from the vocabulary group. The former articulated how they integrated phonics learning with text readings, including opportunities for learners to build fluency with repeated reading of the texts. They discussed the difficulty of a single teacher hearing each learner read but were considering using recording technology to help with assessment and motivate learners with an opportunity to share their recordings with classmates. The teacher from the vocabulary group was focused on reading comprehension and was using

Google Docs and Schoology (a learning management system) to track learner progress on CASAS competencies. In this way learners were provided individualized practice. To assess their learning, this teacher was planning to quiz learners on the competencies they had been practicing. The final ten minutes of the session were left for teachers to complete the survey.

3.15 PDSA Cycle 4–Study

3.15.1 Survey Results

Of the eleven teachers who participated in the PLC session, eight responded to the survey. All the questions were open ended with the exception of one asking if the PLC meeting was helpful to them in thinking about how to check learner progress on the reading instruction they provided, to which 100% of the respondents indicated that "yes" the session was helpful. The survey asked for their comments about the meeting content in the following six areas: 1) what was most helpful from the meeting, 2) what they still had questions about, 3) what they would use/apply in their classroom, 4) what formative assessment activities they would use to assess what they used/applied in their classroom 5) any suggestions they had for the next PLC meeting, and 6) anything else they wanted to comment on.

3.15.1.1 Most Helpful Aspect of Session 4 Meeting

Three quarters of teachers found the opportunity to share with and learn from their colleagues about the different reading instructional strategies they were using in the classroom to be the most helpful part of the fourth PLC meeting, while 38% of teachers indicated that the most helpful part of the session was the opportunity to read and discuss the article with their

colleagues. 13% of teachers indicated both the article and time to share with colleagues were "most" helpful (See Figure 14).

The most helpful part of today's session was:
Respondents could offer multiple answers.

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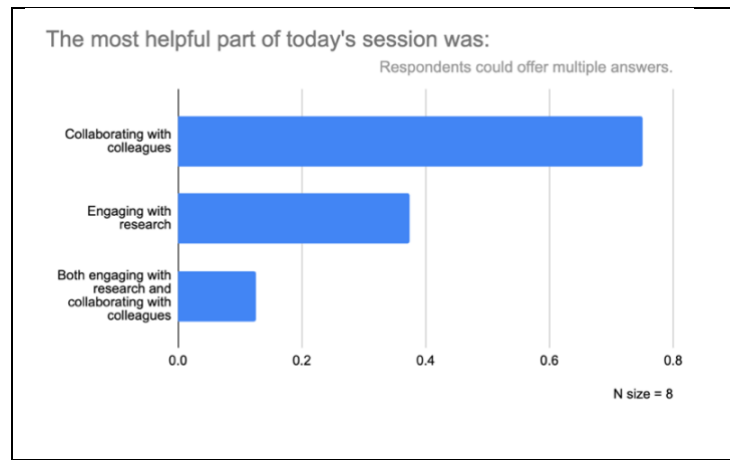
Figure 14 Session 4 Feedback

3.15.1.2 Strategy Implementation and Data Monitoring

Regarding strategy implementation and data monitoring, 68% of teachers indicated they would incorporate vocabulary strategies, while half of the teachers indicated that they would incorporate alphabetics strategies they had discussed in the meeting. One quarter of the teachers would implement reading comprehension strategies, although it was not clear from their responses what those strategies would be. Teachers indicated two additional areas where they would focus their strategies. One included fluency, using a PLC provided resource from a Science of Reading podcast conversation with Tim Shanahan (Lambert, 2020), and the second included metacognition, specifically a strategy from Calderon (2011) to explicitly teach cognates and false cognates, as well as other metacognitive strategies to build phonological awareness (see Figure 3.13).

All of the teachers indicated a type of formative assessment they would use: 63% indicated they would use technology programs such as Edpuzzle, Kahoot, or Whatsapp, and

38% of teachers indicated they would use some type of quiz but did not specify beyond that. That all teachers indicated a type of formative assessment they would use in the classroom was an important finding as earlier in the year several teachers were focused on summative data points. Summative data does not lend itself to timely and meaningful feedback from the teacher as it generally an infrequent data point and not practical as a tool to inform day-to-day instruction (see Figure 15).
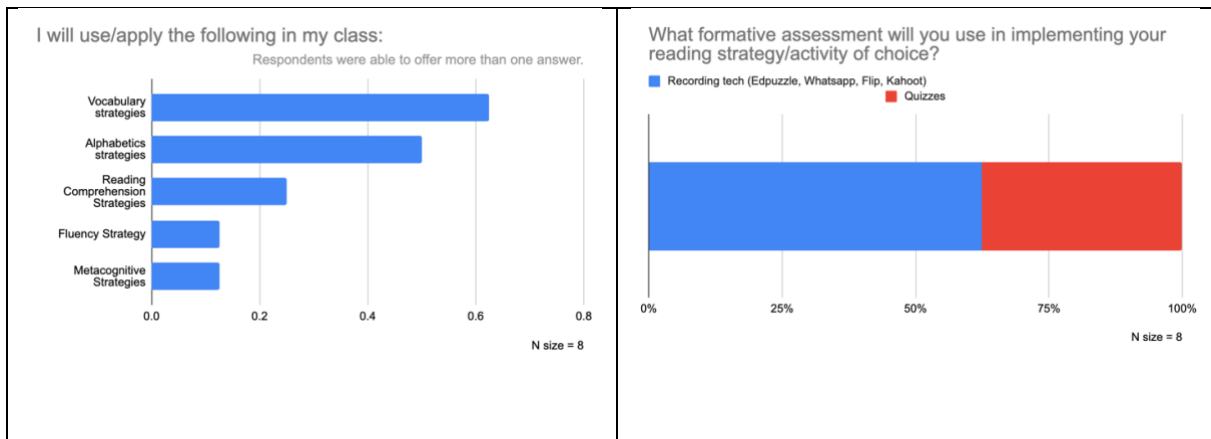
Figure 15 Strategy Implementation and Data Monitoring

3.15.1.3 Remaining Questions and Suggestions for the Next Meeting

While only two respondents had a question that arose from their participation in the meeting, one on how to teach learners to blend sounds to read vocabulary words they knew in English and the second how to help learners to measure their fluency progress, half of the teachers indicated they would like to continue engaging with research on reading instruction. Another 25% wondered if we could have time during the PLC to do the reading. One teacher remarked on how videotaping herself implementing a strategy was something she had found helpful in the past and wondered if this is something we might consider within the PLC.

While all our adult ed faculty teach in English, 28% have a first language other than English. Engaging with an academic article in English could be challenging or require the extra

step of getting the article translated. This is something to consider to better support those teachers. Additionally, in the survey one respondent commented on appreciating the multi-media formats provided for various research articles. Practices that allow easier access to the research should be continued (see Figure 16).
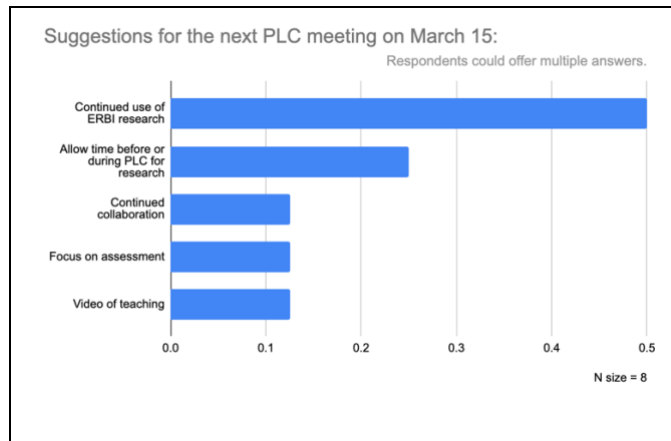
Figure 16 Suggestions for Future PLC Meeting

3.16 PDSA Cycle 4–Act

I compiled the resources that had been shared with the teachers into a Google Doc organized by components of reading. At the start of the year, our initial list of resources was shared, but this is easily lost in the business of the start of the school year. Because several teachers mentioned wanting more research, I reshared specific resources with teachers based on the components of reading in which they were interested. I wanted to make sure these were easily accessible to them, understanding that teachers would look at them when they had time, or time was provided for them to do this. I also wanted to find more podcasts on relevant

research as teachers indicated media they could access while they were walking or washing the dishes was appreciated.

3.17 Summary

The four PDSA cycles did not move along as I had initially planned. The schedule had to be adjusted for two reasons. First, as mentioned previously, due to open enrollment at the start of the year, many teachers were engaging with summative assessment at the second PLC meeting. I needed to reset expectations for teachers to focus on formative assessment. It seemed that this was either not communicated clearly to teachers or not clear as to what exactly I was looking for with regards to formative assessment, based on a survey response about the data protocol following the second PLC meeting. The second reason was that December was busy with school conferences and holiday breaks, and teachers signaled that they were overwhelmed with the requirements of their jobs. In response I chose to hold individual group meetings in lieu of the December PLC meeting. This pushed our agenda back a month.

In addition to schedule changes, I had to change my expectations for how and how quickly we could move through the process. Four groups had formed, focused on four different components of reading, and we were only two facilitators, one of whom was part of a PLC group. I responded to this with a plan to use notes and surveys to understand how the groups were proceeding with meeting the PLC objectives; however, this meant we were looking at that data after the meetings, which meant we were not well poised to ensure the teachers were on track with our expectations. Circling back to the teachers between PLC meetings for clarification or redirection was difficult. Thus, within each PLC meeting we were revisiting

the previous month's objectives instead of moving onto the next set of objectives as initially planned.

Additionally, we did not initiate classroom observations within the PDSA cycles. The churn of entering and exiting learners due to our open enrollment policy through the first nine weeks of the school year, especially in a hybrid setting, created a lot of additional work for teachers. Asking them to participate in a cycle of observation and debrief felt like too much to put on them during these PDSA cycles. However, as previously mentioned in a response to the survey for the fourth PLC meeting, I was encouraged by one teacher's comment for a form of observation to be part of the PLC process. I plan to incorporate observations into the PLC process later in the year, moving it outside of the scope of this project.

In the next two sections I will discuss what I learned from the PDSA cycles and my next steps and implications for program planning and design within my organization.

4.0 Discussion

4.1 Revisiting the Fishbone Diagram: Opportunities and Challenges

In my initial analysis of the problem of adult ELLs not gaining the academic English literacy skills they need to access family sustaining wages, I had identified six root causes in my fishbone diagram, repeated below (figure 4). In developing my PDSA cycles, I chose to focus on "people" as a root cause, and institute PLC meetings to improve learner progress, as that was where I thought I could exert the most influence. However, in the course of the PDSA cycles it became evident that four root cause areas, 1) Structure, 2) Policies, 3) Organizational Culture, and 4) Accountability, were negatively impacting teachers' ability to fully engage in the PLCs and my ability to achieve the outcomes I was looking for. I expand on these instances in descriptions of root causes below. Under the final root cause, methodology, I describe how a consequence of our lack of a curriculum came to light in a PLC meeting. The resulting discussion, which I detail later in this section, may positively contribute to an effort to prioritize the development of a curriculum. While some teachers have expressed concern about having a prescribed curriculum, wondering how it might affect their autonomy in lesson design, the lack of a curriculum is contributing to an overwhelming workload for teachers. I also describe how it became clear that organizational priorities make finding time for professional development and reflection focused on adult learning challenging.

Fishbone Diagram

Structure
- Adult Learner responsibilities outside of class time
- Adult Learners w/ little to no formal education
- Body of scholarship around increasing literacy rates for Adult ELLs with limited literacy is limited.

Policies
- Adult placement tied to child's placement site; child's placement prioritized
- Open enrollment for first quarter
- Liberal attendance policy

People
- Teachers may have knowledge gaps in teaching reading to low literacy learners
- Staff beliefs of perceived student barriers can hinder evidence-based instructional/programmatic moves
- Staff empathy can enable dependency

Organizational Culture
- Limited communication around vision & program purpose
- Expectations around lesson planning and delivery
- Demands on instructional time

Methodology
- No fixed curriculum
- Insufficient time for institutional/individual reflection
- Lack of clarity around indicators for success within a course

Accountability
- Accountability measures lack relevance to learner goals
- Teachers not accountable for progress
- No formalized data tracking outside of summative/high stakes markers

Adult ELLs do not gain the academic English literacy skills in ESOL programs needed to access family wage sustaining careers.

Figure 17 Fishbone Diagram

4.2 People

As discussed earlier in this paper, I identified a few sub areas under the 'people' root cause, and I was prepared to facilitate the PLC meetings addressing those areas. First, I knew that teachers believed they needed a deeper understanding of how to work with their adult learners who were emergent readers in L1, and second, I knew that teachers' beliefs of the barriers their learners faced could result in instructional decisions that were not optimal. The third consideration, that teachers could unintentionally foster learners' dependency on them by not holding high expectations for their learners, did not directly arise within our PDSA cycles.

It became clear in the PLC meetings that there was a variety of knowledge and experience among teachers on how to build learners' literacy skills. Teachers described training and experience from limited to significant; however, they also reported that the

knowledge they had, even though it may have been applied to ELLs, was based on reading instruction designed to support the literacy development of young learners working in their L1. Teachers felt ill-equipped to help build literacy skills in English (L2) for adult learners who were emergent readers in their L1.

Additionally, in response to a survey question, teachers reported on their perceptions of the barriers learners face that negatively impact their literacy development. Many of the reported barriers were not surprising, for example, learners' lack of time to study, lack of L1 literacy development, and physical and cognitive challenges. An important realization was reported in one of the survey responses. A teacher wrote that they had previously blamed learners' lack of literacy development on these barriers. Yet, given what they were learning through the PLC meetings and resources and the reading PD sessions, they understood that rather than attributing a lack of progress to learners' inherent conditions, they could positively influence learner progress given their instructional choices.

4.2.1 Structure

There is a limited body of scholarship on how to support adult learners who are emergent readers in L1 and have little formal school experience. Teachers are left to adapt pedagogical approaches to the teaching of reading designed for children learning to read in their L1. This reality was a constant source of frustration for teachers as they are left to adapt these approaches to their context. For example, they struggle with the tension of teaching through an explicit and systematic approach to phonics instruction and principles of adult learning that content be motivating and immediately applicable to learners' lives. The reading required of adults to successfully function in a literate society, such as communication from their children's school, work-related material, and news to name a few, far surpass what

learners are able to process through decodable texts. Additionally, it can be challenging to measure the effects of the approaches teachers are using with their adult learners given adult learner attendance rates. Adult learners have frequent absences due to both non-compulsory attendance policies and the reality of adult responsibilities, including work, caregiving, and the lack of reliable transportation.

4.2.2 Policies

Our open enrollment policy in the first term of the year is disruptive to the learning process. The constant entering and exiting of learners, particularly in a hybrid program where learners are only in-person two days a week, put a strain on teachers' abilities to build and maintain community in their classes, two key factors that influence adult learner persistence (World Education. n.d.). Additionally, significant amounts of time are required to get new learners set-up to participate in classes. This work includes creating the accounts needed for learners to access their education on the various technology platforms and orienting learners to these programs. It also includes conducting initial interviews and assessing learners' abilities. Especially during the first term of the school year where a teacher may have up to 50% of their class turn over, these demands on teachers' time influenced both if and to what extent they were able to engage in the PLC.

4.2.3 Organizational Culture

Our 2Gen program supports families in the following four areas: 1) adult learning, 2) early childhood education, 3) family integration, and 4) access to comprehensive services to mitigate barriers to education learners may be facing. Teaching in a 2Gen program necessitates focus in all these areas. The PLC emphasis on reading academic research and implementing ERBI followed by data collection and analysis to inform further instruction required teachers

to spend additional time focused on the area of adult learning; however, teachers still had the responsibility to support learners in the other three areas.

As many of our adult learners and their families were still suffering from the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic teachers were devoting increased time and mental energy to mitigate these barriers as well. Our adult learners, all parents, were dealing with children learning from home and inadequate systems to access virtual learning, working front-line jobs and risking COVID, or incurring a loss of income resulting in an inability to pay rent, to name a few stressors. At the start of the PLC, as we entered the third school year affected by the pandemic, teachers were fatigued. In a survey administered in the fall of this school year, teachers expressed feeling overwhelmed; the effects of the global pandemic for our immigrant families, and in turn our teachers, were still a primary influence on the well-being of both these groups.

At the onset of the pandemic when schools shut down overnight, teachers had to abruptly adapt in-person instruction to completely virtual instruction. The shift to virtual instruction was especially challenging because the majority of our learners required significant amounts of instruction to access their learning through unfamiliar technology tools. The next year our school shifted to hybrid learning, which required teachers to redesign their instructional delivery for a second time in two years, and their workload continued to increase. While the majority of our teachers are technologically savvy, digital literacy skills had been a push-in portion of our program taught by digital literacy teachers. In the shift to hybrid instruction, this practice stopped. Thus, in addition to supporting learners, teachers had to become experts at teaching on-line and teaching learners to learn on-line. Additionally, teachers lost the planning time that had been afforded them by this push-in instruction. The continued demand on teachers' time due to the requirements of teaching through the pandemic

influenced their ability to engage with the PLC; some teachers chose to opt out while others, although constant participants, were not always able to complete the pre-meeting work.

Finding time for the PLC to meet was challenging partially due to our organizational culture. We had initially designated some PD days and some Friday afternoons as our meeting times. However, I had difficulty keeping appointed times on both of these types of days. On most PD days there are only approximately 3.5 hours of PD that are dedicated to adult learning, and using PD time for the PLC was not always appropriate given the combination of the competing organizational priorities of a 2Gen program. Friday afternoons, on the other hand, had been designed to be free of learner-facing activities in response to teachers' request for time to plan and to attend to administrative tasks. Each Friday afternoon is also designated for one departmental or school-wide meeting, not to exceed 90 minutes. Our adult ed departmental team meetings were scheduled to take place on the first Friday of each month. Consequently, I had to figure out a schedule based on organizational priorities. A PLC meeting on any given Friday would be an additional meeting for teachers. In a year where teachers expressed frustration due to relatively high workloads, adding a PLC, even if it was optional, was a delicate balance.

4.2.4 Accountability

Within our ESOL program, the performance indicators used to demonstrate learner progress to the Public Charter School Board (PCSB) include CASAS test scores, attendance rates, and persistence rates, the former being how often a learner is present, and the latter indicating a learner's continued engagement in a program enough to complete a pre- and post-measure of some kind. Outside of these areas, there is no centralized system by which learners' progress is tracked. Most teachers have systems they have created for their own use; however,

the use of learner data to inform instruction is inconsistent among our teachers. Consequently, not all teachers in the PLC were in the habit of systematically using data to inform their instruction. In starting off the PLC, I did not take into account that, absent both a centralized system and an established habit, teachers may not have been prepared to track and share learner data.

4.2.5 Methods

Teachers at my school had been grappling with how to build literacy skills for their learners who were emergent readers in L1 for several years. They learned and then started implementing the Orton-Gillingham (OG) method to teach phonics at the Basic 1 level. OG is an approach, it is not a curriculum. Consequently, our teachers create the materials they design to complement the instruction. Teachers report enjoying the creativity they expend in designing learner-centered lesson plans and the accompanying materials; however, they also report this process is time-consuming. Over time, teachers from the Basic 2 class and a newly added pre-literacy class began to implement phonics instruction as well. In a PLC meeting where teachers from these three levels were looking at their data, a phonemic awareness pre-assessment, it became clear to all of us looking at the data that three levels of teachers were focused on teaching many of the same phonemes. As an observer, I thought I saw teachers come to an understanding that having a curriculum would not limit their autonomy, but rather reduce duplicative efforts and streamline efforts in a way that would save them time.

4.2.6 Revisiting the Driver Diagram: Moving Towards Improvement

To effect change that would positively impact learner progress I identified three primary drivers, one of which, "Instructional Policies" was less directly under my sphere of influence than the other two. Consequently, I proposed a theory of improvement, represented

through a driver diagram, reintroduced below in figure 5, that centered on the other two drivers, "Quality Teaching" and "Adult Learner Persistence." My change ideas started with instituting a PLC as a way to support instruction and monitor learner progress. Because by definition a PLC includes cycles of data analysis to inform instructional decisions, my logic was that the PLC would also be the vehicle through which we could lay the groundwork for the next two proposed change ideas, curating data reports that isolate target data and facilitating ways for learners to build metacognitive strategies for improved learning and levels of persistence.
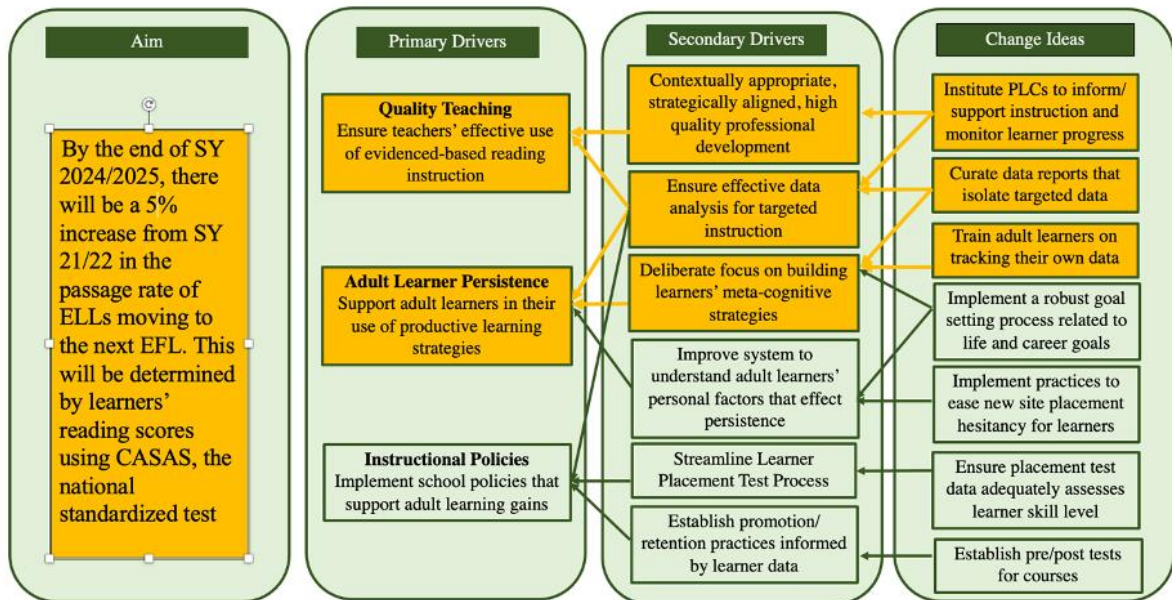
Figure 18 Driver Diagram

4.2.7 Applying my Change Ideas Through a PLC

As described in Section 3, in collaboration with a lead teacher, I implemented an optional PLC where teachers would work through cycles of: 1) engaging with the academic research, 2) exploring and building on their instructional strategies, 3) examining evidence of learner progress, and 4) reflecting on their practice and experience in the PLC. There were four overarching objectives for the PLC. The first was to build teachers' knowledge of evidence-

based reading instructional strategies to use with their adult ELLs, particularly those who are emergent readers in L1. The second objective was to build a consistent practice of using data on learner progress to inform their instruction. The third objective was to restart a community of peer observation and collaboration in order to practice and reflect on the instructional strategies that teachers were building, and the final objective was to incorporate strategies to help learners build metacognitive awareness to support improved reading comprehension.

4.2.7.1 Building Knowledge of Evidence-Based Reading Instruction

As described in Section 3, teachers noted that within the PLC they were building their knowledge of EBRI given their engagement with the research we examined and opportunities to share with and learn from their colleagues. Over the course of our meetings teachers engaged with two resources, an article that included a synthesis of the extant research, practice, and professional development on working with adult English language learners with limited literacy (Burt et al., 2008) and a webinar on Scarborough's reading rope (The Reading League of Wisconsin, 2020). These resources highlighted the importance of building schema for adult ELLs to support their reading comprehension. Adult ELLs, many of whom in our context have limited formal education, benefit from increased factual knowledge as a tool to support their reading comprehension (Peyton & Schaetzel, 2008). While teachers at my school have a practice of pre-reading activities such as pre-teaching vocabulary, in survey responses teachers highlighted the importance of building schema and its effect on increased reading comprehension. Outside of the PLC, several Basic level teachers created a voice-over video on US history of Systemic Racism. The teachers then used a program to make copies of the video in the various L1s of their learners. Learners thus built background knowledge to facilitate their comprehension of the reading materials they would encounter in English. While

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this activity cannot be conclusively linked to learning within the PLC, I posit that an affirmation of the role of schema in research has a positive effect on teachers' instructional moves.

In another example, several teachers responded positively to the research presented in a podcast on building learners' reading fluency (Lambert, 2019). They discussed how fluency was not an area they had previously focused on but were recognizing the link it had to reading comprehension. As a result of this understanding, several teachers had started incorporating fluency activities into their lessons and had shared positive results. One example is discussed in the following section. While it is too early to see the effect of these practices on learners' reading progress, I am encouraged by these examples.

4.2.7.2 Utilizing Data Informed Instruction

At our first PLC meeting teachers were informed that within their PLC groups, in subsequent meetings, they would analyze formative assessment data they collected between meetings. This information would help them discern how individual learners were meeting the reading instructional objectives and they could adjust their instruction accordingly. For some teachers, particularly those who worked with learners with more advanced literacy skills, this process of assessment and reflection resulted in adjustments to their instructional practices. In one instance, noticing the learners were not consistently retaining their knowledge of vocabulary words beyond the week where they were learned, one teacher in the vocabulary PLC group altered their vocabulary instruction to include a focus on vocabulary over the span of a unit, where words were revisited throughout. The teacher had previously been covering a portion of the total unit vocabulary in week-by-week chunks, but their data was demonstrating this was ineffective. A second teacher in this group described instituting pre-assessments as a

way to hone in on the needs of particular learners. In a later discussion, while analyzing vocabulary quiz data a third teacher articulated a need to include a way for learners to demonstrate a productive understanding of the vocabulary, that is knowing words thoroughly enough to use them accurately in writing and speaking. The quizzes were only allowing learners to demonstrate a receptive understanding through matching words with definitions or selecting the definition from a multiple-choice list. The teachers discussed ways they might do this through learner produced essays, poetry, and word-talks, where learners presented on a given vocabulary word. These presentations would include word families, different word forms, collocations, and the like.

Teachers in the alphabetics group had initially brought aggregated pre-assessment data to analyze at our second PLC meeting. While this did not meet the defined objective of the PLC to work with formative assessment, as discussed in Section 3, teachers wanted to use this data to inform their year-long learning objectives. The first PLC meeting designed to look at formative assessment data occurred just after our first term, where we adhere to an open enrollment policy; however, this group of teachers intentionally waited until the second term, when their class rosters stabilized, to gather this baseline data through a pre-assessment. They were not ready to move on to formative assessment based on daily objectives without this larger picture. At a subsequent meeting, however, two of these teachers shared the data they had gathered on how individual learners had demonstrated their understanding of individual phonemes, and how they could use this to inform the way they would work with individual learners. One commented that it was helpful to them to be following their learners this way. It helped them to organize their learners into groups and, with the support of a paraeducator, they were able to provide the targeted instruction they saw their learners needed.

The PLC meetings have continued outside of the PDSA cycles described in this paper, and indications from individual teachers point toward continued engagement with data as a way to inform instruction. A teacher recently reported on using a fluency strategy they had read about in one of the PLC resources. They employed a language experience approach (Huang, 2013), an approach to enable learners to engage with relevant and comprehensible text, learners could use to build their reading fluency. They explained:

I didn't do a formal pre-assessment for this activity. However, students presented paragraphs in the last unit we did, and I noticed choppy rhythms and the absence of pauses or pauses in the wrong places. This formative assessment and a Science of Reading podcast inspired this longer fluency activity (learner 1)

Some students recorded [themselves reading their writing] multiple times. Even though this isn't a true pre-assessment/post-assessment because it wasn't designed that way, you can hear some self-correcting. For example, you can listen to (learner 2).

The teacher included the activity they scaffolded as well as the multiple 30-second recording learners had made. In the subsequent recordings of the learners, their improved fluency was evident.

4.2.7.3 Using Peer Observation

I had planned to include cycles of peer observation, coaching, and reflection between our PLC meetings; however, due to a combination of factors influencing the amount of time teachers were able to devote to the PLC, including teachers feeling overwhelmed given their job responsibilities and organizational logistics discussed above, I chose not to institute that component of the PLC within the PDSA cycles. I know from conversations with teachers that

peer observation had been an established practice among many of the current teachers at my institution. I suspect, although I was not at this institution at the time, this practice had initially been abandoned due to the response to the global pandemic of moving classes to a virtual setting. While classes now included an in-person component, for a variety of reasons, the practice had not yet resumed. However, as mentioned in Section 3, one teacher reported they thought this would be a helpful practice, and wondered if we might incorporate it into the PLC. I believe that teachers will choose to re-engage with peer observations in the next school year, if not in remaining cycles of the PLC, as a way to continue building their reading instructional practices to positively impact the development of learners' literacy skills.

4.2.7.4 Building Learner Metacognitive Skills

We did not explicitly address the PLC objective that teachers incorporate deliberate strategies to build learner metacognitive skills. We had 90-minutes for our meetings and including time for this (and the previous) objective seemed too ambitious for the scope of this project. However, the value of this practice was part of our discussions, and I believe is preparing the ground for teachers to focus on explicit instruction in metacognitive awareness in the classroom moving forward. I cite two examples of this progress. The first occurred during our February meeting where a teacher relayed they were explicitly teaching cognates and false cognates as a strategy their learners could use as they built their English vocabulary and reading comprehension skills. Using cognates and false cognates from L1 to support the learning of the target language is a meta-cognitive strategy, emphasized by Calderon (2018), that we had discussed in a previous meeting. The second example occurred in a check-in conversation I had with a teacher. They showed me some examples of learner-produced dictations from their class. The teacher had used a strategy where they had learners take

dictation on a page the teacher had provided. The structure of the page included a series of short lines, one for each word, so learners could distinguish the number of words in the dictation, discern the distinct beginning and end of words, and notice the space between words. The lines included red lines for "read" words, that is words that are not phonetic and need to be memorized, like "the" and "said." These modifications to a dictation exercise enabled learners to use metacognitive awareness to help them succeed with the dictation.

4.2.8 The Way Forward on the Change Ideas

4.2.8.1   Data Systems

In proposing my theory of improvement, I had proposed a change idea to curate learner data the school already collects. Through our Student Information System (SIS) we have important learner demographic information such as age and years of formal education both in their country of origin and in the US, two important factors that have been shown to be correlated with rates of progress among adult ELLs (Kurvers et al., 2010). The SIS also contains learners' placement test scores, complete CASAS scores and CASAS goals, as well as their education goals, attendance, work history, class history, and years in the country, all important information in building a more complete understanding of the learner. While teachers can get this information, it is not contained in single reports and organizing it into a single, easily accessible document is cumbersome. Consequently, few teachers have a system where they track these complete data. Instead, most teachers track some of these data, and thus may lack information that would inform different instructional choices for given learners. My proposed change idea was to have teachers use this information at the start of the PLC to have a clearer understanding of their learners; however, between the turn-over in learners in the first

term and the time required to pull these data, I decided focusing on formative assessment teachers could more easily gather would be a better use of our time.

Moving forward I have been working with our data team to propose a set of data that would be beneficial to our teachers in understanding as complete a picture as possible of their learners. The data team is currently working to design a single report that would contain this information, rather than the teachers having to create a document that contains this information sourced from several different reports. I am confident that teachers would use this information if it were more easily accessible to help inform their instruction. From my conversations with the teachers who already gather this data, I know they would welcome the time savings the simpler process would present.

4.2.8.2   Adult Learner Self-monitoring

My third proposed change idea was to work with teachers to utilize systems whereby learners could track their own progress as a way to build metacognitive awareness to maximize their learning, positively impact their persistence, and ultimately increase their literacy progress. While this did not end up being an explicit focus, it is happening in instances mentioned previously as well as those where teachers are incorporating technology to help learners meet their learning objectives. Teachers are taking advantage of built-in progress monitoring in a variety of technology programs. Three examples include: 1) Achieve3000, a differentiated reading program that shows learners their comprehension progress, 2) Flip, a recording program that can be used to monitor reading fluency, and 3) My English Lab, where learners get immediate feedback on specific learning objectives. Moving forward I would like to work with teachers to focus explicitly on how to help learners interpret this data and use evidenced-based strategies to build on this learning. I am encouraged by the way teachers are

choosing programs that support this objective and are helping learners to see their progress and adjust their strategies accordingly, as described in previous sections.

4.2.9 Progress Toward the Primary Drivers

Positively impacting primary drivers in any institution, especially one as complex as our 2Gen school, can be a multifaceted endeavor. However, my initial assessment of the work described here is that this project clearly contributed to positively influencing the primary drivers. Teachers in the PLC demonstrated quality teaching through their use of EBRI in the classroom, and data collection to understand their learners' progress and inform their instruction. As described earlier, one teacher reported on assessing learners through audio recordings of their writing. The teacher noticed a need for improved fluency, implemented researched-based strategies to build reading fluency, and observed improved fluency rates in the next set of audio recordings. A second teacher reported utilizing the results of a phoneme assessment to design individualized goals for their learners that they were able to successfully implement through the use of stations. A third teacher described improved results with a dictation exercise that they attributed to changes they made to how learners engaged with the task, both in the structure of the exercise and in the opportunity for learners to use metacognition to improve their outcome.

The influence of this project on adult learner persistence, the second primary driver, is not a measure on which I have much empirical evidence. While the school tracks persistence, it is consistent with last year's data and this meta statistic is not something that can be realistically attributed to this work. However, anecdotally, teachers report that their learners are enthusiastic about the programs they are using to support reading comprehension skills and that they are motivated to improve their progress given the feedback they receive as described

earlier with teachers' use of reading fluency activities. I believe these are all indicators that support a positive outcome due to engagement with the PLC.

4.3 Revisiting the Inquiry Questions and Metrics: Efficacy of a PLC

The six inquiry questions and desired evidence to support the hypotheses I proposed in Section 2 have been implicitly expressed through the description and discussion of my PDSA cycles in this and the previous section. Here I explicitly return to the questions to evaluate the efficacy of the PLC to influence the primary drivers and, ultimately, make progress towards my long-term aim of increasing the literacy rates of adult ELLs.

1. **Does a PLC focused on literacy support teachers in implementing effective instructional practices with L2 learners who are emergent readers?** While within this study it is too early to assess the lag indicators that would affirm the efficacy of the PLC, the lead indicators suggest improvements will be recorded as we continue the PLC work of building teacher knowledge and undergoing cycles of assessing learners, implementing EBRI practices, and monitoring learner progress. Teachers indicated in post-meeting surveys that the PLC meetings were helpful to them in their work of supporting learners' reading progress. In the October survey, when asked if the PLC meeting had been helpful, teachers' average score was 4.25 out of 5 with 1 being not at all helpful and 5 being extremely helpful. In the November meeting teachers indicated that the data protocol was helpful by an average score of 3.9 out of 5, and 62% of teachers indicated they felt better equipped to implement vocabulary

strategies in their classes as a result of the meeting. After the February meeting, the final of the PDSA cycle, 100% of teachers indicated the session was helpful.

Additionally, within this short PDSA cycle, teachers did demonstrate instances of EBRI that were positively affecting learners' progress. Earlier in this section, I discussed several examples involving three of the four components of reading, alphabetics, fluency and vocabulary where teachers reported using EBRI and cycles of assess, design, and monitor to support learner progress. These demonstrated instances were not collected through surveys but rather through the PDSA cycle 3 meeting notes and conversations I had with individual teachers.

2. **Do teachers develop a reading instruction routine, incorporating reading strategies for L2 learners to build literacy skills?** This soon after the completion of the PDSA, it is too early to know for certain if practices will become routines; however, the positive results and learner enthusiasm that teachers were reporting suggest this is not an unreasonable expectation.

3. **How do teachers adapt reading strategies designed for L1 learners to be successful for L2 learners?** There was some evidence of this phenomenon in the example of an activity where a teacher used a language experience approach to help learners build fluency. However, teachers expressed frustration over how the dearth of literature examining appropriate reading strategies for L2 learners diminished their capacity to adapt evidenced-based reading instructional strategies to meet the needs of their learners. The process to adapt strategies takes considerable time and energy to accomplish and in the absence of relevant research this will be an area we will continue to need to work on. I am encouraged by a growing body of literature focused on these

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types of learners through the work of organizations like Literacy Education and Second Language Learning for Adults (LESLLA).

4. **Do teachers have a way to track learners' acquisition of the decoding skills they need to be successful readers?** From my observations, there is not a widely shared method teachers employ to succinctly track learner progress. Two teachers presented their systems for tracking learner progress, but these were their individual examples and not a cohort's, let alone a department-wide system. The interest their cohort members showed in these systems combined with an opportunity to focus on data in the PLC sets the stage for a more wide-spread development of such tools.

5. **Do teachers incorporate metacognition skill-building routines into their instruction?** As mentioned previously, individual teachers discussed metacognitive strategies they were using with their learners and the corresponding positive results. I believe that with continued collaborative time for teachers to share their experiences, they will increasingly build metacognitive awareness routines into their instruction.

6. **Will teachers feel their participation in PLC's had a positive net gain in their practice?** The PLC will continue through the end of the school year and so I do not yet have an indication of how teachers would describe the effects of their participation. While there have been reports of positive experience in the classroom given learning that could be attributed to involvement in the PLC, as described earlier in this section, teachers have also expressed frustration about their workloads, and participation in the PLC comes with increased responsibilities. While I modified the PLC requirements in response to teachers' input this may not have compensated enough to offset the efforts of their involvement.

4.4 Revisiting the Measures: "Did it Work?," "How Did it Work?," and "Did it Work as I Intended?"

4.4.1 Outcome Measures

The outcome measures I defined in Section 2, summative measures such as improved CASAS scores, will serve as an indication of the effectiveness of my theory of improvement. Changes in those outcomes are not likely to be directly attributed to the efforts undertaken given the duration of this study.

4.4.2 Driver Measures

In planning this project, one of the ways I had identified to measure teachers' utilization of EBRI strategies was through classroom peer-observations using teacher-developed rubrics. Within the duration of the PDSA cycles we did not initiate classroom observations; however, as discussed earlier, in a PLC survey response, a teacher remarked on the utility of classroom observations and their desire to engage in them. Given the culture of peer observations the teachers had established prior to the pandemic, re-engagement with peer observations will provide the data necessary to measure the utilization of EBRI practices moving forward.

As discussed previously there were self-reported examples of teachers utilizing EBRI practices. In three examples the teachers implemented a strategy they learned through their engagement with the PLC which would indicate participation in the PLC was positively influencing teacher behavior.

Another measure that I had identified will be the survey responses from the PLC participants assessing their learning given their engagement within the PLC; however, I will not have these until the PLCs conclude at the end of the school year.

4.4.3 Process Measures

To answer the question of how the process of the PLC was working I had to rely on survey data collected after each PLC meeting, along with discussion notes from the various PLC groups. As stated earlier, on the one hand, we allowed the teachers to divide into four groups as they were interested in learning about all four of the components of reading. Four groups focused on different components of reading made it challenging to capture all the discussion teachers were having and ensure next steps were clear. While groups submitted discussion notes, it was probable that they were incomplete. To account for this eventuality, I used survey data to understand teachers' thinking on the various meeting objectives.

On the other hand, teachers were utilizing the resources to inform their instruction and engaging in discussion about the strategies they were implementing and questions they had about application of research to their context. In this way as they were building their knowledge, the process measures were indicating we were on track. While the extent to which teachers internalize these practices remains to be seen, the majority of the teachers indicated collaboration with their peers to discuss instructional strategies is an important way they continue to build their practice.

4.4.4 Balance Measures

In response to the question "Is it working as intended?" the balance measure I chose to monitor was whether teachers believed their participation in the PLC had a net gain on their practice. An indicator of an opportunity cost of participating in the PLC would be teachers signaling they did not have the time to engage in the PLC. As mentioned earlier, it is apparent from teachers' survey input on both workload and on engagement with the PLC that meeting both the demands of their job responsibilities and the additional responsibilities of PLC

participation were challenging. Four[10] of the initial sixteen members chose to opt out of the

PLC. Additionally, there were times when participants were asked to engage with reading

between meetings and not all were able to get that done. However, that the majority of the

teachers remained engaged in the PLC and were able to prepare for the meetings suggest they

perceive a positive net gain.

    In the next section I will discuss my reflections and the lessons learned from this study.

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[10] A fifth member stopped attending the PLC to go on maternity leave.

5.0 Summary of Findings

This study attempted to provide a mechanism for professional learning to help build teachers' capacity and knowledge in delivering EBRI in L2 for adult learners who are emergent readers in L1. The mechanism, an optional, literacy-focused PLC, included a structure by which teachers would 1) engage with research on EBRI to build their knowledge, 2) discuss the application of the learning given our context of adult ELLs, many of whom are emergent readers in their L1, and 3) analyze formative assessment data to understand learner progress and make instructional decisions. A fourth objective of the PLC was to facilitate the incorporation of metacognitive skills into teachers' lesson objectives to help learners maximize their learning. While, as mentioned in Section 3, explicitly including this objective proved to be too ambitious for the time allotted for our PLC meetings, teachers' articulation of metacognitive strategies they were using with learners indicates this is an area we could build upon in future PLC meetings. To measure the impact of the PLC, I designed four PDSA cycles, each one aligned with the planning, implementation, and review of a monthly PLC meeting.

While I plan to survey the teachers as to whether participation in the PLC helped them to build their knowledge of EBRI at our final meeting in June 2023, at the time of this writing I had not yet posed this question. However, during the second PDSA cycle, 88% of teachers responded that they had learned new EBRI strategies that they wanted to implement in their classrooms. Regarding the application of the research to our context of adult ELLs, teachers reported they had adapted strategies including teaching cognates and false cognates in vocabulary development, incorporating reading fluency strategies to help learners focus on

punctuation cues through a language experience approach, and building phonics instruction based on learners' understanding of L1 phonemes. Regarding the use of formative assessment to inform instruction, 100% of the teachers reported that their participation has been helpful in considering how to measure their learners' progress, given the reading strategies they are implementing in their classes. Specifically, as outlined in Section 4, teachers noticed gaps in learners' progress, implemented EBRI strategies that could address the gaps, and documented positive results where learners met their instructional objectives. This cycle is consistent with previous studies on the efficacy of PLCs to use learner data to inform instructional choices that positively impact learner progress (Darling-Hammond et al., 2009; DuFour & Reeves, 2016).

5.1 Limitations

Several factors limited my ability to implement this study as I had intended. Despite the promising instances of teacher successes in the classroom and the appreciation teachers expressed about having a space to both engage with research and collaborate with their colleagues, instituting PLCs with fidelity is a time-consuming endeavor. The teachers demonstrated dedication to building their skills and knowledge by opting into the PLC, but the time required to meet this monthly commitment, outside of their day-to-day responsibilities, proved to be a significant challenge. This phenomenon was likely amplified in a year where the changing demands of teaching with the residual effects of the COVID-19 global pandemic were high. The number of teachers who were interested in participating in the PLC fell by 32% before the second PLC meeting. Most of the teachers who opted out after having started in the PLC reported that they did not have sufficient time to attend to their teaching responsibilities

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and participate in the PLC. Additionally, some teachers who continued to participate were not always prepared for meetings, having been unable to complete pre-reading or collect formative assessment data to share with their colleagues. This lack of preparation required me to adapt PLC meeting objectives and postpone next steps. It was also, though, a signal that in order to get the level of engagement I was looking for, and likely the engagement the teachers wanted to devote to the PLC, I needed to find ways to reduce some of their responsibilities.

The meeting structure imposed two additional limitations. First, to differentiate the PLC experience to align to teachers' interests, I allowed four different groups to form, each focusing on a different component of reading. Without a dedicated facilitator for each group, it was difficult to monitor each group's progress toward the stated PLC objectives. The lack of facilitators highlighted the second and perhaps more significant structural limitation, that of not including more teacher leaders in the planning process. While I had received positive feedback from several teachers about the idea of implementing a PLC to focus on reading instruction, including more teachers in the planning process would have not only helped me to understand the processes that were negatively influencing teachers' ability to engage in the PLC, but also ensured the objectives of the PLC continued to align with the professional development priorities of the teachers. Because we are a hybrid program across four sites it is challenging to have an accurate understanding of teachers' well-being and ability to meet their instructional responsibilities. Teachers are on-site two days of five. Therefore, teachers' voices in decision making arenas are filtered through the supervisors. With this structure it is important that more of the supervisors, as teacher leaders, are brought into the planning process for adult education initiatives.

A final limitation was that I needed to complete the PDSA cycle within a time period that was shorter than the duration of the PLC; this was further exacerbated by the pace of the PLC, with progress unfolding at a pace that was slower than I had intended. While I had initially intended to run three PDSA cycles, I ran four. As stated in Section 3, after the second PLC meeting it became clear that the way teachers were interpreting and carrying out the objectives of the PLC was inconsistent with my goal for the PLC and signaled that they were overwhelmed with job responsibilities. This additional cycle allowed for check-ins during their regularly scheduled team meetings, which pushed a PLC meeting to the next month. Even with the additional cycle, I did not get to implement peer observations, a practice I think will help coalesce in teachers' minds the three objectives of the PLC meeting: 1) utilizing strategies from EBRI, 2) using data to monitor and inform instruction, and 3) collaborating with peers to reflect on the total experience to inform subsequent instruction.

5.2 Implications for Further Inquiry

Literacy rates that are not sufficient to access family-wage sustaining careers are a persistent problem throughout adult education ESOL programs, and yet the body of research that addresses this specific problem is limited. To gain understanding in this space, educators working in well-funded programs like mine will need to take the lead in learning and improving practices. To do this well requires a collaborative effort where teachers and administrators prioritize a process that enables teachers to meet both their teaching responsibilities and

professional development efforts, instead of viewing professional development and the sharing of this knowledge as additional and therefore optional.

Additionally, adult learners have multiple needs, resulting in a variety of demands on ESOL courses and teachers. Adult learners seek out ESOL classes not just to gain academic skills they were unable to develop in their countries of origin, but also to get the support they need to build a life for themselves and their families in a new country. Meeting these needs requires teachers who are skilled and knowledgeable in a variety of areas, and finding ways to support the needs of adult ELLs who are emergent readers in their L1 includes addressing these multiple needs. Building literacy skills to access family-wage sustaining careers is just one of these needs; focusing solely on academic rigor is not likely to support most learners in adult ESOL programs.

Furthermore, an area that warrants more study is asynchronous learning for adult learners with limited formal school experience. There are a growing number of well-designed technology programs that learners can use on their own to supplement their learning. Many of these technology programs provide meaningful and accurate feedback, and learners can hone in on instruction they are interested in when they have time to access it. These are important features for adult learners. Building asynchronous learning into adult ESOL programs for learners who have many responsibilities outside of school helps them persist where programs that require large numbers of in-person hours may not. Time would need to be provided to ensure learners were trained to use the programs as intended, but because adult learners are motivated by the immediacy of their needs, especially ELLs who are working to learn their host country's language, they are likely to be willing partners in this endeavor.

Finally, teachers, who are closest to the work of meeting the literacy needs of adult learners, must be given the time to continually develop the skills required to address these needs. Especially in the field of adult ESOL education, where most learners are still building literacy skills and academic theory is not fully developed, teachers need time to collaborate as they work to apply existing theory to this under-researched context. More time than a smattering of designated PD days should be allocated to the work of distilling available research into actionable steps to take in the classroom. Additionally, time should be set aside for peer observation and collaboration without teachers having to create sub plans, an additional task that could prevent them from taking advantage of this opportunity. In my place of practice, we have started to curate a library of simple, easily implemented sub plans so that we can provide this time without adding an additional burden to teachers.

5.3 Implications for My Place of Practice

The progress teachers demonstrated when they could focus on a cycle of learning, implementing, and reflecting indicates that facilitating the growth of adult learners' literacy levels is possible; however systemic issues initially identified in my fishbone diagram will constrain further success. For example, while the work in the PLC focused on using data to inform instructional choices, it highlighted a lack of systems to support data collection and use. Teachers have already identified data systems they need to more easily understand their learners' progress, and their experience with data analysis in the PLC has reinforced this thinking. A request coming from teachers for expanded data identification and utilization will get more traction within the organization than a request from just me.

5.4 Toward Meeting the Aim

The learning through these PDSA cycles has laid the foundation for further improvement to meet the aim of my inquiry, that of seeing a 5% increase from SY 21/22 in the passage rate of ELLs moving to the next EFL. This PDSA cycle focused primarily on quality teaching through the implementation of EBRI and the monitoring of learner progress given this instruction. Because participating teachers are only now beginning to engage on a regular basis in cycles of implementing EBRI and analyzing the resulting formative assessments to inform their instructional choices, they will not fully integrate these into their teaching until the next academic year. As a result, I do not expect to see progress toward the aim until June 2024. Further honing of our PLC process, through expanded teacher participation in the planning efforts and a realistic consideration of time constraints, will support more fully this effort moving forward.

The second primary driver, that of supporting adult learners in their use of productive learning strategies, was only tangentially introduced in our PLC meetings. Ways for teachers to consider how to support adult learner persistence, building on the strategies teachers reported implementing this current year, should be more explicit in the future PLC objectives. Additionally, increased use of technology programs for which teachers have expressed enthusiasm will provide a natural opportunity for building learners' skills at interpreting their own data to direct their studying efforts.

The final primary driver I identified, our instructional policies, is one that I can continue to influence both through my position as the Director of Adult Education and by building teachers' awareness of the implications of these policy practices. For example, practices affecting learner placement can be adjusted to ensure more accurate placement of learners from

the onset. Teachers will likely support such efforts, as they are the ones who expend significant amounts of time in pre-assessing learners placed in a given class and reassigning them to a more appropriate class, as well as being the ones to observe the time learners lose to this process. Giving teachers the time to plan and participate in a PLC helps to elevate these ideas, and they can thus consider the connections of these policies to the improvement they are trying to promote in the classroom.

5.5 Implications for Growth

In reviewing my work over the past two years I see several personal growth areas that may positively influence progression toward my aim. The first is in adapting to a more collaborative leadership style. This would include establishing a system for more teacher leaders to be point people in departmental initiatives. Before the pandemic, there was an adult ed coordinator and a PD specialist, neither of whom was teaching, who had time to share leadership responsibilities. In response to the pandemic and the additional course options offered as a result, every member of the adult ed department, besides the digital integration team and the director, was in the classroom. Because teachers had signaled they were overwhelmed with job responsibilities, I was hesitant to put more on them by asking them to take on leadership roles on top of their day-to-day responsibilities. To address this, I took on too much planning of the PLC and did not consult them enough to know how my objectives would affect their current workload. For the 23-24 academic school year, I have advocated to have two positions without teaching responsibilities to be restored so that there are more

avenues to understand how teachers are handling their workloads and how they would like to contribute to initiatives.

A second growth area is considering how to ensure teachers have the data systems they need to help them monitor their learners' progress. Without these systems, it is cumbersome for them to be well-informed. My asking for data created additional stress on the teachers; because they are dedicated, teachers wanted to comply, but without centralized systems, this ask created more work for them than I had anticipated. As of this writing, we have met with our student information system specialist to start building the reports teachers can more easily access. While we have farther to go in curating those reports, this is a start.

A third growth area is in better understanding how to balance the multiple needs of adult learners. In my initial systems review I observed that our executive director was not providing guidance as to what should be prioritized in the adult ed programming. While I contend that providing literacy instruction that allows all learners to gain the skills they need to access family-wage sustaining careers is critical, the reality of the multiple needs adult ELLs have requires a multi-pronged approach. Defining a single purpose, as Larabee (1997) argued would create a more effective public education system, may not be the best way to serve this group of learners. This became clear working in a 2Gen school. In my place of practice, adult learners, along with trying to make up for the education they did not receive in their country of origin, are also trying to make sure their children get the education they need to be successful. Additionally, they are working to obtain the skills they need for social mobility and to participate in democratic equality. While addressing all of these at one time may be ineffective, as Larabee posited, *not* addressing them limits what an adult learner can likely accomplish, given the multiple responsibilities they must bear. I now see that the executive

director of our program has been advocating for all of these goals at once, and it is my responsibility as the Director of Adult Education to understand how to move academic achievement with an eye toward allowances that support the other goals.

Appendix A.1 Surveys

Reflecting on Reading: Experiences, Theory and Practice

Please answer the following questions in the spaces provided.

What was it like for you learning to read as a child in school? *

Long answer text

What was reading **outside** of school like for you? *

Long answer text

What do you believe teaching reading should include in the classroom? What should it look like? *

Long answer text

What training (e.g., college coursework, professional development, etc.) have you had specifically focused on teaching reading? *

Long answer text

What do you know about the Essential Components of Reading (Five Pillars)? Share what you know about each of the following components: phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, fluency and comprehension. *

Long answer text

Figure 19 August Survey 1- Reflecting on Reading: Experiences, Theory, and Practices: Questions 1-3 of 8

How do you determine what to teach your students in reading lessons? What process or processes do you follow to make instructional decisions? *

Long answer text
....

In your own reading instructional practice, where do you need to deepen your knowledge or skills? *

Long answer text
....

What are barriers that make teaching reading a challenge in your classroom? *

Long answer text
....

What are barriers for students that make learning to read challenging? *

Long answer text
....

As an adult educator, what do you think about drawing on reading research and practice from both the perspectives of pedagogy and andragogy? Explain. *

Long answer text
....

Figure 20 August Survey 1- Reflecting on Reading: Experiences, Theory, and Practices: Questions 4-8 of 8

Reading Instruction Workshop

Pre-session information gathering

What questions are you grappling with regarding vocabulary development and/or reading comprehension instruction for your learners?

Long answer text

What other questions do you have about reading instruction for adult ELLs?

Long answer text

What level of learners do you currently work with?

○ Basic or FORAW

○ Intermediate

○ Advanced

Figure 21 August Survey 2- Reading Instruction Workshop

Deepening Reading Instructional Practices

Form description

Name *

Short answer text

What podcast/article/video did you choose to learn from? *

Long answer text

What are your key takeaways from the podcast/article/video? *

Long answer text

What information surprised you from the podcast/article/video you engaged with? *

Long answer text

Figure 22 August Survey 3- Deepening Reading Instructional Practices: Questions 1-3 of 7

What information challenged, changed, or confirmed your thinking on the topic? *

Long answer text

How does this learning connect with what you are doing to help your adult learners build their *
reading skills?

Long answer text

What would you like to learn more about related to this topic?

Long answer text

What questions do you have related to this topic?

Long answer text

Figure 23 August Survey 3- Deepening Reading Instructional Practices: Questions 4-7 of 7

3. Which reading component are you focusing on building your students' skills in? *

○ Alphabetics (phonemic awareness and phonics)

○ Fluency

○ Vocabulary

○ Comprehension

4. What activity will you implement for Nov. 4 to build students' skills in that reading component? *

Your answer

5. How confident do you feel implementing activities to build students' skills in this reading component? *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Not yet confident	○	○	○	○	○	Very confident

6. What would help you feel more confident? *

Your answer

Figure 24 October Survey 4- Understanding Teachers as Readers: Questions 3-6 of 9

Figure 25 October Survey 4- Understanding Teachers as Readers: Questions 7-9 of 9

Nov 18 PLC Feedback

Form description

How well did the data protocol work for you? *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Not at all helpful	○	○	○	○	○	Extremely helpful

What about the process helped you to see and learn interesting or surprising things? *

Long answer text

What part of the data protocol could be improved? *

Long answer text

What questions about teaching and assessment did looking at the data raise for you? *

Long answer text

---

*

Did questions of equity arise from the data or discussion?

○ Yes

○ No

○ I am unsure

Figure 26 November Survey 5- PLC Feedback: Section 1 of 7

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Equity

Description (optional)

What equity issue arose? *

Long answer text

After section 2   Continue to next section

Digging Deeper

Description (optional)

*

How can you pursue further the questions that came up for you in the data protocol?

Long answer text

What would you would like to try/continue in your classroom as a result of looking at this   *
data?

Long answer text

Given what you want to try/continue in your classroom as a result of looking at the data, what   *
formative assessment will you use to understand Ss progress with it?

Long answer text

Identify support in any of the following areas that would help you with the implementation or   *
assessment gathering of the strategy you would like to try/continue.

☐ thought partnership/practice

☐ additional research

☐ strategy implementation ideas

☐ Support with implementation

☐ Support with gathering/identifying formative assessment

☐ I don't need support, thanks

☐ Other...

Figure 27 November Survey 5- PLC Feedback: Sections 2-3 of 7

Figure 28 November Survey 5- PLC Feedback: Sections 4-6 of 7

Figure 29 November Survey 5- PLC Feedback: Section 7 of 7

February PLC Meeting Survey

Form description

What is your name?

Short answer text

The PLC meeting today was helpful to me in thinking about how to check Ss progress, given my instruction implementing a reading strategy/activity.

○ Yes

○ No

○ I'm not sure

The most helpful part of today's session was:

Long answer text

I still have questions about:

Long answer text

I will use/apply the following in my class:

Long answer text

If in the previous question you did not write about the formative assessment you will use in implementing your reading strategy/activity of choice, please describe it here:

Long answer text

Suggestions for the next PLC meeting on March 15:

Long answer text

Anything else you would like to comment on:

Long answer text

Figure 30 February Survey 6- PLC Meeting Survey

Appendix A.2 Institutional Review Board Letter

MEMORANDUM

TO: Jennifer Dalzell

FROM: Human Research Protection (HRP)

DATE: October 19, 2022

SUBJECT: IRB# 2210003: Professional Learning Communities to Support Adult English Language Learners Who Are Emergent Readers

The above-referenced project has been reviewed by the Institutional Review Board. Based on the information provided, this project has been characterized as being an activity that does not meet the formal definition of research, according to the federal regulations at 45 CFR 46.102(l)

That is, the proposed activity is not a systematic investigation, including research development, testing, and evaluation, designed to develop or contribute to generalizable knowledge. Should the scope of this project change such that the definition of research is subsequently met, the investigator must notify the IRB immediately.

Given this determination, you may now begin your project.

Figure 31 Institutional Review Board Letter

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