BUILDING TEACHER CAPACITY TO EFFECTIVELY MEET THE NEEDS OF MULTILINGUAL LEARNERS

By
Leslie Sigmon McIntosh, Cheryl Putnam, and Scott Strickler

A disquisition presented to the faculty of the Graduate School of
Western Carolina University in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of Educational Leadership

Chair: Dr. Aarti Bellara
Assistant Professor of Education Research
Department of Human Services

Committee Members:
Dr. Heidi Von Dohlen, Department of Human Services, Associate Professor
Dr. Erin Callahan, College of Arts and Sciences, Associate Professor of English
Dr. Chad E. Maynor, Principal, Bandys High School
Dr. Michael E. Swan, Superintendent, Burke County Schools

March 2025

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We sincerely thank the following people without whom none of this would have been possible: 1) We would like to express our deepest gratitude to **Dr. Bellara**, our disquisition chair, for the unwavering support, guidance, and encouragement throughout this journey. Your insight and dedication were instrumental in shaping this work, and we are truly grateful. 2) To Bandys, Freedom, and Watauga high schools and the **participants of this research**, we are deeply appreciative of the time and effort you contributed to making this study possible. Your willingness to share your experiences played a vital role in bringing this research to life. 3) **To the professors in the Western Carolina University Educational Leadership Doctoral Program,** thank you for your guidance, wisdom, and dedication to our growth as scholars. Your support has been invaluable on this journey, and we are better people and educators because of you. 4) To our **Cohort X family**, thank you for being our extended support system, sharing in the challenges and triumphs of this process. Your camaraderie (and humor) made this journey one of growth, resilience, and shared success.

Leslie wishes to thank…

A huge thank you to my DQ partners, **Cheryl and Scott**—I am so thankful for you both. You made this process all the better by walking the path with me. I am blessed to know you both and to call you colleagues and friends. To my **Mama and Daddy** who always made my sister and me believe that teaching is the most noble profession one can pursue, thank you for the sacrifices you made that allowed me to be a first-generation college graduate and for always encouraging me in my endeavors—educational or otherwise. I am proud to be your daughter. To my amazing children—**Caroline and Garrett**—you are always the why behind everything I do. I hope if I've taught you nothing else, it is that there are no limits to what you can do once you

decide to do it and that the #1 rule still applies: be kind--always. To my husband **Brian**, thank you for supporting me and never questioning my need to live out my life's work and dedicate myself to education. And finally, to the best admin team around and my biggest cheerleaders—**Brandon Harbinson and Chad Maynor**, you guys make me better and I love working beside of you each day. Thank you for making time and space for me to do this work. **Chad**, a special "thank you" for seeing something in me that I did not see in myself. I would have never embarked on this administrator's journey had you not pulled me from the English classroom—however reluctant I might have been. You changed the trajectory of my life because of that, and I truly believe that was the reason I found this program. For that and so much more, I am forever grateful.

Ultimately, this achievement is the culmination of a lifetime of work, experiences, and dreams. It reflects the influence of all the people with whom I have crossed paths—those who taught and coached me, those with whom I worked, and especially those I taught and coached. "Thank you" is simply not enough. Being an educator was always my dream and for it to be my life's work is a blessing.

Cheryl wishes to thank…

A special thank you to my **DQ partners, Leslie and Scott**—without you, this process would have been almost impossible. Your collaboration, encouragement, and determination kept me going, and I am beyond grateful for our partnership. To my Daddy, who has always inspired me to persevere no matter the obstacles, thank you for instilling in me the strength to continue on this path. To my Momma, who was there to comfort me when I felt like giving up, your unwavering belief in me made all the difference. To my **son**, Tyler, who reminded me that I could do anything, your words of encouragement carried me through the toughest moments. To

my **granddaughter**, Emery, who sacrificed precious “Gammie time,” I hope I have inspired you to believe that you can achieve anything you set your mind to.

This achievement is not mine alone—it belongs to everyone who stood by me, lifted me up, and believed in my ability to reach this goal. From the bottom of my heart, thank you.

Scott wishes to thank…

A special thank you to my DQ partners extraordinaire, **Leslie McIntosh and Cheryl Putnam** – you are both incredible educators, insightful and articulate women, and without both of you I would never have had as fruitful an experience that I will continue to use in the work to change the lives of students for the better. I am forever grateful and humbled to have my name next to yours in this work. To **Heather**, my wife and love of my life, along with my children, **Caroline and Franklin**, through time spent together these last several years with me on my laptop working at home, in the car, and nearly everywhere we went. Throughout the early morning or late nights, you have supported me, lifted me up, encouraged me, and loved me more than I can share in words. I love you each so much and look forward to seeing you more and enjoying every second of it. **Mom and Dad**, your encouragement throughout this work has been inspirational. Your kind words, check-ins on my progress (and on how I am doing) and love and care from just down the mountain has helped me continue this work to this point.

There are multiple educators that have helped me reach this professional milestone that I want to thank: 1) **Dr. Jeffrey McDaris –** The former Superintendent of Transylvania County Schools who hired me for three different principalships and continues to encourage and be a mentor to this day. 2) **Dr. Brian Weaver –** Assistant Superintendent of Transylvania County Schools. Without your encouragement, help, advice, and friendship I would never have made the positive impact I work to make today and every day through this work in the disquisition or in

my role as principal. 3) **Dr. Leslie Alexander** – When you came to Watauga County Schools and allowed me to be your first principal hire, I knew that I wanted to work to make my new community continue to be an educational force for growth and good. Your kind words, listening ear, and positive leadership to me, as well as to all of Watauga County Schools, is greatly appreciated. Your encouragement and understanding of my work towards this accomplishment has been incredible and appreciated every step of the way. 4) **Dr. Chris Blanton** – As the assistant superintendent of Watauga County Schools (and former Watauga High School and Innovation Academy principal) I am still working to be as kind, inspiring, and insightful as you are. Your acts of kindness, continuous smile of hope, sage advice, and wealth of local and institutional knowledge have made this work and my job successful in so many ways. 5) **Dr. Scott Elliott** – You are the person that saw something in me to hire me for my first full time teaching job. Nearly a quarter of a century later your mentorship, friendship, words of encouragement, praise and advice still are influential in who I am as a leader, educator, person, and parent. I would not be here without you and the time you have invested in me. I am proud to be a fellow Wataugaian with you and it brings me joy that I still see the former Superintendent so involved with all our schools in Watauga County. 6) **Mrs. Amanda Lewis** – One of the greatest I have ever known that I was privileged to work with as her principal and co-administrator. Working with you made me a better leader and person. Our professional conversations are always insightful, and I am a better person for knowing you. My family adores you and your family and your kinship as you have professionally advanced has meant more to me than you know. 7) **Mrs. Tonya Treadway** – An educator that works for students. Growing with you as co-elementary principals and now as co-high school principals is something I cherish. Your worldview of education always positively influences and challenges me as a principal, and I am

just a better person for knowing you. Thank you for your listening ear, your kindness, and just being an overall incredible person.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

List of Tables ix
List of Figures x
List of Abbreviations xi
Abstract xii
The Disquisition xiii
The Problem 1
A National Issue 1
The Problem of Practice 3
Literature Review 4
School Climate and Sense of Belonging 4
Curriculum 6
School Leadership, Teacher Efficacy, and Collective Teacher Efficacy 8
Building Teacher Capacity 9
Instructional Capacity 10
Cultural Competence 11
Theoretical Framework 13
Networked Improvement Community: Three High Schools in Western North Carolina 15
Bandys High School – Catawba County Schools 16
Freedom High School – Burke County Public Schools 18
Watauga High School – Watauga County Schools 20
Researcher Positionality 22
Leslie Sigmon McIntosh 23
Cheryl Putnam 24
Scott Strickler 26
Causal Analysis 27
Causal Focus 30
Exclusionary School Climate 32
Lack of Leadership and Teacher Efficacy 32
Inadequate Teacher Preparation and Capacity of Teachers 33
Lack of Preservice Training 34
Lack of Professional Development 35
Lack of Cultural Competency 36
Lack of Instructional Capacity 36
Theory of Improvement 36
Improvement Initiative Design 39
Module 1: Cultural Competence 40
Module 2: Effective Pedagogy for MLs 40
Module 3: Access Points for MLs 41
Design Team 42
Implementation Plan and Timeline 43
Hurricane Helene 44
Bandys High School – Leslie Sigmon McIntosh 45

Freedom High School – Cheryl Putnam 46
Watauga High School – Scott Strickler 47
Analysis of the Improvement Initiative 52
Measures 52
Results and Findings 56
Participants 56
Results 58
Limitations of the Findings 72
Scaling Up: Buy-in, Sustainability, and Expandability 74
Implications and Recommendations 75
Implications and Recommendations for Policy 76
Recommendations for Future Research 77
Leadership Lessons Learned 78
Conclusion 80
References 82
Appendices 95
Appendix A: Local Context for Catawba County Schools 95
Appendix B: Local Context for Burke County Public Schools 96
Appendix C: Local Context for Watauga County Schools 97
Appendix D: Implementation Timeline 98
Appendix E: Historically Responsive Literacy Framework 99
Appendix F: Pre- and Post- Survey Items 100
Appendix G: Final Reflection Questions 101
Appendix H: Reflection Questions by Module 102
Appendix I: Sample Lesson: A Thousand Splendid Suns 106
Appendix J: Sample Lesson: Chapter 1 Vocabulary 110

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1: NC Colleges & Universities Pre-Service Requirements ... 34
Table 2: Design Team by Location ... 43
Table 3: End of Module Assessment Items for Modules 1-3 ... 53
Table 4: Module & Survey Completion Rate by Participant ... 57
Table 5: Measures ... 58
Table 6: Module 1 – Cultural Competence: Before & After Statistics ... 64
Table 7: Module 2 – Effective Pedagogy for MLs: Before & After Statistics ... 65
Table 8: Module 3 – Access Points for MLs: Before & After Statistics ... 67
Table 9: Opportunity Cost Coding ... 72
Table A1: CCS Student & Staff Diversity ... 95
Table B1: BCPS Student & Staff Diversity ... 96
Table C1: WCS Student & Staff Diversity ... 97

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1: Networked Improvement Community 16
Figure 2: Fishbone Diagram 29
Figure 3: Fishbone Focal Area 31
Figure 4: Driver Diagram 38
Figure 5: Module 1 – Cultural Competence 59
Figure 6: Module 2 – Effective Pedagogy for MLs 60
Figure 7: Module 3 – Access Points for MLs 61
Figure 8: Pre- & Post- Professional Development Survey Comparison 67
Figure A1: CCS Secondary ESL-Certified Teachers 95
Figure B1: BCPS Secondary ESL-Certified Teachers 96
Figure C1: WCS Secondary ESL-Certified Teachers 97

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AP	Advanced Placement
BCPS	Burke County Public Schools
BHS	Bandys High School
CCS	Catawba County Schools
CCC & TI	Caldwell Community College and Technical Institute
CRT	Critical Race Theory
DQ	Disquisition
EBLS	Emergent Bi/Multilingual Learners
ELs	English Learners
ESL	English as a Second Language
ESLs	English as a Second Language Learners
FHS	Freedom High School
HRL	Historically Responsive Literacy
MLs	Multilingual Learners
NCES	National Center for Education Statistics
NIC	Networked Improvement Community
PDSA	Plan, Do, Study, Act
PLC	Professional Learning Community
PST	Preservice Teacher
SIOP	Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol
UDL	Universal Design for Learning
WCU	Western Carolina University
WHS	Watauga High School
WIA	Watauga Innovation Academy

Abstract

BUILDING TEACHER CAPACITY TO EFFECTIVELY MEET THE NEEDS OF MULTILINGUAL LEARNERS

Leslie Sigmon McIntosh, Ed.D; Cheryl Putnam, Ed.D; Scott Stickler, Ed.D
Western Carolina University (March 2025)

Director: Dr. Emily Virtue

This study examines how building teacher capacity through culturally responsive teaching and targeted instructional strategies enhances outcomes for high school multilingual learners (MLs). Grounded in sociocultural learning theory and second language acquisition research, this study explores the essential knowledge, skills, and dispositions educators need to foster inclusive classrooms. Findings suggest that professional learning, differentiated instruction, and school-wide supports are key to serving MLs effectively. Policy recommendations emphasize enhanced teacher preparation, small class sizes, and increasing the number of specialists as well as adding collaboration time between specialists and teachers. This research contributes to the field by providing insights for educators and policy makers seeking to improve instruction for students learning to speak English.

Keywords: multilingual learners, culturally responsive teaching, second language acquisition, teacher capacity, English learners

The Disquisition

The disquisition is formal, problem-based discourse. The disquisition is closely aligned with the scholar-practitioner role of Doctorate in Education (Ed.D.) students and thus takes on a practical focus rather than the theoretical focus of traditional Ph.D. dissertations. The purpose of the disquisition is "to document the scholarly development of leadership expertise in organizational improvement" (Lomotey, 2020, p. 5). The Ed.D. program at Western Carolina University (WCU) nurtures and matures students as both scholars and practitioners who are trained to understand systems and institutional challenges and opportunities through a lens of research and scholarship. Students apply their knowledge, using their institutional access and positionality, directly to the educational institutions where they lead. The Ed.D. is an applied degree, and the disquisition is similarly an applied capstone experience for doctoral work. The disquisition at WCU specifically utilizes an Improvement Science methodology, is shaped by critical theory and scholarly research, and engages the candidate in the application of the concepts in an applied manner through the development and implementation of an intervention within their local institution, focused on improvement of equity within that system. Ultimately, the disquisition serves as documentation and assessment of an improvement initiative that "contributes to a concrete good to the larger community and the dissemination of new relevant knowledge" (Lomotey, 2020, p. 5).[1]

[1] Statement prepared by Alison Joseph, Ed.D. and Educational Leadership faculty.

BUILDING TEACHER CAPACITY TO EFFECTIVELY MEET THE NEEDS OF MULTILINGUAL LEARNERS

The Problem

A National Issue

The demographic makeup of PK-12 public schools in the United States is vastly different from what it was just a decade ago. As the country inches closer to becoming "majority minority" for the first time in history, the challenges for educators across the nation are many (Krosch et al., 2022). According to the U.S. Department of Education's National Center for Education Statistics (2023), in the fall of 2020, the percentage of public school Multilingual Learners (MLs)[2] was 10.3% or approximately 5 million. When comparing data from fall 2010 to fall 2021, the percentage of Hispanic public school students was higher in all 50 states and the District of Columbia (NCES, 2023). Sheng et al. (2011) emphasized that due to the unprecedented growth of the ML population in U.S. public schools, the federal government, state agencies, and local school districts will struggle to meet the unique educational needs of these students. MLs represent a growing part of the U.S. student body who require differentiated support services to ensure academic success. Coupled with the fact that teacher preparation programs traditionally do not require coursework in teaching students who are learning to speak English, teachers are underprepared to work with these students as effectively as they do English speakers. In fact, teachers in general lack basic foundational knowledge about students learning to speak English even though the vast majority teach these learners (Coady et al, 2015).

[2] Students learning to speak English are historically and currently referred to as "Limited English Proficient" (LEP), "English as a Second Language Learners" (ESLs), "English Learners" (ELs), "Multilingual Learners" (MLs), and "Emergent Bi/Multilinguals" (EBLs). For the purposes of this discussion, "ML" will be used in reference to students learning to speak English.

Historically in America, the language and familial cultures from families and individuals rooted in Latin America have been suppressed and forced into the monolinguistic English-speaking culture that is dominant in schools and in the communities these schools serve (Martinez, 2019; Montgomery et al., 2019; Walsh, 2008). Despite efforts to reform education, a persistent gap remains between MLs and English speakers. The graduation rates of MLs significantly lag behind those of their English-speaking peers. During the 2017-18 school year, the national high school graduation rate percentage for MLs was 69% compared to 85% for all students, a difference of 17 percentage points (Darling-Hammond, 2013).

The consequences of not meeting the academic needs of MLs or these students not completing high school are real and affect more than just the dropout. Callahan and Humphries (2016) noted that MLs participate in higher education at a lower rate than their English-speaking peers and have significantly lower academic outcomes. They also pointed out that secondary level MLs are often met with academic ceilings not experienced by their English-speaking peers because the MLs' linguistic needs take precedence over the fact that they are also content learners (Callahan & Humphries, 2016). Perhaps a more deeply rooted reason for the lack of overall success of MLs is the issue of student placement and readiness. Blaise (2015) highlighted the fact that in the U.S., MLs are often placed at the grade level that fits their age rather than the one that agrees with their academic background. When students are asked to repeatedly work well beyond the point for which their academic background prepared them, it frequently causes reactions that are very damaging to the student both emotionally and academically (Blaise, 2015).

The unemployment rate for dropouts is estimated to be 13% higher than those who attain a high school credential (National Center for Education Statistics, 2023). As a result, one of the

most immediate impacts a high school dropout faces is that of employment. Not surprisingly, those who do not complete high school will earn significantly less than those who do. In addition, dropouts will make lower tax contributions, experience a higher reliance on Medicaid, Medicare, or welfare, and have higher rates of criminal activity (Levin & Belfield, 2007). Failing to meet the educational needs of MLs will likely mean that they will not have access to indicators of a high-quality life which impacts them individually, their families, and communities.

The Problem of Practice

In Improvement Science the work done by scholar practitioners, according to Hinnant-Crawford (2020), is guided by three reflective foundational questions. The first question (What problem am I trying to solve?) seeks to identify and delimit the problem of practice. The second question, (What change can I employ to solve it?) requires those engaging in improvement work to identify an initiative to implement in order to address the problem. Finally, the third question (How will I know that the change I employed is actually an improvement?) requires that the scholar practitioners design measures to evaluate the initiative and reassess the overall problem again. The academic outcomes for MLs are significantly lower than their English-Speaking peers (Callahan and Humphries, 2016; Sheng et al., 2011; Theoharis & O'Toole, 2011; Umansky, 2016), and in order to yield similar academic outcomes to their English-speaking peers, MLs must work beyond their own capabilities leading to social and emotional damage (Blaise, 2015). We contend that our current school systems, the pedagogies teachers are trained to implement, our assessment practices, and our priorities, do not afford MLs the ability to succeed and are not designed to allow MLs to succeed at similar rates to their English-speaking peers, which is an issue of inequity. Teacher preparation programs do not prepare future teachers on how to identify

strategies designed to address the needs of MLs specifically (Coady et al., 2015; de Jong et al., 2018; Li & Jee, 2021; Salerno & Kibler, 2013). This requires school leadership to provide mechanisms to build teachers' capacity to effectively meet the needs of MLs. We identified this lack of teacher capacity to effectively meet the needs the of MLs as our problem of practice and is the impetus for this improvement initiative.

Literature Review

In this section, we explore the primary themes prevalent in extant literature. The structure of this literature review is organized into thematic sections, each delineating specific aspects of the uniqueness of teaching MLs. We begin with school climate and sense of belonging, then move to curriculum, and conclude with the impact of building-level leadership and teachers on MLs while considering teacher efficacy, collective teacher efficacy, and teacher capacity—both instructional and cultural.

School Climate and Sense of Belonging

According to Morrison et al. (2003), a sense of belonging is defined as "an umbrella term to encompass a variety of related constructs in the literature, including school connectedness, membership, bonding, engagement, and affiliation" (p. 87). It is very clear that MLs have a different high school experience from that of their English-speaking peers. McInerney (2022) found that youth who immigrate as teens cope with three areas of transition: adolescence, migration, and entrance to high school. McInerney found that a sense of belonging can have "long-term, positive impacts on academics, physical and psychological health and happiness, and well-being" (p. 1043).

In contrast, research suggests that when students are given the ML label it often hides more than it reveals as educators place emphasis on what the student does not know rather than

what the student does know (Callahan & Shifrer, 2016; Martinez, 2019; Umansky, 2016). As noted by Chang-Bacon and Salerno (2023), monolinguistic ideologies are present throughout U.S. schools (p. 947). The prioritization of English over other languages causes students who speak languages other than English to potentially be marginalized and viewed as "less than" other students in terms of ability or intelligence. The placement of MLs in pull-out classes that separate them from their English-speaking peers perpetuates this deficit thinking (Chang-Bacon & Salerno, 2023). Students potentially face this deficit ideology throughout their entire school career (Callahan & Shifrer, 2016). In North Carolina alone, less than 1% of MLs are enrolled in academically gifted programs; in comparison, 11% of their English-speaking peers are enrolled in such programs (Montgomery et al., 2019). Vera et al. (2021) noted that many students shared feelings of isolation from their peers because they were seen as remedial students as a result of the ML label (pp. 139–140). This sense of isolation and disconnectedness affects students immensely (Vera et al., 2017).

Understanding why MLs drop out of school is vital to developing support systems that increase retention and academic success. Wei (2021) asserted that the challenges faced by MLs influence their educational success. These may include adjusting to new languages, environments, and cultures. Developing and fostering a positive school climate and a sense of belonging is crucial for MLs. Interacting and engaging with teachers and peers can create a sense of belonging for students. When teachers provide an emotionally supportive atmosphere that is conducive for learning, students are more likely to be positively connected to their school environment (Rosenfeld et al., 2000). Creating a positive learning environment within schools involves cultivating a positive and inclusive climate and culture that fosters supportive

relationships among teachers and peers alike. A safe, supportive, and inclusive environment enhances the language learning experience and overall well-being of MLs.

Curriculum

As mentioned previously, MLs are often positioned according to their perceived deficits (Gutiérrez et al., 2009), namely their lack of proficiency in English. Cross (2016) wanted society to move away from viewing MLs with a deficit mindset and instead capitalize on their skills and integrate them into the class as a mediational tool for all people to learn and understand from each other. In other words, realizing that MLs bring much to offer to a classroom community and English-speaking students can learn from them as well is crucial. Most secondary linguistic support services consist primarily of English as a Second Language (ESL) coursework, offered as a stand-alone program or coupled with sheltered content area instruction (Calderón et al., 2011). These programs must be understood within the context of a school's academic schedule which must balance ESL placement with graduation (Callahan & Shifrer, 2016). This is significant because students in ESL courses lose the opportunity to enroll in elective courses that their English-speaking peers are able to take. Many of these courses are designed to expose students to career opportunities, the arts, and the military. Furthermore, MLs frequently face misplacement into special education due to their limited proficiency in English. There were 800,600 MLs identified as students with disabilities in fall 2020, representing 16.1% of the total ML student enrollment. In comparison, students with disabilities comprised 14.5% of total public school enrollment in 2020-21 (NCES, 2023). The ML student's equity trap of English as the primary language ensnares schools and teachers in equating limited English proficiency with limited intellectual capabilities simply because students do not speak English. Trapped within this mindset, educators fail to recognize the linguistic assets that MLs bring. Consequently,

curriculum and language programs designed to assist MLs can inadvertently hinder their social integration with English-speaking peers.

In order to foster the success of all students, particularly MLs, it is crucial to integrate the teaching of content concepts with academic language, which encompasses the development of reading, writing, listening, and speaking skills. Explicit vocabulary instruction and opportunities for meaningful interactions with peers to reinforce learning are the most powerful ways to increase vocabulary knowledge (Echevarria et al., 2007). Vaughn et al. (2009) conducted two experimental studies in a seventh-grade social studies classroom in Texas, where the student population was 65% Latinx, to improve MLs' vocabulary knowledge and comprehension. Student who received explicit vocabulary instruction outperformed their peers who received typical instruction. This study concluded that combining explicit vocabulary and concept instruction provided context for promoting students' vocabulary and understanding of content. In another vocabulary-based intervention, Lesaux et al. (2010) conducted a quantitative study that focused on teacher-delivered intervention with 476 students in sixth-grade classrooms, 346 of whom were MLs. Vocabulary instruction included reading short, engaging texts with selected academic vocabulary words and reinforcement activities. Findings showed that the participating students would benefit from explicit, systematic vocabulary and reading comprehension instruction as part of the core classroom curriculum (Lesaux et al., 2010).

Frequently, subject-area teachers need more training in fostering adolescents' literacy skills, and their expertise in assisting MLs with second language literacy development is even more scarce. To adequately assist MLs in comprehending the course content and the academic language employed in instruction, teachers require ongoing professional development that is integrated into their job responsibilities. The Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol (SIOP)

model incorporates features recommended for high-quality instruction for all students. SIOP is a comprehensive professional development framework that is widely used with K-12 teachers (Echevarria et al., 2007) including lesson participation, building background knowledge, comprehensible input, strategy use, interactions, practice/application of learning, lesson delivery, and review and assessment.

School Leadership, Teacher Efficacy, and Collective Teacher Efficacy

Hattie (2023) claimed that collective teacher efficacy is the greatest contributor to successful student learning. Second only to educators among school-based factors that have the ability to improve student performance are school leaders (Goddard et al., 2015). Research indicates that in order for the gap between the educations of MLs and their English-speaking peers to be closed, school leadership must take an active role in making the education of MLs a priority while supporting teachers at the same time (Cansoy & Parlar, 2018; Kim et al., 2014; Martin-Beltran & Peercy, 2014; Theoharis & O'Toole, 2011; Williams et al., 2007). Teacher and collective teacher efficacy do not just appear in a school; it must be fostered and protected by the principal and leadership staff. Akan's (2013) study, completed in Turkey with 223 elementary teachers, found that when principals and school leaders employ leadership styles that empower teachers, collective teacher efficacy is more likely to be present (p. 599).

Cansoy and Parlar (2018) highlighted the relationship among collective teacher efficacy, teacher self-efficacy, and school leadership in that "teacher self-efficacy positively and significantly predicted collective teacher efficacy, and school leadership positively and significantly predicted collective teacher efficacy" (p. 562). Because of the inter-relatedness of these aspects, principals and school leaders can implement programs and professional development to increase teaching capacity with MLs and empower teachers to perceive

themselves to be more effective as a group (Cansoy & Parlar, 2018; Loughland & Nguyen, 2020). The effects of collective teacher efficacy were touted in the research of Villavicencio et al. (2021) as well. Their case study research of two high schools—one of which was a "Network School," one of 28 schools nationwide that primarily serves MLs, and the other a "non-network school." They emphasized that a central component to effectively teaching MLs hinged on teacher collaboration and a sense of collective responsibility for all students (Villavicencio et al., 2021). School leaders can be the impetus a school needs for instructional change that will produce effects on student achievement, teacher collaboration, and collective teacher efficacy (Akan, 2013; Cansoy & Parlar, 2018; Goddard et al., 2015). In order to attain teacher efficacy, teacher capacity must be addressed.

Building Teacher Capacity

The need for capacity building among teachers is great in part due to the lack of direct preparation in preservice teacher education programs (Coady et al., 2015; de Jong et al., 2018; Li & Jee, 2021; Salerno & Kibler, 2013). In traditional teacher preparation programs at colleges and universities, little if any coursework and practical experience is dedicated to the strategies involved in teaching MLs. In Li and Jee's (2021) mixed-methods study of 433 preservice teachers' (PST)[3] experiences learning to teach MLs, they highlighted that most of the PST indicated that the only exposure and experience they received with MLs was "seat-based," meaning that they had no true clinical experience with MLs (p. 146). Similarly, de Jong et al. (2018) surveyed and interviewed the faculty of 15 teacher education programs in Florida to examine how universities help their own faculty to infuse English as a second language (ESL)

[3] A preservice teacher is a teacher-in-training who is enrolled in a teacher education program at a college or university.

content into teacher education programs. The faculty believed that the concern was more with being able to report that their program had an ESL component than with a development of rich and unique experiences for PST which further indicates a need for building teacher capacity for those teachers who recently entered the profession as well as veteran teachers (de Jong et al., 2018).

At the high school level, most teachers are not prepared to teach MLs, but as noted, they play the primary role in whether or not students grow academically (Hyunsook Song, 2016). To ensure fair and equal educational opportunities for students, it is crucial to foster teachers' confidence, skillset, and effectiveness when working with diverse student groups. In addition to pedagogical and linguistic competence, teachers must possess the capabilities to work with MLs to address their educational, social, and cultural needs. Literature highlights that culturally responsive teaching practices are deeply rooted in teacher efficacy and cultural competence (Blatchley & Lau, 2010). There is a tremendous need to enhance the cultural competency and capacity of teachers working in PK-12 schools instructing MLs.

Instructional Capacity

Research from the last two decades continually suggest that building teacher capacity and strengthening teacher education programs as ways to increase performance, increase high school graduation rates, and make the overall education of MLs equitable to that of their English-speaking peers (Babinski et al., 2017; DaSilva Iddings & Rose, 2012; Lynch et al., 2021; Russell, 2015; Salerno & Kibler, 2013; Shim, 2019; Téllez & Manthey, 2015; Villavicencio et al., 2021). Rubinstein-Avila and Lee (2014) noted that most site-based programs available for MLs found at the elementary level scaffold both the linguistic and academic needs of students. Scaffolding at the high school level is not easily done as teachers' primary focus is on subject

matter knowledge and not on student language development. Teachers' capacity for language development and second language acquisition are topics on which they very likely have had no training. A commonality among researchers regardless of targeted grade levels studied is the desire to better understand how teachers develop a capacity for instructing MLs and what makes teachers confident in doing so (Darling-Aduana & Heinrich, 2018; Russell, 2015; Téllez & Manthey, 2015). Research indicated that schools who fostered collective teacher efficacy through the implementation and use of school-wide programs and training tended to have stronger instructional practices as related to MLs. While building instructional capacity is a start, in order for instructional capacity to be increased teachers must also have a level of cultural competence in educating MLs.

Cultural Competence

Cultural competence is the ability to successfully teach students who come from cultures other than our own (Diller & Moule, 2004). According to Gay (2002), to be culturally competent, teachers must take on the role of students by immersing themselves in the cultures of their students. This entails gaining extensive knowledge about cultural values, learning styles, historical legacies, contributions, and achievements of various ethnic groups (Gay, 2002). Culturally responsive teaching requires teachers to acknowledge and embrace culture, as it is essential for individuals to effectively learn, comprehend, and interpret information. Schunk (2019) stated that social and cultural elements are important in the realization of an individual's learning. Cultural competence significantly impacts student educational outcomes (Arruzza & Chau, 2021). Culture not only influences learner identities, but also how they view themselves and how they perceive others view them (Li & Jee, 2021). It also significantly influences the learning and social integration of MLs. Educators with cultural competence are better equipped

to provide support and meet the needs of students from diverse backgrounds, fostee inclusivity, and enhance academic success for all learners.

In numerous schools across the nation, a cultural divide continues to grow due to significant demographic shifts, leading to a rich tapestry of diversity within classrooms. Educators, faced with this evolving landscape, are grappling with the challenge of effectively supporting students from various cultural backgrounds distinct from their own. To effectively meet the needs of MLs, teachers must have the capacity to familiarize themselves with their students' cultural practices and engage in self-reflection to examine their own cultural beliefs and practices. Milner (2010) emphasized the significance of teachers engaging in profound introspection about their own perspectives, privileges, beliefs, and life experiences. This introspection should be conducted in connection with the perspectives and life experiences of the students and communities they serve (Milner, 2010). This is especially important since White educators are teaching many MLs. Educators must understand that MLs are not inflexible; they are not rigid or unchangeable. As teachers work to recognize and embrace the cultural characteristics that MLs bring to the classroom, these aspects can serve as valuable resources for enhancing the learning experience.

The existence of a cultural divide between teachers and students in PK-12 public schools is evident. Over the past few decades, there have been only minor changes in teacher demographics in the U.S., with 80% of the teaching force identifying as White (NCES, 2023). In contrast, the most recent data on student demographics indicate significant change. Among these students, the racial breakdown is 47% White, 27% Latinx, 15% Black, 5% Asian, and 4% belonging to two or more races (NCES, 2023). School districts must prioritize the continuous

development of cultural competency among teachers, administrators, and staff if they wish to close the gap so that students have teachers who look like them in their classrooms.

Theoretical Framework

Racial bias within the educational system is deeply ingrained. Critical Race Theory (CRT) presents a valuable framework for promoting a more equitable student experience by examining power structures that perpetuate racial disparities and offering strategies for advocacy and positive transformation. CRT was first developed in the 1970s and 1980s by legal scholars and activists in the U.S. It emerged as a response to the limitations of traditional legal frameworks in addressing systematic racial inequality and social injustice. The field of education was first introduced to CRT when Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) created theories around race and utilized them as analytical tools for comprehending and addressing inequities within the education system. Building on CRT during the mid-1990s, LatCrit emerged to expand the analysis of civil rights beyond race (Aoki & Johnson, 2008).

Capper (2019) noted that the tenets of CRT are extended by LatCrit Theory. The six tenets of CRT include the permanence of racism, Whiteness as property, counter-storytelling and majoritarian narratives, interest convergence, critique of liberalism, and intersectionality (Capper, 2019, p. 104). LatCrit Theory extends these tenets by considering immigrant status, language, ethnicity, culture, assimilation, and Latinx essentialism (Capper, 2019). Espinoza and Harris (1997) believed that one of the ways LatCrit is different from CRT is that it views race as more than a Black/White binary problem and acknowledges the greater complications of race. Solorzano and Yosso (2001) defined LatCrit Theory in education as a framework used to theorize and examine how race and racism impact "educational structures, processes, and discourses that effect People of Color generally or Latinas/os specifically" (p. 459). LatCrit

Theory hinges on the intersections of the lives of Latinas/os with other forms of subordination such as racism, sexism, and classism (Huber, 2010). These experiences are shared through LatCrit theory methods such as counter-storytelling and *testimonios* (Huber, 2010; Solorzano & Yosso, 2001).

As Capper (2019) noted, LatCrit theory centers on race, moves beyond just Black and White, and "pivots on the CRT tenets of the permanence of racism, counter-stories, and histories of Latina/o people" (p. 144). Alemán (2009) believed that a LatCrit Theory framework must rely on the discussion of lived experiences of Latinx and the historic discrimination of practices within the school that has undoubtedly led to higher dropout rates and lower achievement in comparison to the majority population within the school. To that end, within the LatCrit framework, the language of "English as a Second Language" and "English Language Learner" are deficit oriented and points to what students lack or cannot do rather than focusing on the assets of MLs.

This can also be classified as linguicism—or the discrimination of people based on their language or dialect and can occur alongside other forms of discrimination such as racism, classism, or sexism (Skutnabb-Kangas, 1989). In rural high schools, student access to equitable educational resources such as bilingual educators or culturally responsive teaching materials is often limited, and this exacerbates the challenges faced by students learning English. Teachers may unconsciously hold lower expectations for these students, leading to reduced academic rigor. This type of systemic bias reinforces inequities, perpetuating a cycle of underachievement and limited career prospects for these students (Torff & Murphy, 2020). Addressing linguicism requires building teacher capacity through professional development that emphasizes cultural competency, inclusive practices, and strategies for supporting MLs. If the focus is not shifted

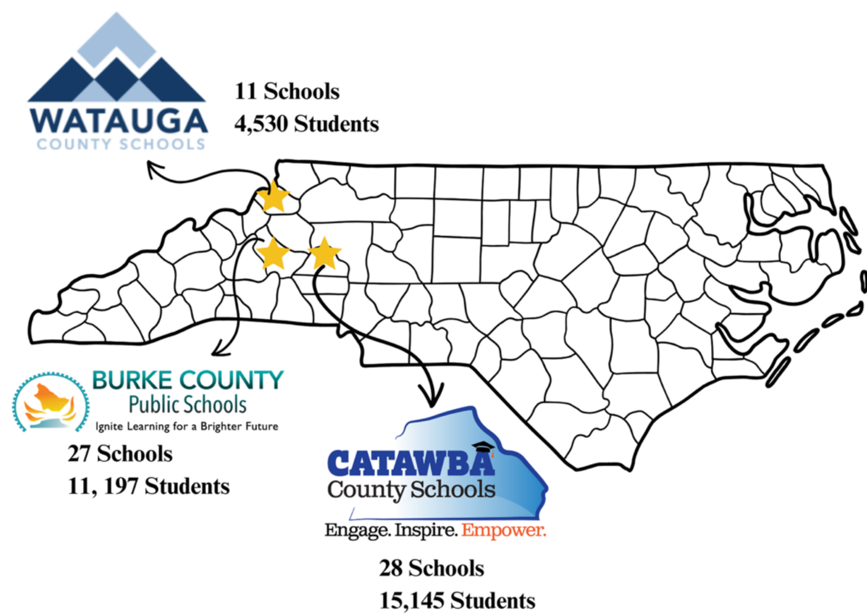
from individual deficits to systemic barriers, any change that occurs from the proposed initiative could very well be more of the same and not a move toward equity.

Networked Improvement Community: Three High Schools in Western North Carolina

To address the issue of MLs lagging behind their English-speaking peers, possibly due to lack of teacher capacity, we (three scholar-practitioners in WCU's EdD program) propose the development of a networked improvement community (NIC). Hinnant-Crawford (2020) defined a NIC as an "execution network designed to address a particular aim" (p. 217). Working together, we collaboratively addressed the problem of practice in hopes to see improvement sooner in that by participating in a NIC, we had a variety of settings to test our improvement initiative. By using the NIC to do our improvement work, we hoped to accelerate our efforts to improve our schools. The improvement work occurred within three different school contexts in western North Carolina: Bandys High School, Freedom High School, and Watauga High School. Figure 1 shows where these high schools (and their districts) are located within the state: Catawba County Schools, Burke County Public Schools, and Watauga County Schools.

Figure 1

Networked Improvement Community



Before detailing the proposed improvement project's design and process, this section presents descriptions of each of the three contexts. The professional role and positionality of the scholar-practitioner associated with each context is included. Positionality captures the dynamic ways an individual is defined by socially significant identity dimensions (Secules et al., 2021). According to Kezar and Lester (2010), positionality theory provides an overview of how individuals have societal positions that impact how they socially construct the world.

Bandys High School - Catawba County Schools

Catawba County Schools (CCS), Bandys High School (BHS) and its immediate community have experienced great demographic shifts in recent years. While some parts of the district are extremely diverse (at least two schools in the district are majority minority), others are still predominately White. CCS is a medium size public school unit with approximately 8% of the student population being categorized as MLs (Greene & Catawba County Schools [CCS],

2023). CCS currently has three Spanish-English immersion elementary schools and is adding a fourth during the 2024-25 school year. Two of the current three are 50:50 Spanish to English and the third—an elementary school in the BHS feeder district is 90:10 Spanish to English. As noted in Appendix A, CCS has wide gaps between the teaching population demographics and student demographics. Currently, 9% of the district's population is Hispanic or Latinx, but only 3.7% of the teaching faculty is the same. Similarly, 6% of the student body is Black while only 2.4% of the teaching faculty is. Among certified staff, 91.7% is White; in comparison, the White student population is 78%.

BHS does not have a sub-group by state accountability standards for students learning to speak English. In order to have a sub-group, a school must have at least 30 students take a particular state mandated test. As a result, on paper there does not appear to be a pressing issue for others to see the great need to help our students learning to speak English. However, BHS is experiencing a population boom unlike any before and the number of students learning to speak English and the high school curriculum simultaneously has tripled in the last two years. Faculty and staff are not adequately prepared to serve these students in an equitable manner compared to that of their English-speaking peers due to a lack of teacher preparation training in English language learning and/or professional development. Additionally, of the teaching faculty, 98% are White, 1% are Hispanic/Latinx, and 1% are Black or Multi-racial. Of the 100-member staff, only three are bilingual: the world language teachers.

As demographics change and there are exponential increases in students learning to speak English each year, the need for adequate training and support must be provided to educators to ensure that our MLs will have their educational and social-emotional needs met. Except for the yearly English language proficiency tests, there is really no data we can use to compare to

students in other subgroups. The proficiency tests that MLs take in the ELLevation program assess a student's ability to read, comprehend, and write the English language have nothing to do with curricular content or the types of classes students take; the only benefit to the English proficiency tests is to see if the students are "proficient" enough to move out of ESL instruction (Ellevation Education, n.d.). While students continue to be monitored through the ELLevation program, the process often seems meaningless as many teachers complete the forms after having the students for only a short amount of time. As administrators, we sense the gaps in learning, the holes in instruction, and the effects on students, but what we have is a system that is not adequately prepared to support students learning English.

Freedom High School - Burke County Public Schools

Burke County Public Schools (BCPS) is made up of approximately 12,000 students, 1,500 staff, and 27 schools. BCPS consists of four traditional high schools with varying enrollment and diversity levels. The North Carolina School Report Card shows that the student body of BCPS is 65.2% White, 4.4% Black, 6.2% Asian or Asian/Pacific Islander, 18.2% Hispanic/Latinx, 0.2% American Indian or Alaska Native, 0.2% Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander, and 5.7% of students are two or more races. In stark contrast to the student demographic, certified staff ethnicity data shows that 95% of employees across 27 schools are White, 2% are Black, less than 1% are Asian, and less than 1% are two or more races. According to the 2022-23 BCPS Human Resources Staff Data (Appendix B), significant gaps can be seen when comparing the ethnic distribution of our staff versus our students. Hispanic students account for 18% of students in the BCPS system; however, only 2% of certified staff are Hispanic. Additional data shows that 65% of the student population in BCPS is White. However, 95% percent of the certified staff population is White. Currently, there are 355 certified

secondary educators in BCPS, only eight of whom have an English as Second Language (ESL) certification. Additionally, only one of the eight certified ESL teachers identifies as Hispanic.

A closer look at Freedom High School (FHS), BCPS system's largest and most diverse high school, shows a total enrollment of 1,453 students. FHS represents a significantly more diverse student population than the overall district population. Among the students at FHS 48% identify as White, 32% as Hispanic, 4% Asian, 8% Black, and 8% belong to two or more races. Of the 32% of students that are Hispanic, 44% are identified as MLs. Despite the student diversity of FHS, the staff demographic of FHS parallels BCPS data (Appendix B). The staff makeup is predominantly White at 94%. The remaining subgroups that comprise the FHS faculty are 5% Black, and 1% Hispanic. The percentage of staff members that speak Spanish is 4%.

School leaders are continuously looking to improve student success and address the needs of groups that are not performing well. Increasing the graduation rate of students is a priority for BCPS. Graduation rates for schools in North Carolina are calculated by the percentage of students who achieve a high school diploma in four years. To qualify for a high school diploma in Burke County, students must earn 28 credits. At FHS, MLs represent one of the most academically at-risk populations of students, as indicated by the low success on our school's annual graduation rate. According to the North Carolina School Report Cards (2023), the four-year graduation rate for BCPS dropped from 91.3% in 2021 to 88.1% in 2022, and 82% of Hispanic students in BCPS received a diploma. MLs graduated from high school at a rate of 69.4% in BCPS. FHS had a four-year graduation rate of 82.7% in 2022, the rate was lowest among Hispanic students at 78.6%. A specific look at MLs shows that 64.6% of students graduated from FHS. Multiple factors can contribute to the low graduation rates of MLs. The length of time it can take a ML student to acquire a second language can impact their ability to

complete the graduation requirements within the required four-year time period. Additionally, taking classes from predominately White teachers who are ill-prepared to teach diverse learners can also contribute to the low graduation rate of students.

The ML population at FHS is 14.4%, approximately 210 students. These students are served by two full-time ESL teachers. These teachers deliver daily instruction to MLs who have not achieved proficiency in their English-speaking abilities, as assessed by the Assessing Comprehension and Communication in English State-to-State for English Language Learners (ACCESS) assessment. The ACCESS assessment focuses on the four language domains of listening, speaking, reading, and writing to determine the proficiency level of MLs. Students are given the ACCESS assessment annually to determine overall language development progress. The percentage of students who met North Carolina's definition of progress toward English language attainment as demonstrated on North Carolina's English language proficiency test can be viewed on the NC Report Card. Only 21.8% of the BCPS MLs and less than 5% of MLs at FHS met proficiency. This data illustrates the urgent need for change in BCPS and at FHS (SAS, 2023).

Watauga High School - Watauga County Schools

In looking at Watauga County, it is evident that a handful of overarching social entities are living or visiting there: college students attending Appalachian State University or Caldwell Community College; professionals associated with Appalachian State University; rural residents, many with family ties that span multiple generations; professional workers in other industries or vocations than collegiate education; the wealthy who own vacation property or homes in the county; the impoverished; Whites; minorities, such as Latinx and Black residents; and tourists.

In these categories, a person or household can fit into multiple groups and have multiple groups to which they belong. The dynamic of the county is interesting due to the large landmass and wide variety of people that live in the pocket communities that surround the town of Boone. There is a distinct resentment for Appalachian State University for part of the community in some of the rural parts of the county, as the University carries a lot of clout in the economics and business of the county. There is a large section of the community that claims Appalachian State is one of the main reasons for living there and outwardly support it and its efforts in academics, the arts, and athletics.

The entire county has a housing shortage and it is rather systemic and touches so many conversations, news articles, and stickers on cars the issue is evident that the "locals" do not want more interlopers—part or full time. Due to this cost-of-living issue, many of the working-class jobs (cleaning, day labor, and other vocations that do not require specialized degrees or certificates) often come from neighboring counties due to a lower cost of living there. While the mountain community has large pockets that want to see an increase in diversity (many of whom are in conjunction with the college), there are still community members that wear the confederate flag on their shirts and place these stickers on their vehicles. The local PK-12 public schools rank in the top five in the state normally, and the community is proud of this achievement as shown by continual school pride, construction projects, and in general support in many ways. There are still many things that we need to learn and understand about the community, especially its Latinx population, to continue our work in this program.

Watauga High School (WHS) and Watauga Innovation Academy (WIA) is the only public high school in the county and has an enrollment that hovers around 1600 students. There are two separate schools located within a single campus—WHS and WIA. Both schools have a

similar focus—to prepare students for employment at a livable wage, enrollment in a two- or four-year university, or enlistment in a branch of the armed services. A student's enrollment in WHS affords them all of these opportunities, as does WIA. One distinct difference between which school a student and their family choose to enroll in is that WIA students can cross-enroll in Caldwell Community College and Technical Institute (CCC&TI) classes as a freshman, while a WHS student must be labeled as academically gifted to enroll in CCC&TI courses in the ninth grade. This has caused the WIA to have a dichotomy between students wanting to graduate with a two-year associate degree. Some students begin college with numerous undergraduate courses complete-primarily in required courses for all majors—and others who are working towards an associate degree with a focus on certification who move into a livable wage job immediately after high school. Students at both high schools can and are enrolled in classes throughout the building.

Both WHS and WIA have a majority White population with less than 20% of the population being from minority ethnicities. The ML population oftentimes is placed into classes with teachers that do not have a background knowledge of teaching other cultures, nor research-based strategies to reach students whose first language is not English (Appendix C). The school currently has 124 teaching staff with three non-White teachers (one Native American and two Latinx). The foreign language department is strong with four of five teachers in that department teaching Spanish (two whose home language is Spanish) and one French teacher. In addition, one assistant principal taught German and one administrative assistant's home language is Spanish. The capacity in the building is positive in wanting to educate MLs, but the knowledge and skills of the staff are not currently present.

Researcher Positionality

As a research team, we bring a wealth of varied educational experience. Currently serving as administrators in our respective districts, we each recognize that our experiences shape our perspectives. We each more clearly explain our positionality as related to the research in the following sections.

Leslie Sigmon McIntosh

I serve as one of two assistant principals at BHS in the CCS district. I identify as a cisgender, White, middle-aged, able-bodied, middle-class, educated, English-speaking female living in Catawba County just northwest of Charlotte, North Carolina where I have lived my entire life. Prior to my doctoral studies, I gave little thought to my sense of privilege as a White person and how that enhanced the life I currently live. As a high school public educator, I have spent my entire 27-year professional career at the same school. This is also the school from which I graduated. During the first 22 years, I taught English, coached several sports, drove a bus, coordinated graduation, and served in several teacher-leadership capacities within the building and at the district level. My responsibilities as an administrator include curriculum, the school improvement plan, internal professional development, exceptional children, 504s, buses, and the coordination of "Trojan Time," our enrichment block in which we run various programs for academic support. I am completing my fifth year as an assistant principal.

During my time in the classroom, I worked with students at all levels in the English classroom from remedial reading to Advanced Placement (AP) Literature and Composition. Much of my course load was AP and honors level. My time with MLs was extremely limited and I do not recall ever teaching a student who could not speak and understand English. I experienced no training in relation to teaching MLs in my college pre-service program and only recently received professional development in this area. Because of my identity as a

monolinguistic, English-speaking White female, I have no concept of what the learning and school experiences are like for our MLs who are attempting to acquire the English language and the academic content at the same time. In addition to this, I have no concept as to what it feels like to be a minority in a predominately White school.

As a result of my time spent at BHS, I recognize that the school is not racially diverse and has historically never been during its 71 years of existence. I am aware that my deep loyalty to and love of the school can sometimes cause a less objective, less critical perspective. I recognize that I was in a position of power over the teachers with whom we worked and was mindful of how this could have affected the work done as well as any response-driven inquiries collected. Because I once taught alongside many of the teachers at Bandys, I recognize that I may have possessed preconceived notions about how they would react to any initiatives—both positive and negative.

I believe that MLs are extremely capable as shown through their ability to acquire more than one language. Unfortunately, teachers often apply deficit thinking toward our MLs and their academic ability. My experience with MLs as an administrator has been nothing but positive. I have also seen how frustrated teachers become with the language barrier and how easily this is equated to not being capable. If teachers lower their expectations or do not believe in the capability of MLs, then they are less likely to learn at high levels. From the perspective of an administrator, I have been afforded the opportunity to see the whole child, not just a student learning to speak English.

Cheryl Putnam

I am a cisgender, heterosexual, middle-aged, able-bodied, middle-class, English-speaking, educated White female. Upon embarking upon my doctoral studies, my familiarity

with positionality, deficit thinking, identity, privilege, and critical theory was limited. I had never deeply examined or considered the power and privilege associated with my identity. It was not until then that I realized my experiences had not prompted me to reflect on what it meant to possess certain social identities. I have never had to experience walking into a classroom where I could not speak or comprehend the language, where everyone was looking at me because of my race and ethnicity. My dominant identities have allowed me to participate in activities and have given me opportunities that I otherwise would not have been afforded, making the path more manageable for me to reach my goals. As an educator and scholar-practitioner, my professional roles have granted me authority and influence over staff and students.

As an administrator, I have observed educational disparities, especially concerning ill-prepared teachers, in catering to the unique needs of MLs. Additionally, there is a noticeable absence of culturally inclusive resources in the educational system. The lack of appropriate resources and strategies for MLs indicates a broader systemic issue in how the education system addresses the needs of these students. Due to societal norms, my bias regarding MLs is inevitable. I am very aware of the deficit lens that society uses when viewing MLs. I have witnessed educators complain about the number of MLs in their classrooms, referring to them as “low kids” and the extra work involved due to their lack of proficiency in English. I have seen the data where MLs are disproportionately referred for special education services. I have even witnessed classroom teachers who required students to speak only English while in their classrooms.

The mission of the school district states, “Burke County Public Schools will educate all learners, nurture their potential and empower them to be contributing members of our community” (Burke County Public Schools, 2023). Currently, BCPS does not mandate any

specific training for classroom teachers to address the specific needs of MLs. I question whether our mission can be attained if our staff lacks the capacity to effectively educate ALL learners.

I acknowledge that my identities may sometimes constrain my understanding of the world. In my pursuit of social justice, I am fully committed to addressing and challenging these biases to promote inclusivity, equity, and respect for MLs. I am dedicated to actively seeking out and valuing the perspectives of individuals from diverse backgrounds, particularly marginalized communities, to broaden my understanding and foster a more inclusive and equitable outlook. I am determined to disrupt the status quo both within my school and in society at large. As an advocate and ally for all students, I strive to create an inclusive and equitable environment where all individuals can thrive.

Scott Strickler

I currently serve as the principal of WHS. As a Christian, cisgender, able-bodied, White, middle-aged male, English speaking high school principal with a master's degree in education and working in a doctoral program while currently living in the middle class, I understand that daily I am afforded privileges that many of the students and families that come to our schools do not have—from food insecurity to hostile home environments due to conflict (racial, familial, and otherwise) to poverty. My household, consisting of two parents and two children, does not have the same issues as those living in marginalized communities in the surrounding community.

As a principal, I interact with students from minoritized backgrounds—Black, Latinx, Gay, Transgender—and I attempt to put myself in their shoes. No one in administration at Watauga High School reflects who they are. Transphobia and other social ills follow a teenager during that time. My own biases include that I have come from privileged stability and work to understand those in different cultures, life situations, and who live differently from me. The ways

in which I have worked to address these known biases is to ensure that I listen and hear what others, especially those from other viewpoints, are saying and the meanings and experiences behind their words. With this course correction of my own preconceived notions, I must also work on understanding how the Black, Latinx, and LQBTQ+ communities could be welcomed in more spaces at school and in the community. While this often causes personal internal conflict, it has helped me to grow and be a better person. I must work to create a coalition to move towards the goal of making all students welcome.

At WHS, I am new. New to the position of WHS principal, I am returning to a community that I am working to connect with in a different manner than I did as an undergraduate at Appalachian State University twenty years ago, and new to a staff that is high achieving in academics (second highest achievement in North Carolina in 2022-2023), athletics, and the arts. I am still working to have and be a trusted voice and I know that with the implementation of anything outside of the cultural norms of the school will be not only tested but potentially have staff not want to fully participate due to the power imbalance between principal and teacher. This work of assuring teachers that this will be a learning opportunity to help our MLs (who have historically performed lower than their peers in academics) and all students in their classes will be crucial to my success in this process and will potentially bring additional future success to more students at WHS.

Causal Analysis

This section explores causal analysis by identifying the underlying factors contributing to the problem of practice. The use of the fishbone diagram is a tool in improvement science that allows scholar practitioners to identify the root causes of a problem. The fishbone diagram found in Figure 2 represents our group's causal systems analysis in terms of structural, organizational,

policy, ideological, capacity, historical, resource, and practice or pedagogical causes (Hinnant-Crawford, 2020). Our fishbone diagram illustrates why MLs graduate at lower rates than English-speaking students. In it, we identified the causes that lead to teachers' lack of capacity to effectively meet the needs of MLs which affects the dropout rate of MLs. The causes include school climate and a sense of belonging, lack of ML-minded school leadership, lack of teacher preparation and efficacy with MLs, lack of partnership with ML families, and lack of appropriate curriculum for MLs.

Figure 2

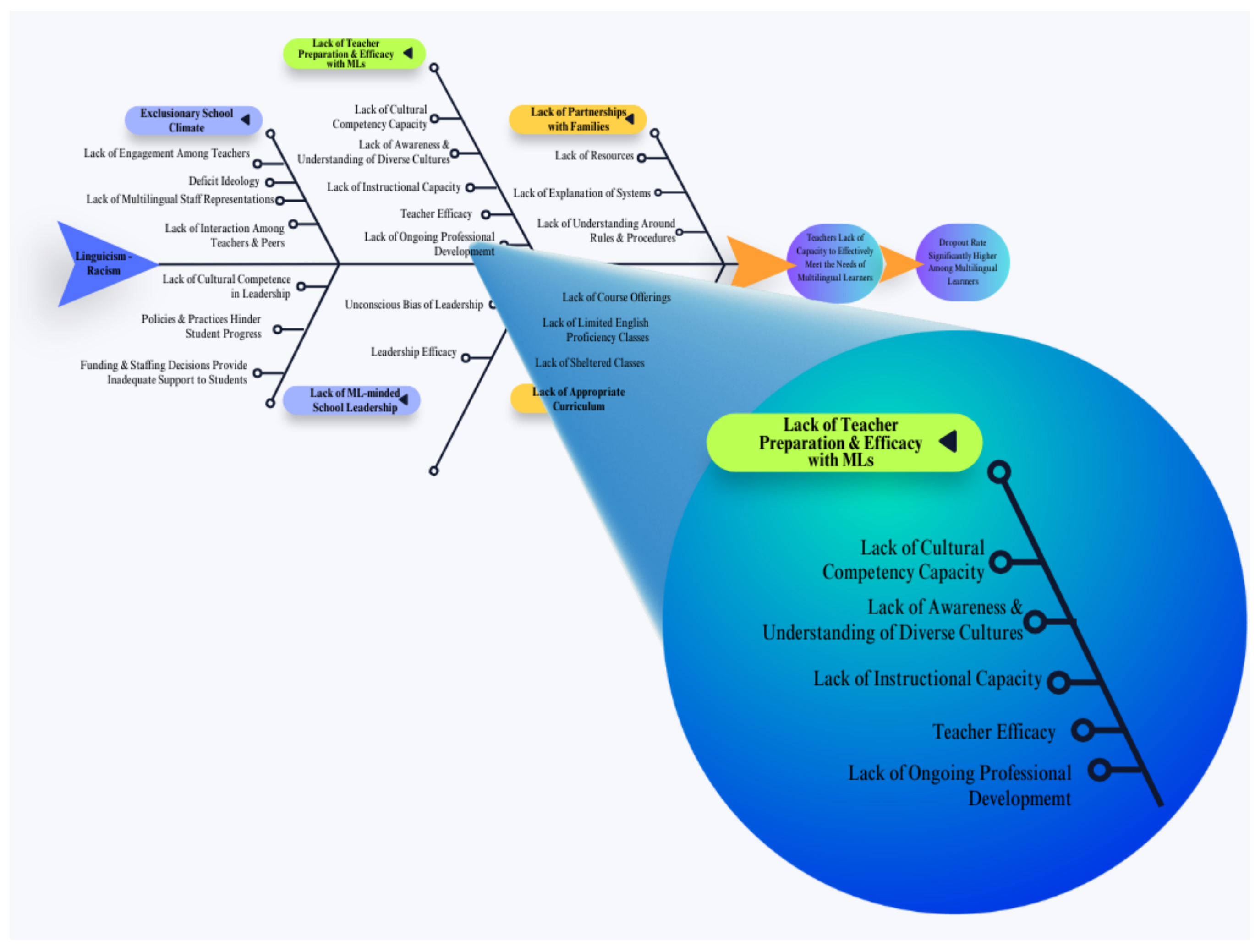
Fishbone Diagram

Causal Focus

We highlighted three root causes of why MLs are not graduating high school at the same rate as their English-speaking peers. As evidenced in the fishbone diagram, linguicism, defined earlier as the discrimination of people based on their language or dialect which can occur alongside other forms of discrimination such as racism, classism, or sexism, is an overarching concept that contributes to these causes. Our initiative is grounded in Improvement Science (Hinnant-Crawford, 2020) and utilizes professional development for teachers to enhance their instructional and cultural capacity. The intervention is founded on research into the attributes of successful professional development initiatives. Substantial research has explored the effectiveness of different types of professional development (Garet et al., 2001; Lynch et al., 2021; Ross & Bruce, 2007; Rubinstein-Avila & Lee, 2014; Russell, 2015; Téllez & Manthey, 2015; Vera et al., 2021). Garet et al. (2001) identified three structural features of professional development—form, duration, and collective participation. Their study found that professional development that focuses on academic subject matter because of its hands-on nature for teachers is more likely to produce an increased capacity in teaching MLs. An extensive body of research substantiates the principles of our casual analysis and in the following section, we explore the literature that outlines these root causes, including school climate and our MLs overall sense of belonging in the schools as well as the impact made by leaders and teachers that is affected by teacher efficacy, teacher preparation and capacity, lack of sufficient pre-service training and applicable professional development, and finally, a lack of necessary cultural and instructional competency when related to MLs. This study aims to investigate the root cause of the lack of teacher preparation and efficacy with MLs and which is emphasized in Figure 3.

Figure 3

Fishbone Focal Area



Exclusionary School Climate

The first root cause of MLs lagging behind their English-speaking peers academically is a school environment that fails to foster a sense of belonging among MLs. The challenges within this problem domain encompass student disconnection from their peers, deficit ideologies, and a lack of representation of teachers who look like all of their students, not just the White students. Research indicates that labeling students as MLs often obscures more than it clarifies, as educators tend to focus on areas of deficiency rather than areas of proficiency (Callahan & Shifrer, 2016; Martínez, 2018; Umansky, 2016). According to Vera et al. (2021), students often feel isolated from their peers due to the ML label. Additional studies (Egalite et al., 2015; Ford, 2021; La Salle et al., 2019; Vera et al., 2017) indicate that building relationships with supportive bilingual staff and adults is a contributing sociocultural factor that leads to students feeling safe and secure to be themselves while promoting higher academic success. Promoting a positive school climate where students have a sense of belonging is a multifaceted process that holds particular importance for multilingual learners to thrive in a high school environment.

Lack of Leadership and Teacher Efficacy

In our examination of causative factors, we identified lack of school leadership and low teacher efficacy in terms of students learning to speak English as root causes. Administrators have considerable influence in schools because they can shape the school's narrative. For example, one study demonstrated that principals' efficacy beliefs positively and significantly predict teachers' collective efficacy beliefs, which in turn, predict student achievement (Goddard et al., 2020). Additionally, student achievement also increases when teachers experience success and receive support from leadership that reinforces their trust in themselves and their colleagues

(Goddard et al., 2004). School leaders must work to build a culture designed to increase collective teacher efficacy, which will affect teachers' behavior and student beliefs.

School districts across the U.S. continue to experience a substantial rise in the number of students whose first language is not English (NCES, 2023). As a result, many educators feel ineffective and find it challenging to connect with students. Various models for assessing teacher efficacy within schools have been tested. Students taught by high-efficacy teachers receive more than just a positive perspective; they also experience a genuine sense of care from their teachers (Collier, 2005). Studies indicate that teacher efficacy, whether at the individual or collective level, stands out as a potent predictor of student achievement (Ross & Bruce, 2007). Consequently, it is imperative for school leaders to place an increased emphasis on cultivating a culture of leadership that enhances collective teacher efficacy.

Inadequate Teacher Preparation and Capacity of Teacher

In our causal analysis, the final root cause we uncovered was the insufficient instructional and cultural capacity of teachers to successfully address the learning needs of MLs. (Babinski et al., 2017; Darling-Aduana & Heinrich, 2018; Gay, 2002; Kim et al., 2014; Lucas et al., 2008; Russell, 2015). This section of the causal analysis depicts the absence of teacher preparation and the shortage of ongoing professional development received by teachers. The lack of teacher capacity to effectively meet the needs of multilingual learners can be attributed to various factors, including resource constraints, prioritizing other initiatives, time limitations, lack of expertise, inadequate training models, lack of cultural competency, insufficient understanding of diverse cultures, and lack of pedagogical strategies (Callahan & Shifrer, 2016; DaSilva Iddings & Rose, 2012; Milner, 2010; Rubinstein-Avila & Lee, 2014; Shim, 2019).

Lack of Preservice Training. All teachers should be provided with various forms of training to support the needs of MLs. Many educators did not receive adequate preparation to accommodate the needs of MLs during their pre-service education. This lack of training has resulted in a heightened immediate need for training. Educational researchers have noted a deficiency in adequately preparing regular classroom teachers to design and execute instruction that caters to the specific requirements of MLs in a general education classroom (Barone-Crowell, 2020; Diarrassouba, 2017; Gomez & Diarrassouba, 2014). Table 1 illustrates the colleges and universities in North Carolina that offer, not necessarily require, at least one course that *might* include strategies to teach students learning to speak English.

Table 1

NC Colleges & Universities Pre-Service Requirements

College or University	Dedicated Course	Combined Course*	No Course	No Secondary Ed Program
Appalachian State		√		
Barton				X
Belmont Abbey				X
Bennett				X
Brevard		√		
Campbell			X	
Catawba			X	
Chowan		√		
Davidson				X
Duke				X
East Carolina			X	
Elizabeth City St.			X	
Elon		√		
Fayetteville State			X	
Gardner-Webb		√		
Greensboro			X	
Guilford			X	
High Point				X
Johnson C. Smith				X
Lees McRae		√		
Lenoir-Rhyne			X	
Livingston			X	

Mars Hill			X	
Methodist			X	
Montreat				X
NC A & T		√		
NC Central		√		
NC State		√		
NC Wesleyan			X	
Pfeiffer			X	
Queens				X
Salem			X	
Shaw				X
St. Andrews			X	
U of Mt. Olive			X	
UNC Asheville				X
UNC Chapel Hill	√ (2)			
UNC Charlotte				
UNC Greensboro		√		
UNC Pembroke			X	
UNC Wilmington	√			
Wake Forest		√		
Warren Wilson				X
Western Carolina	√			
William Peace			X	
Wingate		√		
Winston-Salem St	√			

Note: Data retrieved from colleges and universities' website as to program requirements as of February 2025. *Combined courses include a focus on other populations. Included in this are courses related to culturally relevant teaching and/or diverse learners and may or may not include instructional strategies to teach students learning to speak English.

Lack of Professional Development. Insufficient financial resources, the prioritization of other district initiatives, limited time availability, and a shortage of expertise to deliver professional development are all elements that contribute to the absence of professional development that focuses on MLs. Best practices such as SIOP (Echevarria et al., 2007), functional and content literacy (Gregory & Burkman, 2011), as well as training in the language experience approach, purposeful grouping, think-alouds, and visuals (Bojko-Jeewek & Eide, 2022) are many of the key professional development topics that are lacking. Without these

professional development opportunities, the enhancement of teacher capacity in this area becomes challenging.

Lack of Cultural Competency. Cultural competency plays a crucial role in influencing the educational outcomes of students (Arruzza & Chau, 2021). However, inadequate teacher training related to cultural competence has left teachers ill-prepared to address the diverse needs of their students. Gay (2002) suggested that achieving cultural competence requires teachers to adopt the role of learners, fully engaging with the cultures of students. To bridge this divide, school districts must make it a priority to enhance the cultural competency of their educators.

Lack of Instructional Capacity. High school educators often place emphasis on delivering subject matter with the goal of preparing students for some type of summative assessment. Many high school teachers lack formal training in the domains of language development and second language acquisition. Lucas et al. (2008) reported that to be linguistically responsive teachers, there are essential understandings of second language learning that teachers must recognize and practice. Providing training to support teachers with implementation of academic language development and identifying scaffolds for MLs can have a positive effect on student learning. Teachers expressed appreciation for training aimed at facilitating the integration of strategies tailored to meet the needs of MLs (Murphy et al., 2019).

Theory of Improvement

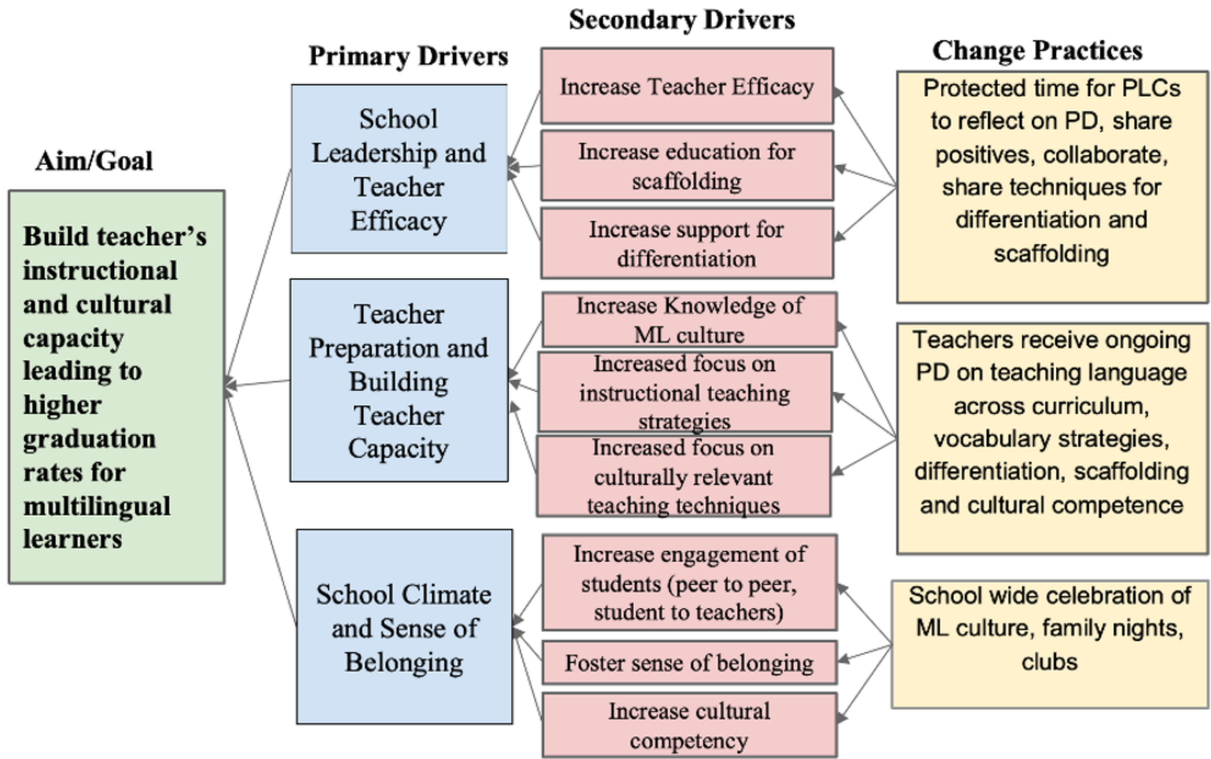
The goal of our improvement effort was to build teacher capacity to instruct MLs, specifically in secondary education. By increasing the cultural and instructional capacity of teachers who work with students learning to speak English, we aimed to increase the graduation rates of MLs in the long term and increase the cultural linguistic responsiveness of teachers to create a greater sense of belonging and immediate success of MLs.

Our short-term goal was to build teachers' instructional and cultural capacity, and the long-term goal was to raise the graduation rate of MLs. In order to meet the short- and long-term goals identified in our diagram, it was necessary to study the primary and secondary drivers behind the lower graduation and success rates of MLs. School leadership, teacher efficacy, teacher preparation and the need to build teacher capacity in instruction of MLs were all primary drivers that affected the success of MLs. Additionally, MLs' sense of belonging and the overall school climate served as primary drivers. From these drivers we examined which change practices were attainable within our sphere of influence and the time allotted to produce meaningful change in the educational experiences of MLs.

Within the structure of improvement science, as scholar practitioners, we identified a change idea or theory of improvement as an adjustment to a system to be tested in a plan, do, study, act (PDSA) cycle. The PDSA cycle was used to analyze the efficacy of the drivers of change in a working theory of improvement and was illustrated in a driver diagram (Carnegie Foundation, 2023). These drivers are represented in our driver diagram depicted in Figure 4. In the diagram, primary drivers and secondary drivers are identified. Primary drivers focused on the "high level" elements in systems while secondary drivers focused on the opportunities "within the system where a change can occur" (Hinnant-Crawford, 2020, p. 121). These identified drivers were influenced by change ideas and change concepts were the focus of the PDSA cycle.

Figure 4

Driver Diagram



Note. Driver Diagram highlighting change practices to build teacher capacity and increase high school graduation rates of MLs.

As administrators, our spheres of influence included yearly professional development and building instructional capacity in our teachers. The identified solution that we had the most control over was to increase teacher capacity by providing professional learning communities (PLC), giving teachers the opportunity to reflect on their learning, and offering the ability to collaborate with peers to build collective efficacy as well as individual efficacy. The ongoing professional development in our improvement initiative was delivered to teachers in three asynchronous modules. Each module was finished in approximately one hour to one and one half hours, and participants had the flexibility to complete them at their own pace or with a group or PLC depending on the number of participants at each. Teachers completed these at their own

pace within a given window of time (2-3 weeks each). The modules teachers completed targeted the concepts of language instruction across the curriculum, vocabulary strategies, differentiation, scaffolding, and cultural competence.

Improvement Initiative Design

The improvement initiative was delivered through the use of a Google Site that participants accessed through the internet. The three modules aimed to improve the academic performance of MLs by equipping teachers with skills to address their students' needs effectively. These modules included video presentations and applicable, content-rich classroom resources for teachers. The goal was to enhance outcomes for MLs by increasing the instructional and cultural competency of the participating teachers. . The learning outcomes related to learning objectives we aimed to achieve during the three-month improvement initiative included:

- Expanding participants' understanding and consciousness regarding the elements that make up their individual identity, resulting in increased self-awareness and empathy;
- Fostering cultural proficiency among participating educators by enhancing their awareness of their own convictions, attitudes, and prejudices;
- Implementing instructional materials that apply the principles of Culturally Relevant Pedagogy, resulting in increased student engagement and academic achievement among culturally diverse student populations;
- Distinguishing dimensions of identity, fostering self-reflection and understanding;
- Employing terms related to identity aspects correctly; and

- Distinguishing between cultural blindness and cultural proficiency, including their associated terminology.

Module 1-Cultural Competence

In module 1, participants delved into the underlying factors within our systems, institutions, and personal perspectives that influence the experiences of MLs. Participants gained insights into the crucial aspects of Culturally Relevant Pedagogy, understanding its practical implementation, and recognizing its significance for all students, particularly MLs. Furthermore, participants developed a heightened awareness and knowledge of diverse elements contributing to individual identity, emphasizing that culturally competent educators must be attuned to their own beliefs, attitudes, and biases. Participants investigated methods for crafting instructional materials and delivering content that validates, incorporates, and encourages students to embrace their own cultural backgrounds, viewpoints, personal experiences, and worldviews as part of the learning process. The learning objectives for this module for participants within the improvement timeframe included:

- Expanding educators' understanding and consciousness regarding the elements that make up their identity;
- Helping educators recognize that culturally proficient educators are aware of their convictions, attitudes, and prejudices; and
- Investigating methods for developing instructional materials that apply the principles of Culturally Relevant Pedagogy.

Module 2-Effective Pedagogy for MLs

In module 2, participants explored the theoretical underpinnings that form the basis of effective teaching for MLs and investigated instructional strategies that align with the principles

of effective pedagogy. The learning objectives of this module for participants within the improvement timeframe included:

- Empowering educators to address the diverse needs of MLs and better meet the educational requirements of all students in secondary classrooms; and
- Building capacity of teachers to meet the needs of MLs through authentic learning experiences, resulting in improvement in student engagement and achievement.

By delving into research-supported practices tailored to MLs and embracing the principles of Universal Design for Learning (UDL) (Meyer et al., 2014) and SIOP, participants acquired a deep understanding of how well-informed decision-making regarding MLs can yield positive outcomes in terms of student performance. This module offered substantial support to educators working with MLs and guided them in making informed instructional decisions that facilitated access for MLs.

Module 3-Access Points for MLs

In this module, participants enriched their knowledge and competence by employing specific instructional approaches that ensured accessibility to content and instruction for MLs, regardless of whether the instruction is in-person or online. The initial portion of this module focused on techniques aimed at making both content and language comprehensible for MLs (input), while the latter part of the module covered strategies for supporting and guiding student responses (output).

Throughout this module, participants developed a deeper understanding of how their students' proficiency in the English language influenced their academic performance. They enhanced their ability to deliver content and instruction accessible to MLs in their classrooms and in their teaching strategies. Furthermore, participants expanded their capacity to provide

MLs with opportunities to practice and develop proficiency in the four essential language skills: speaking, listening, reading, and writing. The learning objectives for participants in this module during the improvement initiative included:

- Building a shared understanding of how English Language Proficiency impacts student performance, resulting in improved survey responses from teachers;
- Increasing capacity of participants to provide accessible content and instruction to MLs in various models of instruction as evidenced in lesson plans; and
- Increasing capacity of participants to provide MLs with opportunities to practice the four essential language skills (speaking, listening, reading, and writing) as evidenced in lesson plans and/or observations.

Design Team

Our design team (Table 2) consisted of a group of educators from each of the high schools in the NIC. The design team consisted of a diverse group of stakeholders, including researchers, administrators, instructional coaches, counselors, and world language teachers—one of whom is an international faculty member from Colombia who himself was a ML. This team ensured that multiple perspectives were considered in shaping and refining the strategies found within the modules to build teacher capacity with MLs. By leveraging the expertise of both instructional leaders and content-area educators, the team ensured that research-based strategies are relevant and sustainable within each school context.

Table 2

Design Team by Location

Bandys High School	Freedom High School	Watauga High School
Assistant Principal	*Assistant Principal*	*Principal*
Instructional Coach	*Instructional Coach*	*Assistant Principal*
School Counselor	*School Counselor*	*School Counselor*
ESL Teacher	*ESL Teacher*	*Family Resource Coordinator*
Spanish Teacher & International Faculty	*English Teacher*	*Spanish Teacher*

Implementation Plan and Timeline

This portion of our improvement initiative included the development and delivery of three professional learning modules on instructional strategies using Culturally Responsive Teaching. In September, October, and November 2024 (Appendix D), we provided professional learning to teachers at BHS, FHS, and WHS on culturally responsive teaching and instructional teaching strategies. Through email and a brief presentation to the faculty at the schools in our NIC, we recruited teachers to participate in the improvement initiative. Because each of us are in a supervisory role in our schools, we worked with teachers at other schools. Cheryl worked within FHS where she is not employed as an administrator. Scott and Leslie switched schools so that they did not work with teachers they supervised. Each scholar practitioner was responsible for collecting and maintaining the data at their assigned school (Cheryl, FHS; Leslie, WHS; and Scott, BHS). We employed an identification strategy to keep all data confidential.

We asked teachers to commit to the completion of three modules and the time it takes to complete our surveys, questionnaires, and other forms of measures. In an effort to offset the challenge of making this commitment of time, we aimed to make it as valuable as possible to our participants. As such, they received professional development credits towards their content area licensure renewal which the state recently reinstated for teachers in North Carolina.

The PDSA cycle depended on the use of Improvement Science measures to evaluate how change ideas affected the system. These measures included process, driver, outcome, and balancing measures. Process measures sought to find the degree to which the new change was implemented, and driver measures were taken during the PDSA cycle as indicators to whether or not a change idea worked. Outcome measures aimed to identify if the change ideas worked, and balancing measures revealed if the change worked as intended as well as if it had any unintended consequences (Hinnant-Crawford, 2020).

During October and November 2024, we introduced the Historically Responsive Literacy (HRL) framework to teachers in an effort to assist in their planning culturally responsive instruction in literacy lesson plans. HRL framework is an approach to literacy education that seeks to integrate historical consciousness with reading, writing, and critical thinking (Appendix E). HRL emphasizes the need for students to engage with literature, texts, and media in ways that promote an understanding of history. It also encourages students to read critically to analyze how historical events, figures, and social dynamics shaped the world. Ultimately, HRL fosters deeper, more meaningful literacy practices in which students are critical thinkers and active participants in shaping the narratives that influence history and society (Marshall & Bouffard, 2021). During the final two months of our study, participants completed a post-survey that measured the capacity for culturally responsive teaching, and we analyzed the results. These served as our outcome measures.

Hurricane Helene

On Friday, September 27, 2024, Hurricane Helene impacted the lives of Western North Carolina citizens in life changing ways including the damage and destruction of homes, schools, and other buildings throughout our communities. With the loss of utilities for up to eight weeks,

roads and bridges being destroyed, and fatalities across the region, the outlook was grim. Looking at our schools in Burke, Catawba, and Watauga Counties, students' lives and their learning was impacted in a variety of ways. All of our counties had to assess damage and close schools to repair and regroup. Burke County missed nine days of school, Catawba County four days, and Watauga County missed seventeen days of school before students returned. This impact was difficult for all of our communities but was also drastically different in how each county and our individual schools came back to focus on the year and attempt to make it as close to pre-hurricane conditions as we can.

This major historical event can be classified as a threat to the internal validity of our improvement effort. In research, internal validity refers to whether an initiative makes a difference or not, and whether there is sufficient evidence to support this claim (Campbell & Stanley, 1953; Cook & Campbell, 1979; Shadish, et al., 2002). Threats to internal validity are factors that jeopardize validity. One such factor is known as historical threat to validity where a specific event occurs between data collection points, or more specifically in this case, after the pre-test and before the post-test (Shadish et al., 2002; Gall, et al. 2007). The devastating impact Hurricane Helene had on the Western Carolina region including our three schools is a threat to validity and thus our findings are likely impacted.

Bandys High School – Leslie Sigmon McIntosh. Much of Catawba County was affected by the hurricane. Flooding, downed trees, and extended power outages disrupted school and students missed four days of learning and socialization. Those in living conditions that were already difficult had the greatest negative impact in our community. As needs increased for some of our families, our local food banks, charitable, and religious organizations stepped in and filled the void that had emerged in the days after the hurricane. While our immediate area had more

damage from downed trees that caused structural damage, we rallied together and ensured that students and our staff were taken care of through this disaster. Throughout the hurricane and its effects, our administrative team and our student services department worked to ensure that as many of those affected by Helene had connections to food and shelter and once all of our students returned to Bandys we rallied around these families to help them get back on track and help our students have a positive school experience once they returned.

Freedom High School - Burke County - Cheryl Putnam. The community that is served by Freedom High School was hit hard by Hurricane Helene. Both the school facilities and dozens of students' and staff's lives drastically changed in 24 hours. Stories of staff and students being displaced were limited, but one situation that exemplifies our community's willingness to come together occurred when the home of our baseball coach flooded. After his house flooded, there was a small window to save as many of his and his family's possessions. Our community rallied around the cause. Baseball players, their parents, community members, and others came and helped salvage as much as possible, which included family heirlooms, furniture, and many other sentimental items to him and his family. While it could be easy to focus on the loss of property our coach and the many others who lost nearly everything, our staff continued time after time to rally around those in need. The physical space of our campus also had major damage with our football field, baseball and softball fields, in addition to our field house being completely flooded. These athletic facilities were not only places that students competed in but were special places where our school community gathered for games (and the social atmosphere that surrounds them) and had student gatherings where our entire student body and faculty could gather to celebrate or be together; it was suddenly gone. Burke County Schools helped find other venues to host events, like Friday night football games, at other campuses around the county. In

many ways the community aspect of a “home” game was lost as we were athletic nomads within our own county.

Our teachers often were seen at school or helping in the community throughout the nine days of school we missed. We continued to strive for how we could quickly get back to the normality of the school day, but the staff is still struggling with those students and families—including some of our own staff who are working to put back together what Helene took from them. We continue to show how we are Freedom Patriots and have embraced those students and staff in our halls every day since our return from the hurricane on October 14, 2024, hoping to show them the care and leadership we have at Freedom High School.

Watauga High School - Watauga County - Scott Strickler. In the immediate aftermath of the hurricane, Watauga High School (WHS) was thrust into an emergency management position and the school became a hub for water distribution for the entire county, as well as surrounding counties for those who could travel to the school safely but to no other parts of the county. By noon the day following Helene, I met with multiple National Guard representatives, organized a water distribution area for the county outside of the school building, collected a team of volunteers (which at this time did not include staff members only volunteers from a local organization and National Guard members), created a plan to distribute the water so that community members could drive up and collect water 24 hours a day, in addition to planning how water could be dropped off. At this stage the donations of water were coming from so many different sources it was nearly uncountable—government organizations sending tractor trailer loads, families and individuals who were driving up with trucks and SUVs filled with as many water bottles as their vehicles could hold, organizations that were ferrying water from local

airports flown in from around the region, and many, many others. Over one thousand pallets were delivered and distributed over the following month.

The Monday following Helene had North Carolina State House Representatives asking to open up the school to be a goods distribution site. The auxiliary gym was opened to all and became the county's de facto Wal-Mart (as Wal-Mart was flooded and only re-opened in late December 2024). Over the coming week, mobilizing a workforce of (primarily) teaching staff and students to come in and work both the goods site in the gym and the water distribution was chaotic and stressful while simultaneously becoming a place of joy and celebration with friends reconnecting and giving purpose to many. Students, families, and other community members began to mobilize around the school, seeing it as a place for much needed help from multiple organizations. Federal Emergency Management Agency representatives came and set up hours to assist those in need and lawyers making appointments to help renters understand their timeline to revoke their leases. Some individuals came and after seeing a larger need for a collection site off campus and the staff who volunteered at WHS helped move the collection site for goods to a nearby pickleball court that then spurred other community centers and schools to open up their own distribution sites around the county, all taking resources from the main distribution hub. I noticed that financial status, political affiliation, neither race nor creed mattered in this time as I loaded water in Land Rovers, Buicks who had seen better days three decades ago, and more Subarus than I can imagine. We had a supply drop off from a Jeep Club in Charlotte, an envoy from a Presidential candidate, and multiple communities from Dare, Currituck, Onslow, and other coastal communities that now had ties to the mountains from a shared understanding of devastation that a hurricane brings.

In the week following Hurricane Helene, having a core team of teachers, staff, school and district administrators, along with students, and community members, we worked to determine what our largest priorities were, and the essentials needed for the work to move forward. I was conscious that many of the volunteers who, in many cases, were victims of the natural disaster themselves were looking for purpose and a means to give back to the community the school serves. For the teaching staff at WHS, this had a large ripple effect. Initially we had larger numbers of volunteers from teachers, as the weeks waned on, we formed a core group of fifteen educators and three administrators who showed up and helped nearly every single day. In the beginning our discussions focused on what were the most important jobs in front of us and it came down to two simple, but large tasks.

First, we needed to contact all of our staff. With nearly 150 staff members, it took three administrators the bulk of Saturday and Sunday to contact staff or have connections and confirm that all of our staff were safe and then assess if anyone had lost their possessions or their home. Only one staff member had lost their apartment in the devastation. Next a larger task occurred: accounting for all of our nearly sixteen hundred students. A group of nearly fifteen staff (working from both the school and their homes) began to contact students' families. Between phone calls, connections on social media, and approximately fifty home visits from four administrators, all of our students were accounted for and determined to be safe by the Thursday morning following the hurricane. Around fifty families had significant issues (lost their housing, their house was inaccessible, or they had been displaced temporarily). This moment is something that many of our staff and community have spoken about, as it was a pressure relief point as anyone who had witnessed firsthand the devastation and locations where homes had been destroyed, or lives had been lost realized this was something to communally celebrate. All while

this was occurring the “school Walmart” had such an influx of visitors that we had to request School Resource Officers (SROs) come and work security each day. We lost track after we continued to count over two thousand visitors daily. Student volunteers became “personal shoppers” and escorted families around so they would not have to search for items. We refined our process of operating the outreach each day and it became more efficient throughout the two full weeks it was open. All the while water was being distributed in front of the school building by the pallet, vehicles were being loaded up with ten or more cases of water for their homes.

Volunteers came from many sources both locally and abroad. During the two weeks immediately following the hurricane, donations came from throughout the state and nationwide, Many other high schools throughout the state sent supplies, funds, or care packages to staff. They continued to call or come by and offer assistance, a helping hand, or knowledge and expertise we were lacking. It was commonplace to see folks that were coming in for resources, as well as state legislators, news reporters, local dignitaries, alongside local and federal workers being on the campus at the same time all day long. The pace was exhausting for those of us who were working four to seven days a week. Staff continued to check-in with students that had the greatest known needs. Everyone working at school was conscious that we did not want the time away from school to seem too similarly disconnected when students were away from school during the COVID pandemic. Each week we held a student celebration at no cost to students. One week we had a tailgate where students showed up, ate donated hot dogs and ice cream, listened to a DJ (who volunteered their time), and had time to just be kids. Many staff, who had not come to the school prior to this first event, showed up, socialized, laughed and we all noticed the lack of students engaging with their phones during this time. We had mental health professionals from external organizations that also came out if anyone needed support during this

time. Later WHS partnered with the local movie theater and showed the movie Cars. Students came, got a bag of popcorn and a soda while laughter and hugs occurred the entire time. Students, along with families, shared how much they appreciated the opportunity for gatherings when students were not in school.

On October 24, 2024, when students and staff returned to school in Watauga County it seemed that everyone was ready to get back down to the business of school. Learning, socialization, and other 'normal' aspects restarted and the community outside of the school building continued to be rebuilt, while those of us inside of the school worked to reestablish bonds with one another and reinforce how we worked together through a disaster that allowed us to become stronger instead of fractured. In the end, students missed twenty days of school.

As school administrators, when something disrupts an entire community; such as a natural disaster, a death of a student or staff member, or the move of a major employer away from the county, you see several overarching groups appear: those who are personally affected by the loss and it alters their course in the short or long term (including their engagement at school which can increase or decrease), those who step up and offer to help in as many ways as they possibly can, and those who step away for a variety of reasons. Each one of our staff had some form of these reactions, but now as we move further and further away from the devastation of Helene, we are continuing to balance the care for those that we know were affected, in addition to continuing to educate and care for those students and staff who have moved past the hurricane and its aftereffects.

The work of our team and this disquisition is to help students who are often overlooked since they walk into school and speak a language different from the majority of teachers and students that surround them in the classroom and halls, however they have all been affected by

Hurricane Helene. Our hope is that we can help teachers integrate practices into their lessons that will help MLs, in addition to students who are behind in their learning, so that all students have the opportunity for successful learning.

As a result of Hurricane Helene, the timeline for our improvement initiative shifted. Initially, our modules were scheduled to be deployed one at a time beginning in September with module 1. Module 2 was to be released in October and module 3 would follow in November. At the end of each module as a part of the PDSA cycle, our plan was to make any modifications prior to releasing the next module. Hurricane Helene occurred as our participants were scheduled to be finishing module 1. With the devastation, power outages, and loss of instructional days, it became clear that we needed to modify our plan. As a result of Helene, we made the decision to shift our timeline, open all the modules, and give participants through the month of December to complete everything. This meant that we are unable to assess process and driver measures to make any real time adjustments to modules based on participant feedback.

Analysis of the Improvement Initiative

In improvement science, practical measures are used to break down what works into four questions: (a) is it working as intended? (b) is it working? (c) did it work? and (d) were there any unintended consequences of the implementation? (Hinnant-Crawford, 2020). These four questions correspond to four different types of practical measures in improvement science: outcome, driver, process, and balance.

Measures

A process measure is a type of metric used to assess whether an initiative is being implemented as intended. Process measures track the steps, actions, and engagement of participants throughout an intervention to determine its fidelity, effectiveness, and areas for

improvement (Hinnant-Crawford, 2020). As part of our improvement initiative, participants completed a brief survey at the conclusion of each module to evaluate the relevance of the materials and strategies, as well as the strategies used to create their learning experiences within the modules. The survey consisted of four key questions designed to measure perceived usefulness and knowledge growth using a Likert-scale format. Like the survey given in for outcome measures, each of the Likert Scale categories was assigned a numerical value ranging from 5 for "Extremely Useful" to 1 for "Extremely Not Useful" for items one and two on the survey or 5 for "Complete Understanding" to 1 for "No Understanding" for items three and four (which served as driver measures). The items are listed below in Table 3. Descriptive statistics were utilized to analyze the data, allowing us to identify trends in participants' responses. This process measure provided valuable insights into the impact of each module, monitored changes in teacher understanding, and informed data-driven refinements to enhance future professional learning opportunities.

Table 3

End of Module Assessment Items for Modules 1-3

Item Number	Item
1	How useful were the materials and resources provided in the module?
2	How useful will the session content and strategies be to your work?
3	Identify your level of understanding about the content BEFORE this professional learning experience.
4	Identify your level of understanding about the content AFTER this professional learning experience.

Note. Items 1 and 2 are process measures. Items 3 and 4 are driver measures.

A driver measure is a key metric used in improvement science to track whether essential changes are being implemented effectively to *drive* progress toward a larger improvement goal. Driver measures monitor progress, identify the effectiveness of key strategies, and guide

continuous improvement. Hinnant-Crawford (2020) emphasized the role of driver measures as critical indicators that assess the implementation of key change ideas within an improvement initiative. She explained that driver measures help improvement teams understand whether they are making progress toward their aim and provide real-time feedback to support adjustments. By focusing on the specific actions that drive meaningful change, driver measures ensure that improvement efforts remain intentional, data-driven, and effective.

Throughout each module, participants were asked several reflection questions to gauge their understanding of the concepts presented. These are listed by module and section in Appendix F. Participants engaged in a reflective process by answering open-ended questions about their learning experiences and the implementation of culturally responsive teaching strategies for multilingual learners. These reflections examined participants' understanding of cultural competence, instructional planning, effectiveness in applying new strategies, areas for growth, interest in additional coaching, and suggestions for improving the modules. To analyze the qualitative data, we applied inductive coding to identify recurring themes and patterns in responses. By analyzing participant reflections, we were able to determine whether the professional development is leading to meaningful changes in practice and identify opportunities for further enhancements to maximize its effectiveness. Items 3 and 4 of the end of module assessment (also found in Table 3) served as quantitative measure in which descriptive statistics was used to analyze the data.

Outcome measures serve as summative indicators, evaluating whether an intervention has led to meaningful improvements. The primary purpose of outcome measures is to determine the success of an initiative by providing evidence of measurable change. Hinnant-Crawford (2020) stressed that outcome measures must align with the overall aim of an initiative to ensure that the

data collected provides a clear and accurate reflection of impact. At the beginning of the study, participants completed a pre-assessment survey designed to evaluate their confidence in teaching multilingual learners and their understanding of culturally responsive instructional strategies. Using a Likert scale ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree," where each option on the scale was assigned a corresponding value (5-Strongly Agree, 4-Agree, 3-Neither Agree or Disagree, 2-Disagree, and 1-Strongly Disagree), the survey aimed to assess participants' self-efficacy in supporting MLs and promoting an inclusive learning environment. We hoped to receive insight from these surveys that would show gains in the educators' self-efficacy to instruct students whose primary language was not English. Each of the teachers self-evaluated their own ability to provide meaningful instruction to MLs prior to starting the work within the learning modules provided. The survey included statements measuring their ability to adapt instruction, integrate students' cultural backgrounds, foster inclusive classroom environments, and address cultural mismatches in education.

To measure the impact of the professional development, the same survey was administered again as a post-assessment after participants completed all modules. This approach enabled us to track shifts in teacher confidence and instructional practices over time, serving as the outcome measure for this study. By assigning numerical values to the Likert Scale categories, we were then able to obtain an average score for the responses to survey questions. These "I am able to" statements from the survey are found in Appendix G. By comparing pre- and post-assessment responses, we identified areas of growth and examined how the professional learning experience influenced participants' perceptions and teaching strategies. Descriptive statistics were applied to analyze this quantitative outcome measure, providing insight into the effectiveness of the professional development initiative in enhancing instructional capacity for

multilingual learners. All five of our participants took the pre-assessment survey about their confidence/self-efficacy in teaching students learning to speak English. Only four of the five participants took the post-assessment survey that asked the same questions. These results were analyzed for any change to measure differences in their confidence/self-efficacy in teaching students learning to speak English.

A balance measure is a critical metric in research and improvement science used to assess whether changes made in one area led to unintended consequences in another. The primary purpose of balance measures is to monitor unintended consequences, maintain system-wide stability, and support sustainable change. Hinnant-Crawford (2020) emphasizes the role of balance measures in ensuring that educational improvement efforts are both effective and equitable. She explained that while driver and process measures focus on whether a change is working, balance measures serve as safeguards, preventing unintended negative impacts that could undermine long-term success.

To assess the opportunity cost of participating in the professional development, we included a balance measure after each module by asking participants what they would have done instead if they had not completed the training. To analyze this data, we used In Vivo coding. We analyzed responses by capturing participants' exact words to identify recurring themes and patterns. This analysis helped us recognize potential trade-offs, ensuring that the professional development was both meaningful and manageable within participants' existing responsibilities.

Results & Findings

Participants

We implemented our improvement initiative in September and concluded during December of the 2024-2025 school year. The data for all four practical measures used in this DQ

were collected from the participants--the teachers who volunteered to participate in our improvement initiative. Our participant group consisted of five teachers, four female and one male. Two of the teachers were from BHS, two from FHS, and one from WHS. The teachers represented the core content areas of English, math, science, and social studies. All participants were continuing license teachers meaning that they were not beginning teachers.

Collecting data from a smaller group was advantageous for us given the strict deadlines and timeframe we held. The small sample size allowed for more detailed and nuanced analysis of the qualitative data and was deemed appropriate to facilitate an in-depth understanding of participants' perspectives. We recognize that the smaller sample size may be less likely to represent the broader population and that it limited the types of analyses we could perform. Data were collected through a series of surveys as well as pre- and post-assessments. Not all participants completed all items used in data collection as is shown in Table 4. The names below are pseudonyms for our participants and due to the small sample, we chose traditionally Anglo names for them so as not to unintentionally identify them. Additionally, we selected all female names so as not to distinguish participants' responses based on sex.

Table 4

Module & Survey Completion by Participant

Participants	Pre-Assessment Survey	Module 1	Module 2	Module 3	Post-Assessment Survey
Lisa	X	X	X	X	X
Lydia	X	X	X	X	X
Annie	X	X	X	X	X
Tori	X	X	X	X	X
Katie	X	X	X	X	

Results

In this section, the results of the study are presented through an analysis of the data collected using process, driver, outcome, and balance measures in Table 5. The findings provide insight into the effectiveness of the implemented strategies, highlighting key trends, patterns, and relationships within the data. This analysis offers a comprehensive understanding of the study's impact and can inform future decision-making and research studies.

Table 5

Measures

Measure	Data Type	Analysis Tool	When
Process	Quantitative	Descriptive Statistics; Visual Trend Analysis	End of Each Module
Driver	Qualitative	Inductive Coding	Throughout Each Module
Driver	Quantitative	Descriptive Statistics; Visual Trend Analysis	End of Each Module
Outcome	Quantitative	Descriptive Statistics; Independent Means Test	End of Initiative
Balance	Qualitative	In Vivo Coding	End of Each Module

In assessing the effectiveness of the improvement initiative designed to build teacher capacity in educating MLs, participants provided feedback on the usefulness of materials and session content across the three modules. Using a five-point Likert scale in which one is "Not Useful" and five is "Extremely Useful," all five participants completed the reflections for each module (Figures 5, 6, and 7). Form *Module 1: Cultural Competency*, the average rating for the usefulness of materials and resources was 4.6 (Mean), while the perceived usefulness of the session content and strategies had a mean of 4.6. *Module 2: Effective Pedagogy for MLs* received the highest rating, with both questions averaging 5.0, indicating that participants found the materials and content extremely useful. Similarly, *Module 3: Access Points for MLs* received

high ratings, with a Mean of 4.8 for materials and 5.0 for session content. These descriptive statistics suggest that participants consistently valued the resources and content, with particularly strong agreement on the practicality of strategies provided in modules 2 and 3.

Figure 5

Module 1 – Cultural Competence

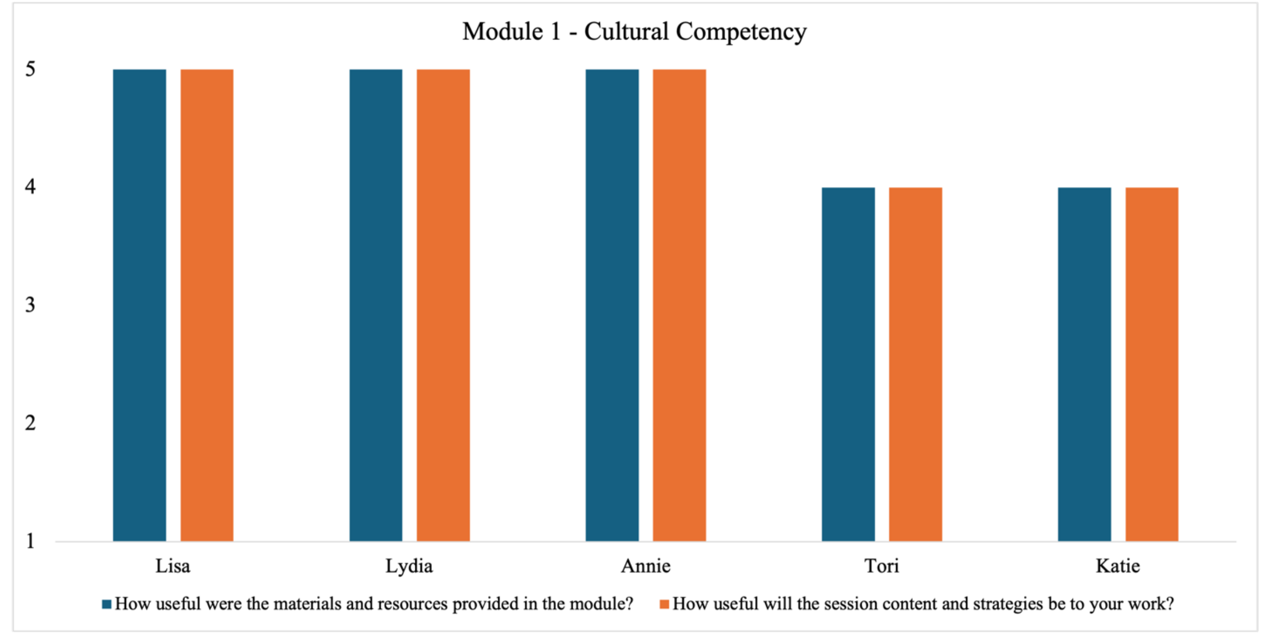


Figure 6

Module 2 – Effective Pedagogy for MLs

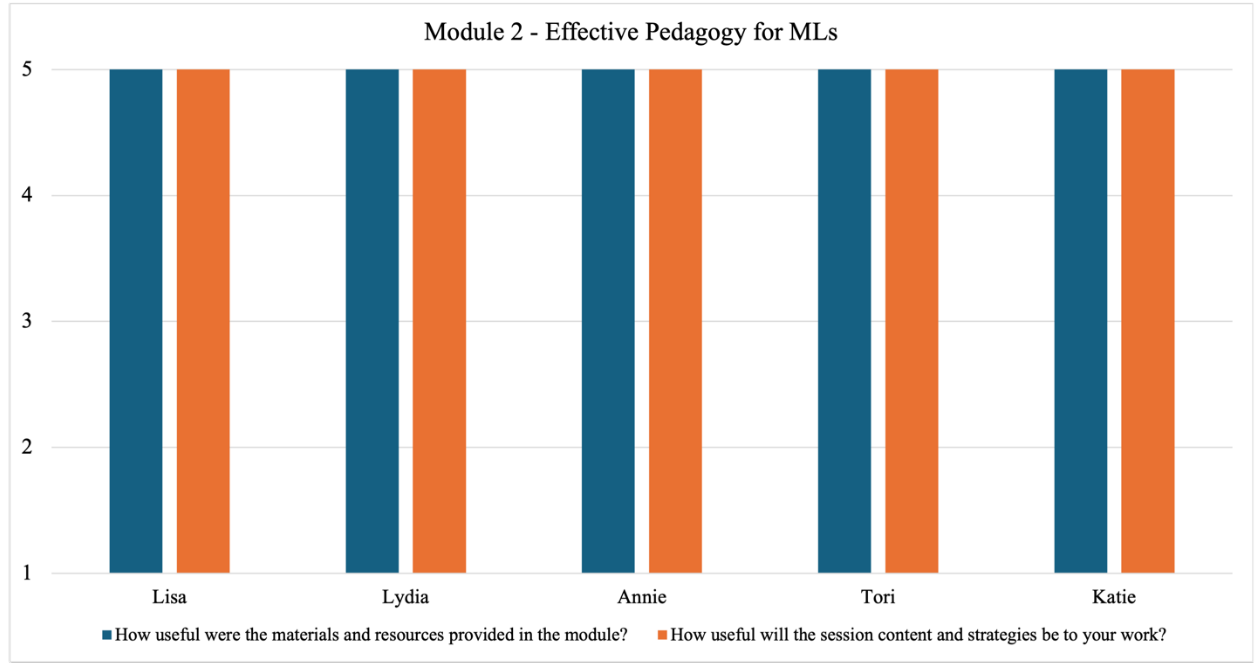
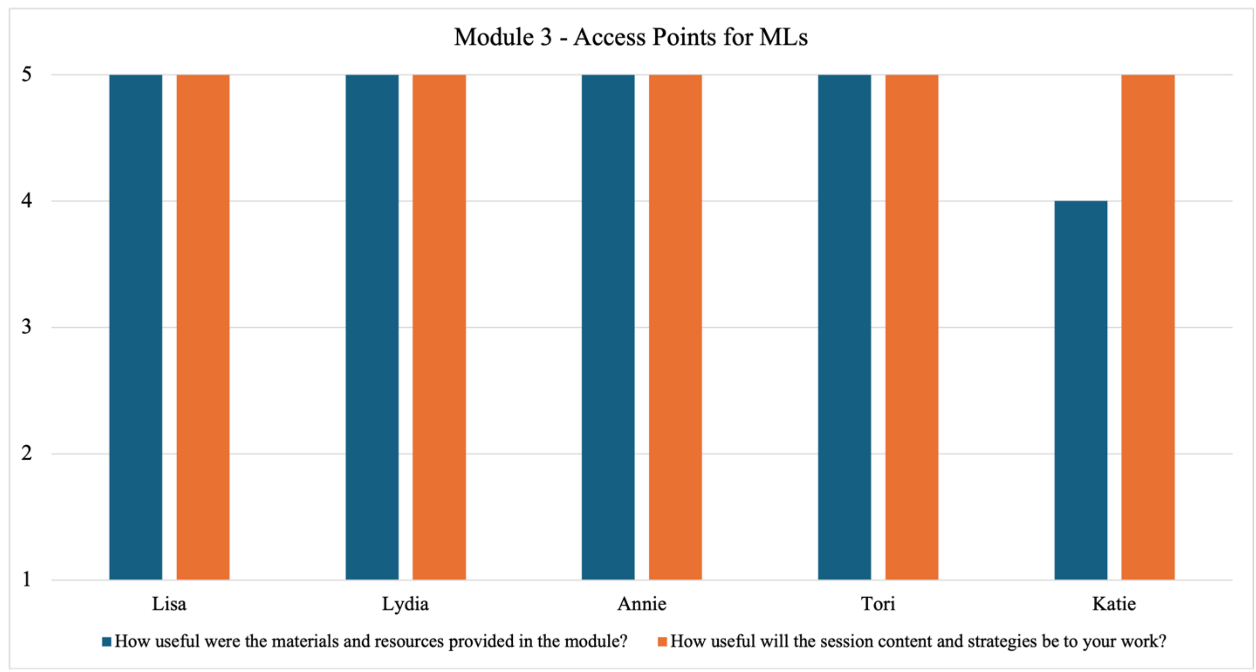


Figure 7

Module 3 – Access Points for MLs



Driver measures monitored the progress of our improvement initiative. After completing the professional development, participants engaged in a reflective process by answering open-ended questions about their learning experiences and the implementation of culturally responsive teaching strategies for MLs. These reflections examined participants' understanding of cultural competence, instructional planning, effectiveness in applying new strategies, areas for growth, interest in additional coaching, and suggestions for improving modules.

In the improvement initiative modules, our qualitative coding analysis revealed that participants recognized the profound impact of identity suppression, cultural expectations, and the challenges faced by MLs in educational settings in *Module 1: Cultural Competence.* Through in vivo coding, key themes emerged, highlighting the societal pressures that compel individuals—both educators and students—to conform, minimize aspects of their cultural identity, and navigate unspoken rules within dominant cultural norms. Participants expressed

concerns about how MLs often feel alienated or pressured to assimilate, and how educators must be mindful of students' home environments, emotional well-being, and the need for inclusive instructional practices. One participated stated that, "Expectations from the prevailing culture force students to hide or minimize aspects of who they are" while another noted that, "The urge to 'fit in' might cause young pupils to feel estranged from their cultural heritage." This analysis underscores the importance of fostering culturally responsive teaching that values and affirms diverse identities in the classroom.

In the *Module 2: Effective Pedagogy for MLs*, the coding analysis uncovered that participants emphasized the critical role of scaffolding in supporting MLs by reducing language barriers and fostering confidence. Using in vivo coding, prominent themes surfaced, highlighting that effective scaffolding strategies—such as graphic organizers, sentence frames, realia, and visual aids—allow MLs to demonstrate their content knowledge without being hindered by language proficiency challenges. Participants also recognized the importance of aligning scaffolding strategies with individual student needs, using clear and simplified instructions, and creating a supportive learning environment where MLs feel safe to engage and express their understanding. The participants' understanding of why scaffolding is essential to the success of MLs was underscored by responses such as "scaffolding provides opportunities for students to feel safe in showing their understanding" and "simplified language, graphic organizers or other visuals, oral assessments, and read aloud are some of the scaffolds."

In *Module 3: Access Points for MLs*—our coding analysis identified participants' perspectives on sheltered instruction, highlighting key themes related to current practices, challenges, and future needs. Using in vivo coding, participants emphasized the importance of integrating language and content objectives, providing comprehensible input, and using native

language instruction as a foundation for learning. While some sheltered instructional strategies—such as co-teaching, scaffolding, and explicit vocabulary instruction—were already in place, responses indicated gaps in systemic implementation and professional development. Participants noted the need for district-wide SIOP implementation, enhanced training for content teachers, and increased collaboration between educators, instructional coaches, and administrators. Additionally, the limited availability of dedicated English Language Learner teachers and challenges in supporting students from diverse linguistic background were identified as barriers to effective sheltered instruction. Participants noted in their responses that they must "be cognitive of assumptions and bias" and how critical it is for them to "establish a welcoming and encouraging atmosphere that will improve students' capacity to comprehend the material." Similar to this, one participant stated that there is a need to "increase engagement with families of multilingual learners." This analysis highlights the critical need for structured, research-based strategies to ensure MLs receive equitable and effective support in content-area instruction. Statements such as there is a "lack of comprehensive strategies of sheltered instruction" and teachers need "enhanced training for co-teachers and content teachers" underscore this belief.

We used quantitative process measures at the end of each module. *Module 1: Cultural Competence* examined the effect of a professional development module on the understanding of cultural competency. Five participants completed the end of module survey with their understanding rated on a five-point scale, where high scores indicate greater comprehension. Prior to the module, as noted in Table 6, participants cited an average understanding level of 3.2 (Mean), with a median of 3. Scores ranged from 2 to 4, and the standard deviation was 0.827,

including some variability in initial understanding. After completing the module, the average understanding level increased to 4.6 (Mean), with a median of 5. Scores ranged from 4 to 5, and the standard deviation decreased to 0.548, suggesting more consistent comprehension levels after training.

Table 6

Module 1 – Cultural Competence: Before & After Statistics

	Level of Understanding Before Module	Level of Understanding After Module
Mean	3.203	4.60
Median	3.003	5.00
Std. Deviation	.827	.548
Minimum	2	4
Maximum	4	5

Note: N= 5

Module 2: Effective Pedagogy for MLs examined the effect of professional development on teachers' understanding of effective pedagogy for MLs. All five participants completed the pre- and post-module assessment, with their understanding rated on a five-point scale, where higher scores indicate greater comprehension. Prior to the module, participants exhibited an average understanding level of 2.2 (Mean), with a median score of 2. Scores ranged from 1 to 3, and the standard deviation was 0.837 indicating some variability in initial understanding (Table 7). After completing the module, the average understanding level increased to 4.8 (Mean), with a median score of 5. Scores range from 4 to 5, and the standard deviation decreased to 0.447, suggesting more consistent comprehension levels after training.

Table 7

Module 2 – Effective Pedagogy for MLs: Before & After Statistics

	Level of Understanding Before Module	Level of Understanding After Module
Mean	2.20	4.80
Median	2.00	5.00
Std. Deviation	.837	.447
Minimum	1	4
Maximum	3	5

Note: N= 5

Module 3: Access Points for MLs examined the effect of a professional development module on teachers' understanding as to access points for MLs. Table 8 is representative of the five participants who completed a pre- and post-module assessment, with their understanding rated on a five-point scale, where higher scores indicate greater comprehension. Prior to the module, participants exhibited an average understanding level of 2.6 (Mean), with a median of 1. Scores exhibited substantial variability, ranging from1 to 5, and the standard deviation was 2.191, indicating a broad range of initial comprehension levels. After completing the module, the average understanding level increased to 4.4 (Mean), with a median of 4. Scores showed less variability, ranging from 4 to 5, with a standard deviation of 0.548, suggesting a more uniform level of comprehension post-module.

Table 8

Module 3 – Access Points for MLs: Before & After Statistics

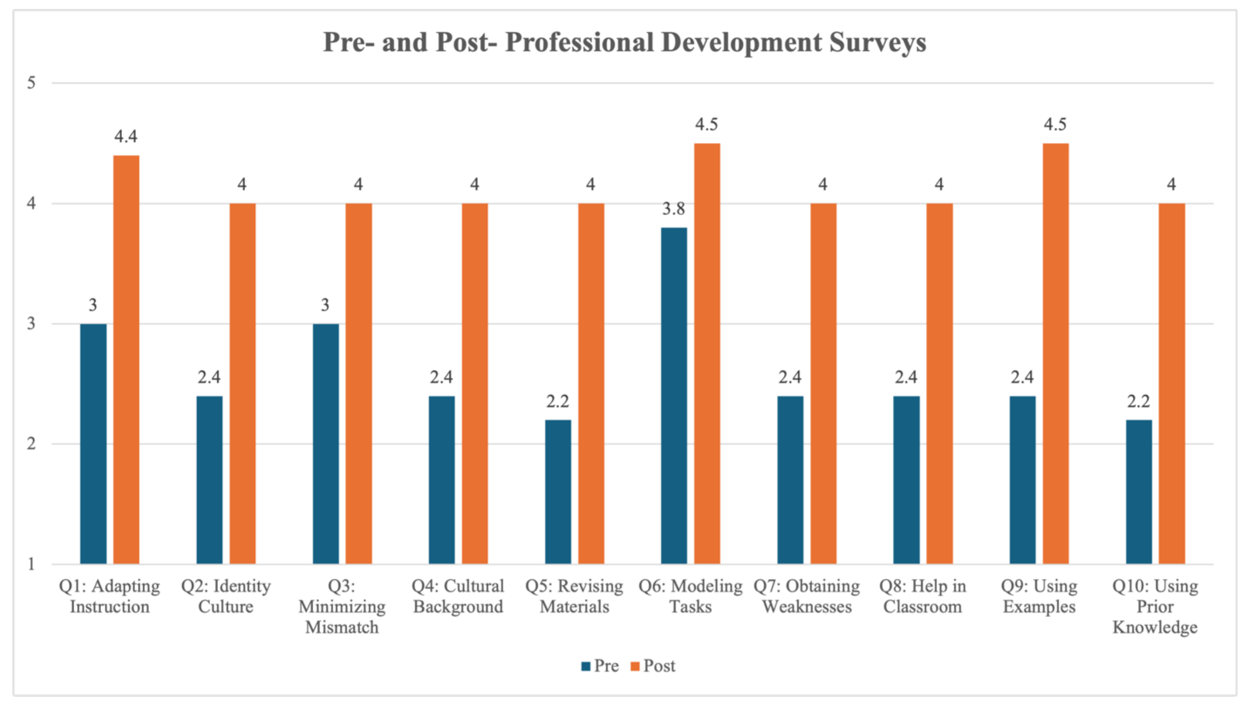
	Level of Understanding Before Module	Level of Understanding After Module
Mean	2.60	4.40
Median	1.00	4.00
Std. Deviation	2.191	.548
Minimum	1	4
Maximum	5	5

Note: N= 5

Our outcome measure served as summative indicators and evaluated whether our intervention led to meaningful improvements. Only four of the five participants took the post-modules survey, as opposed to the five that took the pre-improvement initiative survey. The study evaluated changes in teachers' self-perceived abilities to implement culturally responsive teaching practices before and after completing professional development modules. Pre- and post-survey data were analyzed using descriptive statistics to assess the significance of changes in understanding across various competencies. The results of pre- and post- survey analysis, as illustrated in Figure 8 revealed significant improvements in teachers' self-perceived abilities across most of the survey items.

Figure 8

Pre- & Post-Professional Development Survey Comparison



For the item "I am able to adapt instruction to meet the needs of my students," teachers reported an increase in their mean score from 3 before the modules to 4.4 after the modules. This reflected a noticeable improvement in their ability to tailor instruction to student needs. Similarly, for the item "I am able to implement strategies to minimize the effects of the mismatch between my students' home culture and the school culture," there was a significant increase in the mean scores from 3 pre-modules to 4 post-modules, indicating enhanced confidence in addressing cultural mismatches. Teachers also demonstrated substantial growth in their ability to use students' cultural backgrounds to help make learning meaningful. For the item "I am able to use students' cultural backgrounds to help make learning meaningful," mean scores increased from 2.4 pre-modules to 4 post-modules. A similar pattern was observed for the item "I am able to revise instructional material to include a better representation of cultural groups," where mean scores improved from 2.2 before the modules to 4 after the modules. These results

suggest that teachers became more confident integrating culturally representative materials into their instruction. For the item “I am able to model classroom tasks to enhance English Language Learners’ understanding,” mean scores increased from 2.2 prior to the modules to 4 afterwards. Teachers also reported greater confidence in obtaining information about their students’ academic weaknesses with mean scores rising from 2.4 pre-modules to 4 post-modules. These findings highlight improvement in both instructional strategies and assessment practices. The ability to foster an inclusive classroom environment also showed significant growth. For the item, “I am able to help students feel like important members of the classroom,” teachers’ mean scores increased from 2.4 pre-modules to 4 post-modules. For the item “I am able to use examples that are familiar to students from diverse backgrounds,” mean scores rose from 2.4 before the modules to 4 afterwards. For the item “I am able to use examples that are familiar to students from diverse backgrounds,” mean scores rose from 2.4 pre- to 4 post-modules. These results suggest that teachers become more adept at creating culturally relevant learning experiences for their students. Finally, for the item “I am able to use my students’ prior knowledge to help make sense of new information,” teachers reported a significant increase in mean scores from 2.2 before the modules and 4 afterwards. This improvement reflects enhanced confidence in leveraging students’ existing knowledge as a foundation for new learning.

One area that did not show change was the teachers’ ability to identify differences between school culture and students’ home culture (“I am able to identify ways that the school culture is different from my students’ home culture”). The mean score remained consistent at 3.6 (SD-0.538) both before and after the modules, an area where participants already reported relatively high confidence prior to the module, suggesting that this was an area of strength prior to the intervention.

Only five of the fifty total responses from the five participants that completed the pre-module survey fell into the neutral category – “neither agree nor disagree.” The only negative answer for any participant was one response of ‘disagree’ to the statement “I am able to implement strategies to minimize the effects of the mismatch between my students’ home culture and the school culture.” The participants in our study came to us with their belief that they had already gained knowledge on how to educate MLs in their classrooms and that they had some knowledge of a wide range of social, cultural, and academic aptitude of MLs.

After module completion, each of our educators were asked to complete a post survey consisting of duplicate questions from the first survey. As previously stated earlier in our data analysis the participants all answered that they stayed consistent, shown with any repeated “agree” answers or grew with those answers that moved from the negative or neutral to “agree” or “strongly agree.” One participant did not complete the post survey which may have been caused by effects of Hurricane Helene or other personal matters that the educator was encountering during the window this survey was open. The issue does not seem to be a concern with the process, driver and balance measures since the participant, who completed all the other sections of the modules. Understanding this loss of one participant, or twenty percent of our study’s population, will be important to reflect on as we continue this work with the school staff we serve and if we choose to take this work to a wider audience. The four other participants across the board reported gains in their understanding, planning, instruction, and understanding of MLs in their classroom.

We collected an additional qualitative outcome measure through the submission of sample lesson plans. Of the five participants, Katie did not submit a sample lesson plan. In analyzing the lesson plans, there were a variety of subject areas represented: one English, one

social studies, one environmental science, and one math. All of the lesson plans showed evidence of the strategies and concepts introduced during the modules, especially *Module 2: Effective Pedagogy for MLs.* With the sample lessons, each of them had the commonality of the use of graphic organizers. While there was an attempt to add strategies such as pre-teaching vocabulary and use of realia, only one of the sample lessons showed explicit evidence of strategies other than a graphic organizer from the information presented in the modules.

The participant who submitted the English lesson plan included several strategies that were presented in the modules. The lesson contained the use of realia, connection to background knowledge, read aloud, and graphic organizers. Because we did not observe the lesson, we cannot be certain the other strategies were not implemented during the lesson (such as the pre-teaching of academic vocabulary and framing). The lesson on Chapter One of the novel *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, contained a condensed and adapted version (in English) of the chapter with vocabulary words underlined. Students were encouraged to use a dictionary to translate unfamiliar words and speak to a partner of similar language ability to clarify questions. The participant used picture cards and sentence strips (Appendix H) to introduce key plot information to allow the students to get a sense of what Chapter One is about before they read the text. Additionally, students were able to pair with students of similar language ability to discuss unfamiliar words they encounter in the sentence strips. When they read the adapted chapter aloud, students were asked to place the pictures in chronological order. The participant included a vocabulary study anchored in a graphic organizer, with pictures, and explanation in both English and, for this example, Spanish (Appendix I). These samples, especially the one highlighted here, exhibited participants' attempt to incorporate the scaffolding strategies found in

Module 2: Scaffolding Strategies indicating that there was success in improvement initiative implementation.

A balance measure was implemented to evaluate the potential trade-offs associated with participation in professional development modules. Specifically, participants were asked what they would have done instead had they not engaged in the training. This approach provided valuable insights into whether professional learning displaced other critical responsibilities or impacted participants' personal time. Through inductive coding, two dominant themes emerged across all three modules: professional responsibilities and personal time. Professional responsibilities included tasks such as lesson planning, grading papers, analyzing student data, and developing instructional materials. Personal time reflected activities such as spending time with family, relaxing, and engaging in self-care.

The results shown in Table 9 indicated that participants often balanced competing demands between their work-related responsibilities and personal well-being. While some educators noted that they were able to integrate the professional development without major disruptions, others acknowledged that completing the modules required reallocating time they would have otherwise used for lesson preparation, administrative tasks, or personal activities. Table 9 summarizes key responses categorized by descriptive and in vivo coding, demonstrating the recurring themes that emerged across modules. This analysis ensures that professional development remains feasible, equitable, and does not unintentionally burden educators, aligning with Hinnant-Crawford's (2020) assertion that balance measures serve as safeguards to prevent unintended negative consequences.

Table 9

Opportunity Cost Coding

Module	Descriptive Coding	In Vivo Coding
1	Professional Responsibilities Personal Time	"Working on notes, activities, and assignments" "Spending time with family:
2	Professional Responsibilities Personal Time	"Grading Papers" "Getting needed me time"
3	Professional Responsibilities Personal Time	"Lesson Planning" "Relaxing"

Limitations of the Findings

The *Parents Bill of Rights* in North Carolina affected and limited the way in which we were able to gather research due to the restrictions placed on gathering data from students. Because of this, this study lacks one very important aspect: the collective voices of the students learning to speak English. Because our chosen theoretical frameworks—CRT and LatCrit—center on the voices of those who are often overlooked, marginalized, or discriminated against, this new legislation greatly limited our improvement initiative because we were unable to center these voices. This limitation did not allow us to ascertain how the professional development we implemented affected the students in the classrooms of these teachers.

A key limitation of this study was the inability to directly observe teacher participants implementing the strategies and knowledge gained from the improvement initiative modules. While survey responses and reflective questions provided insight into teachers' perceptions of their growth and readiness to support MLs, the lack of classroom observation means that the study cannot verify how, or to what extent, these strategies were actually applied in practice.

Without firsthand evidence of implementation, it was difficult to assess the impact the training had on instructional practices and student outcomes.

Another limitation of this study was the lack of direct interaction and coaching between researchers and teacher participants due to the study's design and the inherent power dynamic between researchers and teachers. Because the researchers held administrative roles, engaging in coaching or direct support could have influenced participants' responses or created a sense of pressure, potentially affecting the authenticity of interaction with the modules. As a result, the study relied on self-reported data, which may not fully capture the depth of teachers' understanding or implementation of the new strategies. While we did collect four sample lesson plans from participants, there is an inherent limitation present. We do not know if these lesson plans were implemented or prepared as a lesson that could be taught in the future. Not observing the teachers applying the skills and strategies from the improvement initiative serves as a limitation. Similarly, in retrospect, we were also limited in this outcome measure since we did not request that teachers identify which strategies they implemented in order for us to apply a more efficient coding method.

Hurricane Helene cannot be overlooked as a limitation in our research as the event significantly disrupted the implementation and outcomes of our improvement initiative. The hurricane caused widespread damage across our NIC leading to extended school closures of up to 17 days. This disruption not only interrupted the professional development timeline, but it also shifted educators' focus to crisis management and community recovery efforts. Participants were juggling personal and professional challenges such as displacement and property damage which likely impacted their ability to fully engage with the training modules. As noted, the hurricane also introduced historical threat internal validity to our research by creating conditions that could

have influenced participants' responses to pre- and post- assessments. The loss of one participant from post-survey data collection could be attributed to these extraordinary circumstances, further limiting our findings. While our educators certainly demonstrated resilience in the face of this disaster, Hurricane Helene illustrated how external factors can hinder both participation and data reliability.

A final limitation that we experienced was getting the teachers to participate who are willing to do the extra work. The overall climate in education during this timeframe in North Carolina was difficult at best and teachers already felt overworked and underpaid. In addition to a 500-year natural disaster and educating through crisis, this may have been one of the reasons for the small sample size. Conversely, due to the small sample size of five teachers across three different high schools, there is the chance that the participants who volunteered for the study were also interested in better educating MLs. As a result, the findings may appear to be more efficacious than they actually were.

Scaling Up: Buy-in, Sustainability, and Expandability

To ensure the sustainability and scalability of our improvement initiative, fostering strong stakeholder buy-in is essential. Achieving this requires an approach that places an emphasis on collaboration, transparency, and shared ownership of the initiative. Within our NIC, engaging our stakeholders earlier in the process can be more successful if we clearly articulate the vision and the goals, but most importantly, the potential benefits of the initiative. As administrators, we can also set the vision for staff to build capacity in educating MLs by forming PLCs and by including this type of professional development as professional development plan goals for the staff. This will ensure that teachers are fulfilling expectations set forth in regard to educating our

MLs. This could also increase the collective teacher efficacy of the staff and hopefully create a greater sense of ownership in the work.

As the ML population grows throughout our NIC, we have a unique opportunity to work with the human resources departments within each district to introduce this type of work to teachers new to our districts during the onboarding process. The structure of the improvement initiative is such that it does not have to be completed as a whole, but rather in parts as needed. An even larger and challenging goal is to work in conjunction with nearby colleges and universities to demonstrate the need for this type of coursework to be offered to pre-service teachers. As the improvement initiative is used throughout the NIC, the data collected can be shared with the education colleges/departments to demonstrate the need within their own communities for pre-service classes, training, and experiences. Additionally, partnerships between colleges, universities, and schools can facilitate hands-on experiences where preservice teachers collaborate with experienced educators to apply the research-based practices in real-world settings. Because there are already partnerships in place between all the colleges and universities and public schools in our NIC, this could be a natural extension of work that is already happening. Preparing preservice teachers to meet the diverse needs of MLs can help ensure a pipeline of educators equipped to support and educate MLs.

Implications and Recommendations

In this section, we will discuss the implications for practice including a summary of our findings as well as the intersection of our team's work with equity/inequity and how schools can better equip teachers to serve students learning to speak English.

Implications and Recommendations for Policy

The findings of this research, supported by extant literature indicate that in North Carolina as well as the broader United States education system, there is a great need for professional development and support for educators teaching students learning to speak English in high school. In North Carolina, where legislative measures such as the *Parents Bill of Rights* impose restrictions on data collection and instructional flexibility, policymakers must consider how to balance parental involvement with the professional autonomy educators need to effectively support MLs. Our research highlights a need for sustained professional development programs that equip teachers for culturally responsive teaching and strategies for language acquisition.

Professional development is possibly only one part to the solution to build teachers who have the capacity to teach MLs. The development of all teachers to teach MLs must begin as a part of their pre-service education. Coupling course work with field experience will help teachers to develop skills that will provide the results that MLs deserve (Garver, et al., 2018). Much like Li et al. (2017) noted, MLs are not solely taught by certified second language educators, but it is a shared responsibility with mainstream classroom teachers. It is imperative that preservice teacher education programs prepare future teachers to meet the needs of MLs. Building teacher efficacy begins long before they enter the classroom, and the majority of pre-service teachers do not feel underprepared to teach MLs (Li et al., 2017).

In addition, policies should promote smaller class sizes, increased staffing of English Language Learning specialists, and dedicated time for those specialists to collaborate with educators. These supports can enhance teacher effectiveness and, in turn, student success. In North Carolina, policymakers should consider revising teacher preparation programs to require

coursework and training specific to ML instruction, ensuring that all educators—regardless of subject area—are prepared to support MLs.

Recommendations for Future Research

Future researchers should consider expanding their studies to include the perspectives of students learning to speak English, as their experiences are essential to understanding the full impact of instructional strategies and policies. While our research provides valuable insights into how educators build capacity to support MLs, it lacks direct input from the students who are most affected by these teaching practices. Future studies should explore ways to ethically and legally include student voices, perhaps through parental outreach initiatives that emphasize the importance of student perspectives in shaping effective educational strategies. Gaining direct insight from MLs can help researchers understand their learning challenges, engagement levels, and the effectiveness of various instructional approaches from a student-centered perspective.

Additionally, including MLs in research can provide a more comprehensive picture of how school policies and teaching methods impact their academic success and social integration. By involving students, future research can uncover gaps in current support systems and offer more targeted recommendations for educators, school leaders, and policymakers. Ultimately, integrating student voices into future studies will lead to a more impactful understanding of how to build educator capacity in ways that directly improve student outcomes. Future researchers should consider the current political climate that surrounds MLs and be cognizant of the effect of any research may have on students.

Future research should also incorporate classroom observations or video analysis to gain a more comprehensive understanding of how professional learning translates into practice. The use of a structured observation protocol to assess how frequently and effectively teachers

implement strategies for MLs could prove invaluable to researchers. Video recordings of instructional sessions could be analyzed to capture nuanced teaching practices, allowing for more detailed feedback and reflection. Incorporating teacher self-reflections with the observational data could provide deeper insight into the challenges and successes of implementation. In addition, future research should explore design models where instructional coaches provide support which allows for more collaboration within the professional development and makes it a more peer-driven approach.

Leadership Lessons Learned

Conducting research on building teacher capacity to work with MLs provided valuable leadership lessons. This process underscored the significance of ethical responsibility and cultural sensitivity, essential traits for us as leaders who seek to empower others in educational environments—diverse or otherwise.

One of the essential leadership lessons learned was in balancing competing priorities such as managing research timelines, academic responsibilities, professional commitments, and personal commitments. While we each felt confident in our ability to effectively manage time, through this process, we learned with greater significance the importance of time management and goal setting to stay on track. Additionally, we had our ability to develop and enact a detailed research plan tested as well as our flexibility tested as we adapted to the challenges that arose, especially the disruption caused by Hurricane Helene. As we worked within our research initiative, we learned to adjust our methods and, in this case, our focus, in response to the limitations that were placed on us such as the *Parents Bill of Rights*. Managing these hurdles and finding solutions to the complications that arose continued to foster the growth mindset required by this program and this type of equity work.

The format of the disquisition and use of a NIC allowed us to fully comprehend the importance of a team when doing equity work such as this. Working with each other, our disquisition chair, and our disquisition team from different disciplines clearly demonstrated the importance of collaborative relationships, clear and frequent communication, and a great deal of respect for one another. In the process, we continually saw the necessity of upholding ethical standards—such as ensuring confidentiality and maintaining cultural sensitivity—to hold ourselves accountable to the integrity required among educational leaders. We also experienced the opportunity to build trust and rapport with educators to promote professional development in teaching students who are learning to speak English. Through our work, we advocated for changes that benefit both students and teachers.

Another leadership lesson we learned during this process involved navigating crisis and disruption. The disruption caused by Hurricane Helene provided insights for sustaining improvement initiatives during crises including the importance of being flexible over rigid. While we had timelines we needed to follow, we also had to express empathy. Following the hurricane, we practiced trauma-informed leadership and prioritized the physical and emotional health of our students and staff before resuming our improvement initiative. Additionally, we found it necessary to alter our module delivery and completion dates. Ultimately, we were reminded that in order to make any sustainable improvement, we must always center the needs of those involved, especially under extenuating circumstances.

Finally, among of the greatest lessons learned during this process was the value of reflection. Reflecting on our own strengths, weaknesses, and leadership style during this program and research process allowed us to foster awareness and continuous learning. Through the process, we were able to encourage reflective practices among our participants and plant seeds

that will foster a culture of continuous improvement. While we entered this program with a sense of imposter syndrome, we leave having gained confidence in decision-making, systems management, and other attributes that allowed us to overcome that feeling of being an imposter to become a confident educational leader and change agent, especially in issues involving equity.

While this research project has concluded, the work that must be done to ensure equity for MLs is far from finished. In order to continue building our capacity as leaders of improvement work, it is essential for us to engage in ongoing professional development, and as mentioned previously, reflective practice. We must stay informed about emerging research and best practices, and we must actively participate in professional learning communities or networks that foster the exchange of innovative ideas and collaboration. Above all else, we must maintain our commitment to equity and inclusivity to ensure that improvement efforts address the needs of learners and educators. Our primary goal is to remain effective in being a driving force in fostering meaningful change and sustainable improvements in education.

Conclusion

Across the United States, the student population is becoming increasingly diverse, yet many teacher preparation programs and professional development initiatives lag behind in providing the necessary tools to meet these evolving needs. Research has consistently shown that culturally relevant teaching improves student engagement, academic achievement, and sense of belonging—particularly from students in historically marginalized communities. Similarly, targeted training in working with MLs is essential, as the number of MLs in the United States continues to rise. Without these supports, inequities in education will continue to persist, disproportionately affecting students learning to speak English.

At its core, our study highlights the need to ensure that all students—regardless of their cultural or linguistic backgrounds—receive high quality instruction. Schools must commit to equipping educators with the skills necessary to foster inclusive learning environments where every student can thrive. Addressing these disparities requires systemic change, including policy shifts, curriculum reform, and increased investment in professional development for teachers. By prioritizing culturally responsive teaching and the education of our MLs, we take a significant step toward creating a more just and equitable education system for all students.

References

Akan, D. (2013). The relationship between school principals' leadership styles and collective teacher efficacy. *Educational Research and Reviews*, *8*(10), 596–601.

Alemán, E. (2009). Latcrit educational leadership and advocacy: Struggling over Whiteness as property in Texas school finance. *Equity & Excellence in Education*, *42*(2), 183–201. https://doi.org/10.1080/10665680902744246

Aoki, K., & Johnson, K. (2008). An assessment of LatCrit theory ten years after. *Ind. LJ*, *83*(1151).

Arruzza, E., & Chau, M. (2021). The effectiveness of cultural competence education in enhancing knowledge acquisition, performance, attitudes, and student satisfaction among undergraduate health science students: A scoping review. *Journal of Educational Evaluation for Health Professions*, *18*, 3. https://doi.org/10.3352/jeehp.2021.18.3

Babinski, L. M., Amendum, S. J., Knotek, S. E., Sánchez, M., & Malone, P. (2017). Improving young English learners' language and literacy skills through teacher professional development: A randomized controlled trial. *American Educational Research Journal*, *55*(1), 117–143. https://doi.org/10.3102/0002831217732335

Barone-Crowell, H. (2020). *Lack of preparation for mainstream teachers of English Language Learners*. [Capstone project, The College at Brockport, State University of New York]. Department of Education and Human Development.

Blaise, J. G. (2015). The effects of high-stakes accountability measures on students with limited English proficiency. *Urban Education*, *53*(9), 1154–1181. https://doi.org/10.1177/0042085915613549

Blatchley, L., & Lau, M. (2010). Culturally competent assessment of English language learners for special education services. *National Association of School Psychologists Communique*, *38*(7), 27–29.

Bojko-Jeewek, J. R., & Eide, H. (2022). A warm wELLcome for language learners: Techniques! routines! interventions! strategies! favorite instructional strategies to help English language learners in the classroom. *Illinois Reading Council Journal*, *50*(2), 66–71. https://doi.org/10.33600/ircj.50.2.2022.66

Burke County Public Schools. (2023). *Home*. https://www.burke.k12.nc.us/. https://www.burke.k12.nc.us/

Calderón, M., Slavin, R., & Sánchez, M. (2011). Effective instruction for English learners. *The Future of Children*, *21*(1), 103–127. https://doi.org/10.1353/foc.2011.0007

Callahan, R. M., & Humphries, M. H. (2016). Undermatched? school-based linguistic status, college going, and the immigrant advantage. *American Educational Research Journal*, *53*(2), 263–295. https://doi.org/10.3102/0002831215627857

Callahan, R. M., & Shifrer, D. (2016). Equitable access for secondary English learner students. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, *52*(3), 463–496. https://doi.org/10.1177/0013161x16648190

Campbell, D. & Stanley, J. (1963). Experimental and quasi-experimental design for research. Rand-McNally.

Cansoy, R., & Parlar, H. (2018). Examining the relationship between school principals' instructional leadership behaviors, teacher self-efficacy, and collective teacher efficacy. *International Journal of Educational Management*, *32*(4), 550–567. https://doi.org/10.1108/ijem-04-2017-0089

Capper, C. A. (2019). *Organizational theory for equity and diversity: Leading integrated, socially just education*. Routledge.

Carnegie Foundation. (2023). *Learning to improve glossary*. Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching. https://www.carnegiefoundation.org/resources/learning-to-improve-glossary/#drivers

Chang-Bacon, C. K., & Salerno, A. S. (2023). Classroom as neo-national microcosm: Teachers learning to disrupt linguistic microaggressions. *TESOL Quarterly*, *57*(3), 946–958. https://doi.org/10.1002/tesq.3220

Coady, M. R., Harper, C., & de Jong, E. J. (2015). Aiming for equity: Preparing mainstream teachers for inclusion or inclusive classrooms? *TESOL Quarterly*, *50*(2), 340–368. https://doi.org/10.1002/tesq.223

Collier, M. D. (2005). An ethic of caring: The fuel for high teacher efficacy. *The Urban Review*, *37*(4), 351–359. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11256-005-0012-4

Cook, T.D., & Campbell, D.T. (1979). Quasi-experimentation: Design and analysis issues for field settings. Houghton Mifflin Company.

Cross, R. (2016). Language and content 'integration': The affordances of additional languages as a tool within a single curriculum space. *Journal of Curriculum Studies*, *48*(3), 388–408. https://doi.org/10.1080/00220272.2015.1125528

Darling-Aduana, J., & Heinrich, C. J. (2018). The role of teacher capacity and instructional practice in the integration of educational technology for emergent bilingual students. *Computers & Education*, *126*, 417–432. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.compedu.2018.08.002

Darling-Hammond, L. (2013). Inequality and school resources: What it will take to close the opportunity gap. In P. Carter & K. G. Welner (Eds.), *Closing the opportunity gap: What*

America must do to give every child an even chance (pp. 77–97). Oxford University Press.

DaSilva Iddings, A., & Rose, B. (2012). Developing pedagogical practices for English-language learners: A design-based approach. *Pedagogies: An International Journal*, *7*(1), 32–51. https://doi.org/10.1080/1554480x.2012.630510

de Jong, E. J., Naranjo, C., Li, S., & Ouzia, . (2018). Beyond compliance: ESL faculty's perspectives on preparing general education faculty for ESL infusion. *The Educational Forum*, *82*(2), 174–190. https://doi.org/10.1080/00131725.2018.1420856

Diarrassouba, N. (2017). No English learner left behind: How can states and teacher preparation programs support content-area practitioners? *English Language Teaching*, *11*(1), 179. https://doi.org/10.5539/elt.v11n1p179

Diller, J., & Moule, J. (2004). *Cultural competence: A primer for educators* (1st ed.). Wadsworth.

Echevarria, J., Short, D., & Vogt, M. (2007). *Implementing the SIOP model through effective professional development and coaching* (1st ed.). Pearson.

Egalite, A. J., Kisida, B., & Winters, M. A. (2015). Representation in the classroom: The effect of own-race teachers on student achievement. *Economics of Education Review*, *45*, 44–52. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.econedurev.2015.01.007

Ellevation Education. (n.d.). *Transform the way you serve English learners*. Retrieved March 7, 2025, from https://ellevationeducation.com/

Espinoza, L., & Harris, A. P. (1997). Afterword: Embracing the tar-baby. LatCrit theory and the sticky mess of race. *California Law Review*, *85*(5), 1585. https://doi.org/10.2307/3481066

Ford, M. R. (2021). A little representation goes a long way: Minority teacher representation and district performance in a highly homogenous context. *Public Organization Review*, *22*(3), 691–705. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11115-021-00535-3

Gall, M., Gall, J., & Borg, R. (2007). Educational research: An introduction (8th ed.) Pearson Education.

Garet, M. S., Porter, A. C., Desimone, L., Birman, B. F., & Yoon, K. (2001). What makes professional development effective? results from a national sample of teachers. *American Educational Research Journal*, *38*(4), 915–945. https://doi.org/10.3102/00028312038004915

Garver, R., Zohreh, R., Fuhui, T. (2018) I believe I can: Service-learning to raise preservice teacher's efficacy with English learners. *The Reading Matrix: An International Online Journal 18*(2), 23-37.

Gay, G. (2002). Preparing for culturally responsive teaching. *Journal of Teacher Education*, *53*(2), 106–116. https://doi.org/10.1177/0022487102053002003

Goddard, R. D., Bailes, L. P., & Kim, M. (2020). Principal efficacy beliefs for instructional leadership and their relation to teachers' sense of collective efficacy and student achievement. *Leadership and Policy in Schools*, *20*(3), 472–493. https://doi.org/10.1080/15700763.2019.1696369

Goddard, R. D., Hoy, W. K., & Hoy, A. (2004). Collective efficacy beliefs: Theoretical developments, empirical evidence, and future directions. *Educational Researcher*, *33*(3), 3–13. https://doi.org/10.3102/0013189x033003003

Goddard, R., Goddard, Y., Sook Kim, E., & Miller, R. (2015). A theoretical and empirical analysis of the roles of instructional leadership, teacher collaboration, and collective

efficacy beliefs in support of student learning. *American Journal of Education*, *121*(4), 501–530. https://doi.org/10.1086/681925

Gomez, M., & Diarrassouba, N. (2014). What do teachers need to support English learners? *English Language Teaching, 7*(5), 89-101. http://doi.org/10.5539/elt.v7n5p89

Greene, D. H., & Catawba County Schools. (2023). *Language instruction education program services (LIEP) 2023-2024* [Internal Report].

Gregory, G., & Burkman, A. (2011). *Differentiated literacy strategies for English language learners, grades 7-12*. Corwin Press.

Gutiérrez, K. D., Morales, P., & Martinez, D. C. (2009). Re-mediating literacy: Culture, difference, and learning for students from nondominant communities. *Review of Research in Education*, *33*(1), 212–245. https://doi.org/10.3102/0091732x08328267

Hattie, J. (2023). *Visible learning: The sequel* (1st ed.). Routledge.

Hinnant-Crawford, B. N. (2020). *Improvement science in education: A primer*. Myers Education Press.

Huber, L. P. (2010). Beautifully powerful: A Latcrit reflection on coming to an epistemological consciousness and the power of testimonio. *Journal of Gender, Social Policy, & the Law*, *18*(3), 839–851.

Hyunsook Song, K. (2016). Systematic professional development training and its impact on teachers' attitudes toward ELLs: SIOP and guided coaching. *TESOL Journal*, *7*(4), 767–799.

Kezar, A., & Lester, J. (2010). Breaking the barriers of essentialism in leadership research: Positionality as a promising approach. *Feminist Formations*, *22*(1), 163–185. https://doi.org/10.1353/nwsa.0.0121

Kim, Y., Erekson, J., Bunten, B. A., & Hinchey, P. (2014). Toward sustainable educational changes through school-based professional development on ELL assessment for new teachers. *Theory Into Practice*, *53*(3), 228–235. https://doi.org/10.1080/00405841.2014.916966

Krosch, A. R., Park, S. J., Walker, J., & Lisner, A. R. (2022). The threat of a majority-minority U.S. alters White Americans' perception of race. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, *99*, 104266. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jesp.2021.104266

La Salle, T. P., Wang, C., Wu, C., & Rocha Neves, J. (2019). Racial mismatch among minoritized students and White teachers: Implications and recommendations for moving forward. *Journal of Educational and Psychological Consultation*, *30*(3), 314–343. https://doi.org/10.1080/10474412.2019.1673759

Ladson-Billings, G., & Tate, W. F. (1995). Toward a critical race theory of education. *Teachers College Record: The Voice of Scholarship in Education*, *97*(1), 47–68. https://doi.org/10.1177/016146819509700104

Lesaux, N. K., Kieffer, M. J., Faller, S., & Kelley, J. G. (2010). The effectiveness and ease of implementation of an academic vocabulary intervention for linguistically diverse students in urban middle schools. *Reading Research Quarterly*, *45*(2), 196–228. https://doi.org/10.1598/rrq.45.2.3

Levin, H. M., & Belfield, C. R. (2007). *Educational interventions to raise high school graduation rates* (C. R. Belfield & H. M. Levin, Eds.). Brookings Institution Press.

Li, G., Hinojosa, D., & Wexler, L. (2017). *Beliefs and perceptions about their preparation to teach English language learners: Voices of mainstream pre-service teachers,6*(3).

Li, G., & Jee, Y. (2021). Pan-diversity integration as an equity trap: Lessons from preservice teachers' preparation for teaching English language learners in a predominantly White institution in the United States. *Teachers College Record: The Voice of Scholarship in Education*, *123*(12), 125–154. https://doi.org/10.1177/01614681211070873

Loughland, T., & Nguyen, H. (2020). Using teacher collective efficacy as a conceptual framework for teacher professional learning – a case study. *Australian Journal of Education*, *64*(2), 147–160. https://doi.org/10.1177/0004944120908968

Lucas, T., Villegas, A., & Freedson-Gonzalez, M. (2008). Linguistically responsive teacher education. *Journal of Teacher Education*, *59*(4), 361–373. https://doi.org/10.1177/0022487108322110

Lynch, J. C., Irby, B. J., Tong, F., Lara-Alecio, R., Zhou, Z., & Singer, E. (2021). Massive open online professional individualized learning: Building teachers' instructional capacity for English learners. *Teaching English as a Second Language Electronic Journal (TESL-EJ)*, *25*(2). https://doi.org/Https://tesl-ej.org/pdf/ej98/a10.pdf

Marshall, T. R., & Bouffard, S. (2021). Honoring history, cultivating genius. *The Learning Professional*, *42*(6), 53–55.

Martin-Beltran, M., & Peercy, M. (2014). Collaboration to teach English language learners: Opportunities for shared teacher learning. *Teachers and Teaching*, *20*(6), 721–737. https://doi.org/10.1080/13540602.2014.885704

Martinez, J. A. (2019). Research trends in school improvement for marginalized students. In C. B. Gaines (Ed.), *Leadership for school improvement: Reflection and renewal* (pp. 53–65). Information Age Publishing.

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

McInerney, K. (2022). Perceptions from newcomer multilingual adolescents: Predictors and experiences of sense of belonging in high school. *Child & Youth Care Forum*, *52*(5), 1041–1072. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10566-022-09723-8

Meyer, A., Rose, D. H., & Gordon, D. (2014). *Universal design for learning: Theory and practice*. CAST Professional Publishing.

Milner, R. (2010). Start where you are, but don't stay there: Understanding diversity, opportunity gaps, and teaching in today's classrooms. *Choice Reviews Online*, *48*(12), 48–7061-48-7061. https://doi.org/10.5860/choice.48-7061

Montgomery, S., Dreier, A., & North Carolina Justice Center. (2019). *Education without barriers: Addressing the needs of NC's English learning students* (NCJC Report) [Report]. North Carolina Justice Center. https://www.ncjustice.org/publications/education-without-barriers-addressing-the-needs-of-ncs-english-learning-students/

Morrison, G. M., Cosden, M. A., O'Farrell, S. L., & Campos, E. (2003). Changes in Latino students' perceptions of school belonging over time: Impact of language proficiency, self-perceptions and teacher evaluations. *The California School Psychologist*, *8*(1), 87–98. https://doi.org/10.1007/bf03340898

Murphy, A., Haller, E., & Spiridakis, J. (2019). Teachers' perceptions of a mentoring cohort model in a program leading to certification to teach English language learners. *Mentoring*

& Tutoring: Partnership in Learning, *27*(3), 295–316. https://doi.org/10.1080/13611267.2019.1630997

National Center for Education Statistics. (2023). *English learners in public schools*. U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences. Retrieved July 5, 2023, from Https://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/indicator/cga

Rosenfeld, L. B., Richman, J. M., & Bowen, G. L. (2000). Social support networks and school outcomes: The centrality of the teacher, child, and adolescent. *Child and Adolescent Social Work Journal*, *17*(3), 205–226. https://doi.org/10.1023/a:1007535930286

Ross, J., & Bruce, C. (2007). Professional development effects on teacher efficacy: Results of randomized field trial. *The Journal of Educational Research*, *101*(1), 50–60. https://doi.org/10.3200/joer.101.1.50-60

Rubinstein-Avila, E., & Lee, E. (2014). Secondary teachers and English language learners (ells): Attitudes, preparation and implications. *The Clearing House: A Journal of Educational Strategies, Issues and Ideas*, *87*(5), 187–191. https://doi.org/10.1080/00098655.2014.910162

Russell, F. A. (2015). Learning to teach English learners: Instructional coaching and developing novice high school teacher capacity. *Teacher Education Quarterly*, *42*(1), 27–47.

Salerno, A. S., & Kibler, A. K. (2013). Before they teach: how pre-service teachers plan for linguistically diverse students. *Teacher Education Quarterly*, *40*(4), 5–26.

SAS. (2023). *North Carolina school report cards*. NC Reports. https://ncreports.ondemand.sas.com/src/?county=Burke

Schunk, D. (2019). *Learning theories: An educational perspective* (8th ed.). Pearson.

Secules, S., McCall, C., Mejia, J., Beebe, C., Masters, A. S., L. Sánchez-Peña, M., & Svyantek, M. (2021). Positionality practices and dimensions of impact on equity research: A collaborative inquiry and call to the community. *Journal of Engineering Education*, *110*(1), 19–43. https://doi.org/10.1002/jee.20377

Shadish, W. R., Cook, T. D., & Campbell, D. T. (2002). Experimental and quasi-experimental designs for generalized causal inference. Houghton Mifflin and Company.

Sheng, Z., Sheng, Y., & Anderson, C. J. (2011). Dropping out of school among ell students: Implications to schools and teacher education. *The Clearing House: A Journal of Educational Strategies, Issues and Ideas*, *84*(3), 98–103. https://doi.org/10.1080/00098655.2010.538755

Shim, J. (2019). Towards a more nuance understanding of White teachers of English learners: Increasing capacity and capabilities. *Journal of Language Teaching and Research*, *10*(1), 1. https://doi.org/10.17507/jltr.1001.01

Skutnabb-Kangas, T. (1989). Multilingualism and the education of minority children. *Estudios Fronterizos*, 36–67. https://doi.org/10.21670/ref.1989.18-19.a02

Solorzano, D. G., & Yosso, T. J. (2001). Critical race and LatCrit theory and method: Counter-storytelling. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, *14*(4), 471–495. https://doi.org/10.1080/09518390110063365

Téllez, K., & Manthey, G. (2015). Teachers' perceptions of effective school-wide programs and strategies for English language learners. *Learning Environments Research*, *18*(1), 111–127. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10984-015-9173-6

Theoharis, G., & O'Toole, J. (2011). Leading inclusive ELL. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, *47*(4), 646–688. https://doi.org/10.1177/0013161x11401616

Torff, B., & Murphy, A. (2020, January 27). *Teachers' beliefs about English learners: Adding linguistic support to enhance academic rigor - Kappan Online*. Kappan Online. https://kappanonline.org/teachers-beliefs-english-language-learners-linguistic-support-torff-murphy/

Umansky, I. M. (2016). To be or not to be EL: An examination of the impact of classifying students as English learners. *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, *38*(4), 714–737. https://doi.org/10.3102/0162373716664802

Vaughn, S., Martinez, L. R., Linan-Thompson, S., Reutebuch, C. K., Carlson, C. D., & Francis, D. J. (2009). Enhancing social studies vocabulary and comprehension for seventh-grade English language learners: Findings from two experimental studies. *Journal of Research on Educational Effectiveness*, *2*(4), 297–324. https://doi.org/10.1080/19345740903167018

Vera, E., Hook, K., Daskalova, P., Hill, L., Galvin, S., Fritsche, S., Catellier, J., Haywood, S., Raziuddin, A., Anderson, B., Roche, M., Floro, M., Mutuyemariya, C., Thomas, K., Heerwagen, K., Camacho, D., Boots, T., & Gruber, E. (2017). Understanding the socioemotional worlds of English learners: A retrospective study. *Journal of Educational and Psychological Consultation*, *28*(2), 137–163. https://doi.org/10.1080/10474412.2017.1305279

Vera, E. M., Heineke, A., Israel, M., Hill, M., Goldberger, N., Hook, K., & Anderson, B. (2021). Learning about English learners: Teachers' and leaders' perceptions of effective professional development. *International Multilingual Research Journal*, *16*(2), 93–112. https://doi.org/10.1080/19313152.2021.1971474

Villavicencio, A., Jaffe-Walter, R., & Klevan, S. (2021). “You can’t close your door here:” leveraging teacher collaboration to improve outcomes for immigrant English learners. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, *97*, 103227. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2020.103227

Walsh, M. (2008, December 31). *Ells and the law: Statutes, precedents*. Education Week. https://www.edweek.org/teaching-learning/ells-and-the-law-statutes-precedents/2008/12

Wei, L. (2021). Teaching academic vocabulary to English language learners (ells). *Theory and Practice in Language Studies*, *11*(12), 1507–1514. https://doi.org/10.17507/tpls.1112.01

Williams, T., Hakuta, T., Haertel, E., Perry, M., Oregon, I., & Brazil, N. (2007). *Similar English learner students, different results: Why do some schools do better? A follow-up analysis, based on a large-scale survey of California elementary schools serving low-income EL students.* EdSource.

Appendix A

Local Context for Catawba County Schools

Table A1

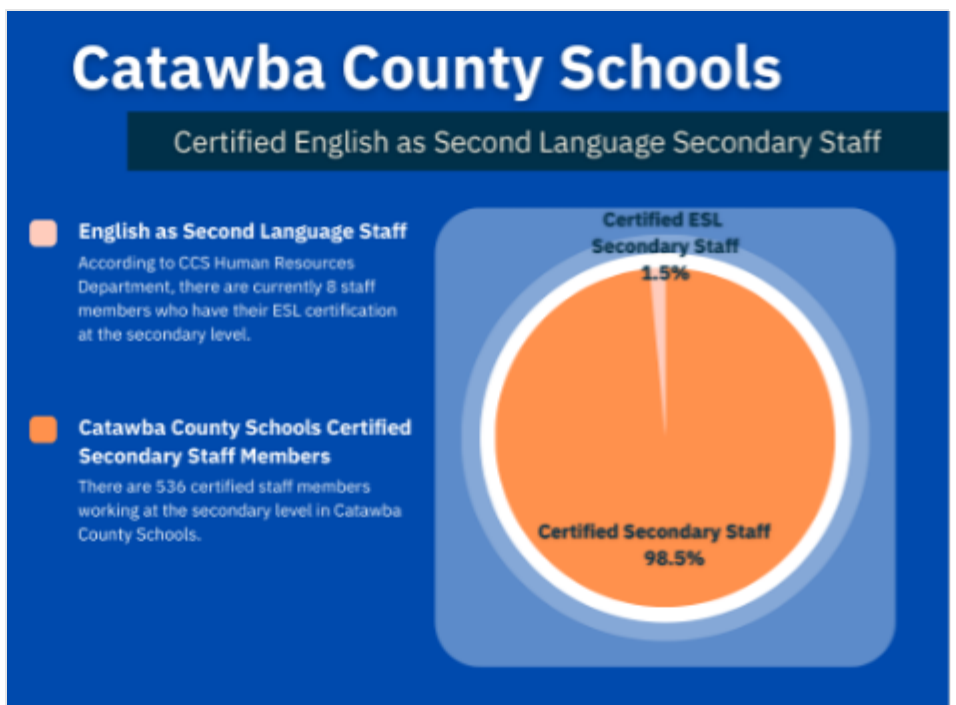
CCS Student & Staff Diversity

Ethnic Distribution	Students	Certified Staff	Difference
American Indian or Alaskan Native	0%	0%	0%
Asian	4%	1.42%	-2.58%
Black	6%	2.44%	-3.56%
Hispanic or Latinx	9%	3.70%	-5.30%
Pacific Islander	0%	0.08%	0.08%
White	78%	91.73%	13.73%
Two or More Races	2%	0.47%	-1.53%

Note. Data provided by CCS Human Resources Department, October 2023.

Figure A1

CCS Secondary ESL-Certified Teachers



Note. Data provided by Catawba County Schools Human Resources Department, October 2023.

Appendix B

Local Context for Burke County Public Schools

Table B1

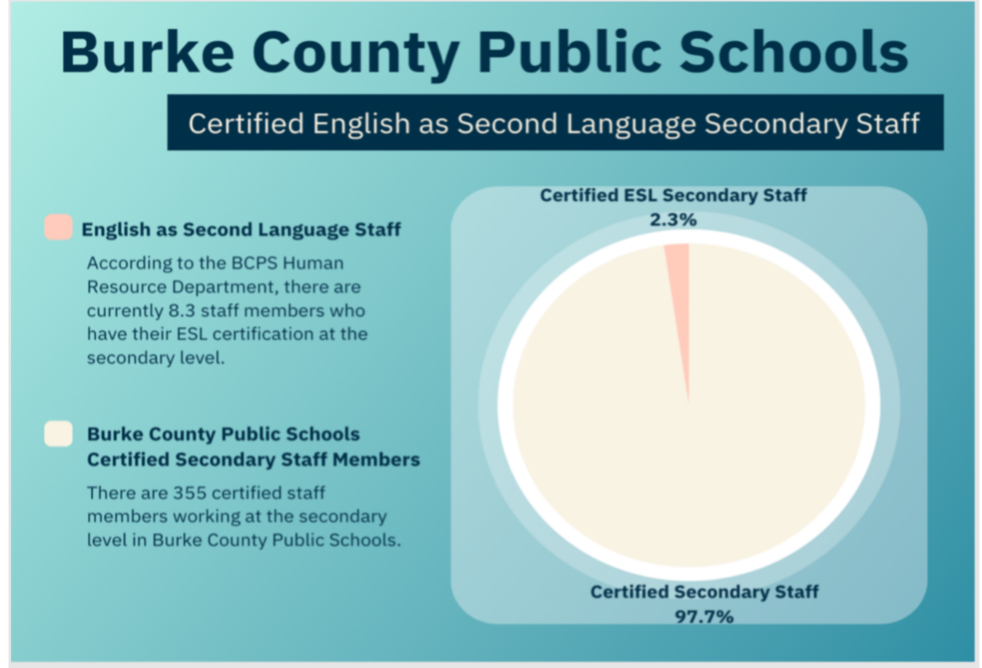
BCPS Student & Staff Diversity

Ethnic Distribution	Students	Certified Staff	Difference
American Indian or Alaskan Native	0%	0%	0%
Asian	6%	<1%	-5%
Black	5%	2%	3%
Hispanic	18%	2%	-16%
Pacific Islander	0%	0%	0%
White	65%	95%	+30%
Two or More Races	6%	<1%	-5%

Note. Type your note content here.

Figure B1

BCPS Secondary ESL-Certified Secondary Staff



Appendix C

Local Context for Watauga County Schools

Table C1

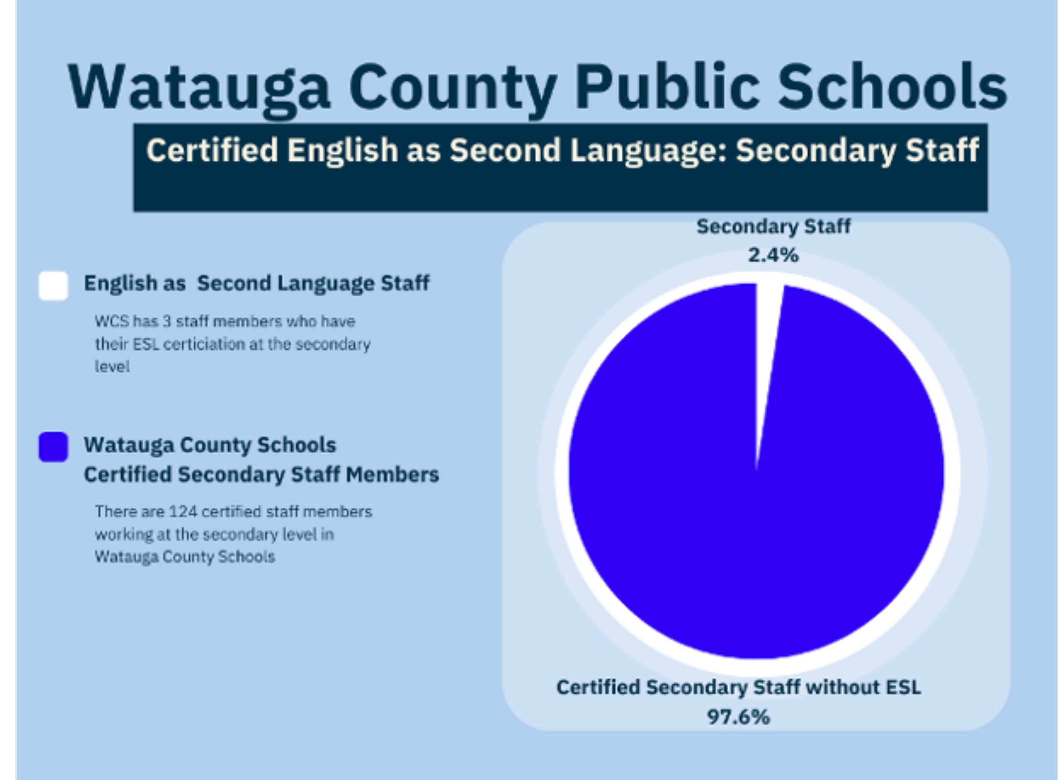
WCS Student & Staff Diversity

Ethnic Distribution	Students	Certified Staff	Difference
American Indian or Alaskan Native	<1%	<1%	Similar
Asian	1.70%	0.00%	-1.70%
Black	1.10%	0.00%	-1.10%
Hispanic	11.50%	1.60%	-9.90%
Pacific Islander	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
White	82.60%	97.50%	14.90%
Two or More Races	2.60%	0.00%	-2.60%

Note. Staff data from WHS/WIHS Staff Surveys. Student data from PowerSchool, October 2023.

Figure C1

WCS Secondary ESL-Certified Secondary Staff



Appendix D

Implementation Timeline

GOAL: Increase graduation rates of Multilingual Learners by building teacher capacity	**Oct. 2023**	**Nov. 2023**	**Dec/ Jan. 23/24**	**Feb. 2024**	**Mar. 2024**	**April 2024**	**May 2024**	**June 2024**	**July 2024**	**Aug. 2024**	**Sept. 2024**	**Oct. 2024**	**Nov. 2024**	**Dec. 2024**
Define our individual schools' cultural competency of teachers to meet the needs of dual language learners. Then determine the best method to develop professional development for teaching staff.														
Define what professional development modules would reach our schools and show experts in our educational communities for feedback.			X											
Pre-survey to teachers on culturally responsive teaching—baseline data to compare with post-survey (for summative).										X				
PLAN: Design team develops PD modules and materials on culturally responsive teaching and instructional strategies using Culturally Responsive Teaching														
DO: Provide PD to teachers at BHS, FHS, and WHS on culturally responsive teaching & instructional teaching strategies														
STUDY: Teachers take a survey after PD on culturally responsive teaching Balancing Measure (unintended outcomes) and Driver (are we building capacity)												X		
Summative assessment post-survey for teachers measuring capacity for culturally responsive teaching. Outcome Measure														

Appendix E

Historically Responsive Literacy Framework

A Framework for Culturally and Historically Inclusive Education

1. Identity
    - Encourages self-awareness and understanding of one's background.
    - Supports students in exploring their cultural, historical, and personal identities.
    - Promotes affirmation and self-expression.

2. Skills
    - Develops traditional literacy skills (reading, writing, speaking, listening).
    - Strengthens critical thinking and problem-solving abilities.
    - Encourages mastery of academic and real-world competencies.

3. Intellect
    - Provides knowledge of diverse histories and contributions.
    - Encourages deep inquiry and research-based learning.
    - Develops a scholarly mindset rooted in historical and cultural awareness.

4. Criticality
    - Teaches students to question, analyze, and challenge systems of power.
    - Develops awareness of social justice and equity issues.
    - Encourages advocacy and informed decision-making.

5. Joy
    - Centers learning in joy, creativity, and empowerment.
    - Encourages students to find personal fulfillment in literacy.
    - Celebrates cultural pride and collective success.

From: Muhammad, G. (2020). *Cultivating Genius: An Equity Framework for Culturally and Historically Responsive Literacy*.

Appendix F

Pre- and Post-Survey Items

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
	1	2	3	4	5
I am able to adapt instruction to meet the needs of my students					
I am able to identify ways that the school culture (e.g., values, norms, and practices) is different from my students' home culture.					
I am able to implement strategies to minimize the effects of the mismatch between my students' home culture and the school culture.					
I am able to use my students' cultural background to help make learning meaningful.					
I am able to revise instructional material to include a better representation of cultural groups.					
I am able to model classroom tasks to enhance English Language Learners' understanding.					
I am able to help students feel like important members of the classroom.					
I am able to use examples that are familiar to students from diverse backgrounds.					
I am able to use my students' prior knowledge to help make sense of new information.					

Appendix G

Final Reflection Questions

1. How did the module help your understanding of cultural competence?
2. How did the module make you think about or rethink ways in which you create lessons for MLs?
3. How successful do you think you were in implementing the strategies presented in the modules? What would improve your implementation?
4. Would you like one-on-one coaching to continue your learning involving MLs?
5. How could the modules be improved to apply the skills and strategies presented?

Appendix H

Reflection Questions by Module

Module 1.1

1. Please share an example of an unspoken and unconscious rule in your culture.
2. What do you agree/disagree with in what you reviewed in this module?
3. What questions do you have about what you reviewed in this module?
4. Which level of culture do you feel educators spend more time incorporating into content and instruction?
5. Which level of culture do you feel causes the most harmful misunderstandings? Please provide an example, if possible.

Module 1.2

1. How is this like our everyday lives?
2. Is there some part of you that the dominant culture requires you to give up on a daily basis?
3. How is this like what we ask of our students in school?
4. How is this like what we ask of our Multilingual Learners in schools?

Module 1.3

1. How can I (an individual) and we (the staff of the school) move to a higher level of cultural proficiency?

Module 1.4

1. Based on the tenets of culturally relevant pedagogy below, respond to the following discussion prompt: If you are asked to implement a culturally relevant pedagogy, what will you to tomorrow to begin this process?

Tenets of Culturally Relevant Pedagogy

- Hold high expectations for all students and help all students learn.
- Contribute to positive academic, attitudinal, and social outcomes for students.
- Use diverse and relevant materials.
- Contribute to the development of classrooms and schools that value diversity.
- Collaborate with colleagues, administrators, parents, and education professionals to ensure student success.

Source: Ladson-Billings, 1998

Module 2.1

1. What are three things you learned in the first part of this module?
2. What two things do you still have questions about?
3. What is one key takeaway you had from the reading?

Module 2.2

1. What is the most significant learning implication from these three theorists that supports MLs?

Module 2.3

1. How might using scaffolding during instruction lead to more accurate results in the assessment of MLs?

Module 3.1

1. As you read through the description of sheltered instruction, what keywords and phrases stood out to you?

2. What is true for your district/building/program in regard to sheltered instruction to support MLs?
3. What may be some aspects that need to be addressed in the future as you work to strengthen your program?

Module 3.2

Read through the strategies below for resilience building. With your partner, group, or own your own, work to come to a consensus as to what the bolded terms mean.

- Educators who understand the **language acquisition process**;
- Valuing the **use of native language** in and out of the classrooms;
- **High expectations** for language learning and **academic achievement**;
- Opportunities to develop **problem solving skills**;
- **Support for undocumented students** and their families; and
- Opportunities and support for **relationship building**.

1. Once you have reviewed the strategies, consider why it is important to build shared definitions of terms. How might we use this strategy with our students?
2. How might that strategy help to build students' English language?

Module 3.3

1. Having watched the demonstration of sheltered instruction, can you identify some of the instructional supports used by the teacher?
2. What other instructional supports could the teacher have used during her lesson?

Module 3.4

1. What characteristics of sheltered content instruction did you see in the lesson plan that you reviewed?

Module 3.5

1. What is one SIOP component area you want to focus on improving in order to meet the needs of your students?

Appendix I

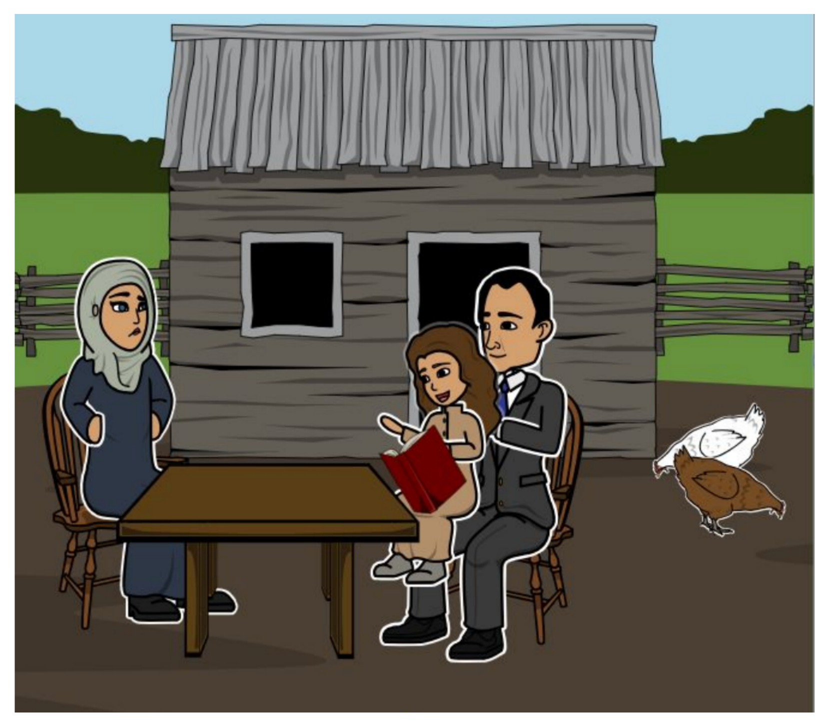
Sample Lesson: *A Thousand Splendid Suns*

Directions:

1. *Show each picture card to the students. Ask the students what they see in each picture. Introduce key vocabulary related to the text.*
2. *Read the sentence strips from the text. Allow students to discuss the meaning with their language peers. Encourage students to ask questions if they encounter unfamiliar words.*
3. *Ask the students to match the sentence strips with the picture cards.*
4. *Ask the student to arrange the picture cards in chronological order to recreate the narrative in the text. Have the students narrate a story using the pictures and the sentence strips. Encourage students to use the vocabulary introduced earlier.*

A Thousand Splendid Suns

Part 1, Chapter 1
Picture Cards & Sentence Strips



Mariam waits to see her father, Jalil, every Thursday, but her mother Nana doesn’t like their relationship.

Mariam feels loved and special when Jalil visits. She enjoys his stories about the city of Herat and feels proud of her father.

While waiting, Mariam accidentally broke her mother's cherished tea set. Nana is angry. She calls Mariam a clumsy harami.

Appendix J

Sample Lesson: Chapter 1 Vocabulary

A Thousand Splendid Suns [Adapted Text]
Part 1, Chapter 1 Questions

Review the new vocabulary words. / Revisa las nuevas palabras del vocabulario.

Word/Palabra	***Translation/Traducción***	***Picture/Imagen***
restless	inquieta	
preoccupied	preocupada	
tea set	juego de té	
accidentally	accidentalmente	
clumsy	torpe	