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Empowering Educators: Enhancing Teacher Efficacy In Rural Schools Through Innovative Professional Development For Teachers Of English Language Learners

Jody Lynn Maanum

EMPOWERING EDUCATORS: ENHANCING TEACHER EFFICACY IN RURAL SCHOOLS THROUGH INNOVATIVE PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT FOR TEACHERS OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS.

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Jody L. Maanum
November 2023

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For those in the field of education, the intrinsic desire for lifelong and continual learning is deeply embedded. As an educator, I have personally and professionally embraced this desire, which continually empowers me to cultivate a culture of curiosity and continual learning for myself and for those whom I teach. This journey certainly has not been easy, nor has it been without challenge, but my dream became a reality because of those in my life who played a vital role in supporting me.

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ABSTRACT

The National Center for Educational Statistics' [NCES] 2021 annual report indicates that there are currently over five million English Language Learners (ELLs) in U.S. schools. Of additional importance to this statistic is that the growing wave of diversity is no longer primarily settling in the larger metropolitan areas, but ELLs and their families are more recently finding themselves in geographically rural areas. The school systems in these rural areas face unique challenges in meeting the needs of the growing diverse populations, with many teachers in these systems lacking best practice knowledge and the confidence and competence needed to meet the diverse academic, social, and emotional needs of their new students.

Offering learning opportunities for teachers is the typical response from administrators when the call for professional growth arises. Unfortunately, the traditional professional development methods used are often ineffective for adult learners, resulting in the limited influence of transferring the new learning into practice. This study aimed to determine how learner agency, through innovative professional development methods, influenced teachers' self-efficacy to implement new knowledge into classroom routines.

Keywords: rural America, English language learners, professional development, self-agency, adult learner

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Demands on Education in Rural America

All schools in the United States share one common goal: providing every child access to high-quality education to pursue meaningful life goals. If only education in America was this easy, especially in rural America. While receiving a quality education should be deemed an expected human right for all students, unfortunately, the experience afforded to many students educated in our nation's rural areas is less than excellent (Adams & Wood, 2015; Fishman, 2015). Inadequate fiscal resources, limited human capital, and geographic isolation create significant barriers, making it difficult for many rural schools to meet that one common goal (Culbertson & Billig, 2015).

Growing Diversity of Student Population in Rural Schools

The National Center for Educational Statistic's [NCES] 2021 annual report indicates that there are currently over five million English Language Learners (ELLs) in U.S. schools, with over 75% of those students speaking Spanish as their first language. Of additional importance to this statistic is that the growing wave of diversity is no longer primarily settling in the larger metropolitan areas, but ELLs and their families are more recently finding themselves in geographically rural areas. Because of this, Reed (2019) reports that in these rural settings, the rapid increase in racial and ethnic diversity has significantly impacted the diversity of the student populations within the school systems. These school systems face unique challenges in meeting the needs of the growing diverse

populations, with many teachers lacking best practice knowledge and the confidence and competence needed to meet these students' academic, social, and emotional needs. While the classroom teachers, ethically and professionally, are eager to know how best to meet the growing diversity of needs within their classrooms, limited prior training and experiences, unchartered planning, pedagogical uncertainty, and lack of confidence all impact, often negatively, student outcomes (Bouck, 2018).

Meeting the Needs of English Language Learners

When an initiative or area of need is identified in public schools, the customary practice is to address these needs through professional development opportunities. Unfortunately, the determined content and methods through which the content is received are far too often ineffective in driving the application of the new learning into practice (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017; Darling-Hammond & Richardson, 2009). In the case of rural schools that are currently doing their best to react to the increasingly diverse needs of their learners, if teachers were allowed to self-identify their cultural awareness and competency practices and then were given a voice in what topics they further develop and choice in the methods of doing so, perhaps their learning would be more effectively applied to their English Language Learners (ELLs) focused teaching practices.

English Language Learner or ELL is the term most commonly used to describe individuals for whom English is not their native language. These individuals, however, are in the process of developing proficiency in the English language. Baker and Wright (2021) explain that the label is limiting in that it does not acknowledge the student's first language and would prefer the use of the term "Multilingual Learner" (MLL) as a general term to emphasize students who are in the process of developing more than one language. Although the term "Multilingual Learner" (MLL) is preferred and deemed more

inclusive, this study will use ELL to reference the multilingual population, as this reference is most commonly reported in current research and literature and most academic discussions related to this topic. It is also likely that the general population, at this time, will better understand the term ELL.

Given the increasing ELL population in demographically rural areas, teachers, who have rarely had to consider using diverse culturally appropriate practices in their classrooms in the past, are now having to do so more thoughtfully. It is commonly noted that teachers are stronger in their awareness of culturally competent practices but less confident in applying that knowledge to their teaching practices and classroom routines (Bacon, 2018; Ross, 2012). Teachers must be culturally responsive to the needs of their students, and current practices in teacher development need to be revised to do so. Far too often, professional development topics and methods are universally determined for all teachers, typically by administration or the central office, employing a one-size-fits-all model. (Darling-Hammond & Richardson, 2009; Darling-Hammond et al., 2017).

Current Professional Development Practices

The methods of effective professional development have been debated for decades, with ineffective practices usually prevailing. In 2007, Fullan described the typical external practices used to impact instructional change as rarely "powerful enough, specific enough, or sustained enough to alter the culture of the classroom and school" (p.35). To transform these previously utilized ineffective practices, in 2015, the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) reauthorized the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) from 1965. ESSA placed a long-awaited definition of professional development within federal educational policy. This definition asserts the significance of continued

educator learning as the key to helping students succeed with high academic standards (Leaning Forward, 2017).

All students depend on teachers to provide rigorous and impactful instruction that addresses individual student needs. The ethical responsibility of practicing teachers is to grow professionally and develop a practical skill set through which the instruction for all learners can be supported (Cadero-Smith, 2020). Effective professional development opportunities are necessary to equip teachers with the skills to provide high-quality education; however, research has shown that professional development does not always translate to solid learning outcomes (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017).

Empowering Leaner Agency through Professional Development

According to Darling-Hammond et al. (2017), the field of education is constantly changing. Changes in the world, changes in the local community, advances in science and brain research, and technological developments are just a few examples that morph and shape educational practices and drive the need for continued and ongoing teacher professional learning. Teachers are adult learners who have been explicitly trained to teach child learners. This pedagogical training in teacher preparation programs and continuing education training for practicing teachers is necessary to ensure children and young adults receive instruction in developmentally appropriate ways. Far too often, however, child learner instructional methods are utilized in professional development experiences to support the development of adult learners; these practices are typically met with resistance and frequently result in ineffective learning experiences. Adult learners, instead, better benefit when allowed to "make free or independent choices, to engage in autonomous actions, and to exercise judgment in the interest of others and oneself" (Campbell, 2012, p. 183). This is known as learner agency.

Learner agency supports the opportunity in one's learning for creativity, motivation, well-being, and happiness (Billett et al., 2006; Larsen-Freeman, 2019), which is strongly connected to autonomy, self-fulfillment and a force for change (Calvert, 2016; McGregor & Frodsham, 2022). It is through the opportunity for teachers to have voice and choice in their learning that agency is provided. Professional development voice and choice allow learners to drive their own learning, often in response to their students' needs. Through this opportunity for agency, teacher professional judgment is honored, and their expertise is valued and recognized. Learner agency drives intrinsic motivation, moving one from the knowledge of theory to practice. Daniel Pink's book Drive (2009) highlights the ineffectiveness of motivating using carrots and sticks (rewards and punishments) and spotlights the importance of offering autonomy, opportunities for self-direction, and connection to others for learning. When activities are seen as beneficial and interesting, learners become more actively engaged and interested in accomplishing the task (Kelly & Fogarty, 2015; Ryan & Deci, 2000).

Purpose of the Study

Recent growth in the population of multilingual language-speaking children in rural Minnesota schools has required immediate and reactive responses to meet the needs of multilingual students and their families. The responses of the school districts have typically been, when able, to provide traditional professional development sessions targeting the latest issues, in an attempt to place a patch on the most significantly reported need. Unfortunately, research studying the impact of traditional professional development practices most commonly used in educational settings consistently identify ineffective, inefficient and unproductive results. Of significant concern is the awareness that these

particularly poor practices do not lead to teacher growth and development nor positive impacts on student outcomes, yet they continue to be utilized (Patfield, et al., 2023; Wei, et al., 2010).

The purpose of this study explored the impact that learner agency has on teachers' self-efficacy in implementing multilingual learner strategies after participating in a professional development initiative offering learner's voice and choice. The study is intended to offer alternative and innovative approaches to professional development to enhance effectiveness and improve confidence in supporting multilingual learners.

Significance of This Study

Professional development opportunities are designed to support the knowledge and skill-based needs of practicing teachers. It is a professional and ethical obligation of practicing teachers to continually grow throughout their tenure and develop their knowledge of content and competency in implementing pedagogical routines that will effectively meet the needs of their students. It is additionally necessary to ensure that the topics of the professional development opportunities that target areas of knowledge or skill-based insufficiencies from which teachers can learn are thoughtfully designed to meet the interest needs of the participants.

The geographic area in where this study was conducted was in a very small demographically rural region of west central Minnesota. School districts are small by nature and according to the Minnesota Department of Education data center, the PreK – 12th grade student populations in the three districts involved in the study range from 379 – 1046 students. While on average, 95% of students enrolled in this trio of rural districts

do identify English as their native language, there are 5% of the population who are identifying as multilingual (Minnesota Report Card, n.d.).

Rural districts face numerous challenges when tasked with providing an equitable and appropriate education for all students. Federal and state funding inequities, challenges with teacher recruitment and retention, and access to materials and resources are significant. While they are welcoming these students and families into their communities and school systems, they are finding themselves faced with not only the typically occurring rural school challenges but also with determining how best to support students whose native language is not English. These school systems face unique challenges in meeting the needs of the growing diverse populations as many of the teachers in these systems lack best practice knowledge and the confidence and competence needed to meet these students' academic, social, and emotional needs (Reed, 2019; Glover et al., 2016). The need for professional development is necessary, and the need for effective professional development is critical.

Research Question

This study is designed to explore the following research question:

How do practicing teachers in rural settings describe their experiences of participating in the Multilingual Professional Development Academy (MLPDA)? Specifically, how do they describe their self-efficacy for teaching multilingual learners, their application of new learning, and their perception of professional development?

Theoretical Frameworks

Theory of Constructivism

In the field of education, teachers are ethically and professionally required to evolve, modify, adjust, and accommodate their practices to meet the ever-changing needs of their students and advancements in educational practices. Therefore, teachers are placed on this lifelong learning endeavor to remain informed and competent in their professional roles (Merriam & Bierema, 2014). As the Theory of Constructivism describes, learning is the construction of meaning through experience, occurring when learners attempt to make sense of what is happening in their current environment. It is learner-centered, where learners actively see meaning and are not empty vessels just waiting to be filled (Driscoll, 2005; Gao, 2021).

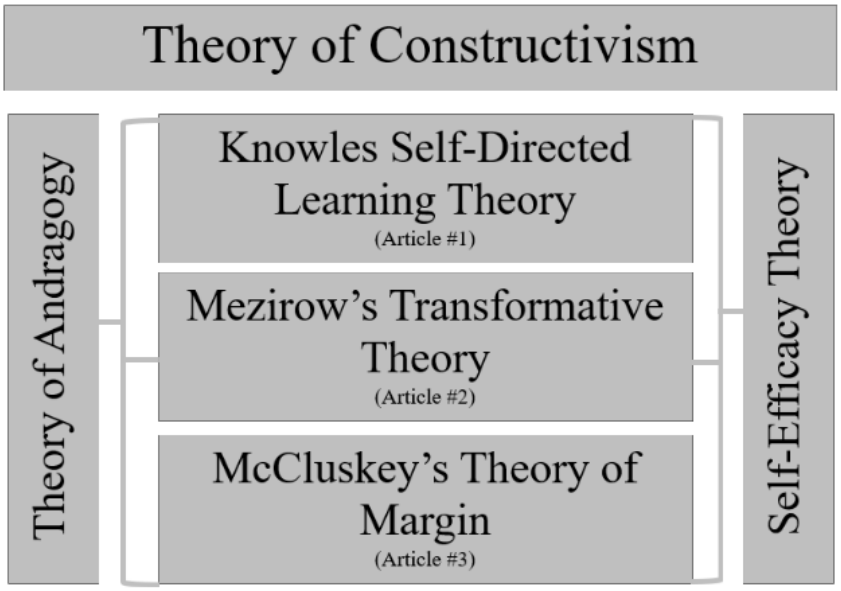
Well-known theorists Jean Piaget and John Dewey contributed to the constructivism theory by suggesting that the basis for genuine learning is through experiences with one's environment. A growing reservoir of experiences accumulates as one matures, and from this, knowledge is constructed at a more sophisticated level. According to Merriam and Bierema, "Constructivism is the foundation to understanding much of adult learning theory and practice." (2014, p. 37).

To address appropriate and productive practices for teachers as learners, Knowles (1983) and Moberg (2006) each attempt to differentiate between pedagogy (child-learning) and andragogy (adult learning), further describing the need for adult education to be tailored differently than child-directed education. "Andragogy is a major theory/model/approach to understanding and planning instruction for adult learners" (Merriam & Bierema, 2014, p. 59). Recognizing the foundations from where these

frameworks develop will help to intentionally shape the professional learning experiences and opportunities offered to teachers. Knowles (1975) describes that as adults mature, they become increasingly self-directed in their learning, requiring more of a facilitator and less of an instructor or a classroom. Learning through experiential opportunities ignites motivation and builds one's belief in their skills. It is through this theoretical framework lens of adult learning that the following conceptual frameworks emerge. These concepts, shown below in Figure 1 (Maanum, 2023) will be expanded upon in the literature review.

Figure 1

Empowering Educators Theoretical Framework



Knowles Theory of Andragogy

Developed by Malcolm Knowles (1975), the theory of andragogy emphasizes self-directed learning while acknowledging that adults have unique characteristics, needs, and motivations as learners. The theory presents that adults are more likely to be motivated to learn if they see immediate relevance and applicability of the knowledge to

their lives and experiences. Because adults bring a wealth of life-experiences into their learning, prior experiences and knowledge are important highlights of the theory as well. Knowles differentiates between andragogy and pedagogy in that andragogy promotes a learner-centered approach, unlike pedagogy which tends to take on a more teacher-centered approach.

Knowles (1998) recognizes that adults are not merely passive recipients of knowledge but instead must be active participants in the planning and evaluation of learning. The Theory of Andragogy critically influences the way in which programs are designed and delivered to adult learners by emphasizing autonomy, self-motivation and practical application of knowledge.

Knowles Self-Directed Learning

A theory embedded in constructivism, and first given a comprehensible definition by Allen Tough and Malcolm Knowles in the early 1970's, is self-directed learning (SDL). Self-directed learning is the notion that learners control their own learning, deciding on what and how to learn (Merriam & Bierema, 2014). Merriam (2001) posits that the goal of self-directed learning is to develop a learner's capacity to be self-directed, additionally taking responsibility for one's own learning. SDL has been described both as an attribute that one possesses as well as a process in which one participates (Candy, 1991; Zee & Koomen, 2016). As a personal attribute, Brockett and Hiemstra (1991) suggest that when the learner takes responsibility for their learning, there will be a positive association with high self-efficacy.

In describing SDL as a process in which one participates, Knowles (1975) describes this as an opportunity "in which individuals take the initiative, with or without

the help of others, in diagnosing their learning needs, formulating learning goals, identifying human and material resources for learning, choosing and implementing appropriate learning strategies, and evaluating those learning outcomes" (p. 18).

While the goal for learners is to become self-driven, according to Grow (1991, 1994), one must not expect SDL to be accomplished individually at all times. The facilitator of the experience does have a role in monitoring and customizing the learning to meet the learner's needs. If something new is being introduced, which may be unfamiliar to the learner, perhaps the facilitator becomes more directive, offering clarification or feedback if needed. If, on the other hand, the learners are situated to handle the learning opportunity independently, perhaps the facilitator's role is to be a consultant and resource provider (Merriam & Bierema, 2014).

During innovative professional learning opportunities, it would be necessary for adult learners to have the opportunity to direct their own learning. This may occur by offering topics from which the learner could study. It may also require the facilitator to design the learning paths, but the route in which the learner takes would be individually chosen.

Mezirow's Transformative Theory

Mezirow's Transformative Learning theory also recognizes the acquired experiences that adults use as frames of reference or structure through which understanding is gained from experiences from which they function. These acquired experiences include "associations, concepts, values, feelings and conditioned responses" which define their life (Mezirow, 1997, p.5). Once these lines of action are set, human nature permits the rejection of ideas that fail to fit preconceptions or see specific ideas as

unworthy of consideration. Mezirow (1997) further illustrates that unless disrupted, adult learners will develop solid habits of mind and points of view, which can be challenging to change.

In the education field, decades of research have been devoted, studies linked, and mandates attached to student achievement. As described by Martin et al. (2014), such directives from the top down have required attention paid to rethinking, reshaping, and changing teachers' instructional practices. Research has also shown that changing instructional practices, habits of mind, points of view, or ways of thinking is not easy (Martin et al., 2019). Examining how adults, as educators, transform their practices to lead to positive student outcomes aligns with Mezirow's (1997) transformational learning theory by exploring how adults make changes in their behavior, practices, and beliefs.

. Mezirow explains that as adults, "We have a strong tendency to reject ideas that fail to fit our preconceptions, labeling those ideas as unworthy of consideration" (Mezirow, 2003, p. 5). Transformation of adult learning occurs when learners face circumstances that allow movement toward a more self-reflective and inclusive frame of reference.

McClusky's Theory of Margin

In 1963, Howard McClusky contributed to the field of adult education by offering his Theory of Margin. This theory highlighted the impact of motivation on adult learning, describing motivation as a measure of a learner's resources (power) compared to demands (load). Power is described as "the resources, i.e., abilities, possessions, positions, allies, etc., which a person can command in coping with load" (McClusky,

1970, p. 27), and load is defined as the personal and social demands required by a person to maintain autonomy and self-control (Merriam & Bierema, 2014).

Margin is described as the power that is left over after the load has taken what it requires. Margin is essential for human well-being and allows one to feel motivated to invest one's power into projects and experiences that lead to learning. While undoubtedly applicable for all adult learning, McClusky's Theory of Margin effectively describes a relevance to teaching. Hiemstra and Sisco (1990) and now more currently Biney (2022) both point out that facilitators of learning, or teachers, can unknowingly create a heavier "load" for adult learners by assuming a more traditional and authoritarian stance. Autonomy and choice in learning, which removes the load and offers power for learners to engage in educational activities, is seen as an impactful way to motivate learners. It is imperative for "instructors to carefully craft the learning environment to avoid creating additional load for learners" (Merriam & Bierema, 2014, p. 155). McClusky's work provides insight into adult learning, which requires balancing the energy needed and the amount available.

Bandura's Self-Efficacy Theory

Badura's self-efficacy theory (1977) refers to the beliefs that one holds regarding their ability to execute behaviors necessary for preferred or desired outcomes. Self-efficacy reflects the confidence one has in the ability to exert control over one's motivation, behavior and social environment. The self-efficacy theory is clear to state that success of one person does not indicate exceptionality over one who is currently not successful. The self-efficacy theory, instead suggests that individuals who are not experiencing success, have possibly not been provided with learning opportunities or

modeling of examples that would support that learner in developing high levels of self-efficacy (Gallagher, 2012; Zee & Koomen, 2016).

In educational settings, it is common for teachers to see others "seemingly" successful at things in which they are not. These situations, if not managed effectively, reduce confidence and decelerate motivation. By using innovative professional learning opportunities that foster self-agency, learners can identify areas in which they would like to grow, select the methods to do so, and are more likely to experience a positive impact on self-efficacy.

Some have argued the credibility of this theory, questioning the idea of relying only on one's belief to create a desired outcome, as if one wishes for good things enough, it will happen. Gallagher (2012) explains that it is firmly recognized, however, that self-efficacy is not synonymous with positive thinking. Self-efficacy links positive outcomes with the opportunities of experiencing or witnessing success. Exposure to successful outcomes cultivates continued positive outcome results. It is through engagement and work that self-efficacy grows. In supporting teachers in professional learning, Bandura's self-efficacy theory (1977) exposes itself through positive learning results. Self-efficacy continues to flourish as success and accomplishments are experienced and validated through learning opportunities.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

Rural America Education

All schools in the United States share one common goal: providing every child access to high-quality education and the pursuit of meaningful life goals. It is further expected that highly competent, prepared, and qualified teachers are equipped with significant levels of self-efficacy (Cruz et al., 2019; Nyangau, 2019; Adams & Woods, 2015), deep content knowledge, and well-developed instructional skills (Cadero-Smith, 2020) to meet the needs of all learners. While receiving a quality education should be deemed an expected human right for all students, unfortunately, the experience afforded to many students educated in our nation's rural areas is less than excellent (Adams & Wood, 2015; Fishman, 2015). It is not because the teachers in rural areas are inferior or do not share the common goal and expectations that teachers in nonrural areas hold for their students. There are barriers exclusive to rural schools that are real. If the goal shared by all US schools is meant to include all children, these barriers must be addressed.

What constitutes "rural?" As Tieken and Montgomery (2021) report, there is no single, agreed-upon definition for the term, and the federal government and individual states abide by their own. Typically, the definition is tied to "land use, population size or density, and proximity to urban areas." (p.7). The distinction is typically described using the terms urban or rural.

According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2021), rural youth collectively represent nearly 25% of the student population in public schools in the United States. While rural communities are diverse, they are not all in crisis. Twenty-five percent of rural students, however, do live in poverty and face significant resource deficits at home (Showalter et al., 2017; Fishman, 2015). Showalter et al. (2017) explain that rural issues, such as poverty and mental health concerns, are often overlooked by policymakers, given a lack of understanding of the realities of rural living (Fishman, 2015).

School systems within these rural areas face significant challenges that negatively impact their ability to reach the common goal: providing all students with a high-quality education. Barriers of most concern include inadequate fiscal resources (Roza, 2015), limited human capital (Gagnon & Mattingly, 2015), and geographic isolation (Glover et al., 2016).

Inadequate Fiscal Resources

Insufficient funding plagues rural schools due to decreased property tax revenues generated from low-density populations (Culbertson & Billig, 2016; Forner, 2016) and difficulties with passing local levies and bond referenda (Kamrath & Brunner, 2014). Outmigration and reduced census in rural areas diminish student populations, resulting in fewer federal and state dollars for schools (Forner, 2016).

Although there are federal and state funding appropriations for school districts, access to many of the resources requires a capacity to implement programming that falls outside the capabilities of most rural school districts. For example, Race to the Top, a more recently noted federal public school reform grant, included unmanageable complex

implementation requirements due to limited capacity and inequitable scalability for rural school districts that many did not even apply (Ganon & Mattingly, 2015).

Limited Human Capital

Inadequate fiscal resources and shallow employment pools from which to draw limit the human capital available in rural schools. Lack of administrative support for superintendents (Augustine-Shaw, 2015; Hansen, 2018) and challenges with teacher recruitment and retention (Culbertson & Billig, 2016; Gagnon & Mattingly, 2015) negatively impact rural schools. Administratively understaffed rural superintendents find the demands for their time in the lunchroom serving breakfast, in a classroom teaching a math lesson because the teacher is sick, driving a bus route at the end of the day to get kids home from school, and sweeping the basketball court at a game in the evening to ensure a safe environment in which to play. These described activities and many more are typically ones that individuals did not anticipate upon pursuing an advanced degree to obtain a superintendent's license. Limited human capital within rural school districts requires all hands-on deck for the system to function. This can, in turn, limit the superintendent's availability to focus on long-range strategic planning, evaluation of high-quality instruction for all students, and the development of solid, inclusive cultures and environments in which all students feel accepted and from which they will succeed.

Geographic Isolation

Geographic isolation weaves its way through the previously reported issues of inadequate fiscal resources and limited human capital to present another layer of complexity for rural schools (Culbertson & Billig, 2015; Glover et al., 2016). Geographic isolation is a simultaneous effect of rurality. Because the school is rural, it is also

geographically isolated. Because a school is geographically isolated, access to material resources such as curriculum, programs, technological advancements, and even the internet may be limited. This geographic remoteness distances rural schools from high human capital areas, creating challenges in recruiting teachers. Once teachers are recruited, geographic isolation does impact teacher retention. Gagnon and Mattingly (2015) do indicate that rural schools with a tighter, more transparent connection between school and community better serve the teachers within the schools; however, too often, feelings of discouragement, loneliness, unsatisfaction, and prohibited professional growth influence a teacher's decision to leave.

Growing Diversity of Student Population in Rural Schools:

Over the past decade, the United States population has grown 7.4 percent to 331.4 million, as the 2020 U.S. Census reported. According to Johnson (2021), this growth represents a significant increase in the country's racial diversity, particularly in children. The largest racial subgroup, 57.8 percent of the nation's residents, report to be non-Hispanic Whites with 42.4 percent of the population reporting to be other than non-Hispanic Whites. This is a 5.9 percent population gain among groups other than non-Hispanic Whites. "Children are at the leading edge of the nation's growing diversity" (Johnson, 2021, p. 2). According to the 2020 U.S. Census, just over half (52.7 percent) of the population of children under eighteen belong to a minority group. This is an 11.8 percent increase from a decade ago.

The National Center for Educational Statistic's [NCES] 2021 annual report indicates that there are currently over five million English Language Learners (ELLs) in U.S. schools, with over 75% of those students speaking Spanish as their first language.

Of additional importance to this statistic is that the growing wave of diversity is no longer primarily settling in the larger metropolitan areas, but ELLs and their families are more recently finding themselves in geographically rural areas. Economic needs and changes, including the hiring of an increasing number of migrant and immigrant workers, have played a significant role in the diversification of rural America (Howley et al., 2014).

Reed (2019) reports that the rapid increase in racial and ethnic diversity that is changing the rural geographic landscape is also significantly impacting the diversity of the student populations within the school systems. Since 2000, 80 percent of rural population growth is from ethnic and minority groups (Battelle for Kids, 2016). These school systems face unique challenges in meeting the needs of the growing diverse populations, with many teachers lacking best practice knowledge and the confidence and competence needed to meet these students' academic, social, and emotional needs. While the classroom teachers ethically and professionally are eager to know how best to meet the growing diversity of needs within their classrooms, limited prior training and experiences, unchartered planning, pedagogical uncertainty, and lack of confidence far too often negatively impact student outcomes (Bouck, 2018).

ELL Learners Defined

Misconceptions of English Language Learners (ELLs) can lead to misunderstandings regarding the use of best educational practices and instructional strategies to support learning growth and development. The NCES (2021) reports Spanish as being the most common first language spoken among the approximately 3.7 million English Language Learners enrolled in public schools. This represents nearly 75% of all ELLs and 7.6 percent of the approximate 10% of total ELLs in public K-12 students. It is critical to respect the diverse backgrounds from which these students originate, honor the

native languages they speak, and appropriately respond to the social, emotional, and educational needs they embody. Individual unique learning profiles must be considered, understanding that there is no one instructional path appropriate to meet all needs (Ossa, 2022).

Fensterwald (2016) lists the following criteria for how ELLs are federally defined:

- aged 3-21
- enrolled or preparing to enroll in an elementary or secondary school
- was not born in the United States OR whose native language is a language other than English; and
- where difficulties in speaking, reading, writing, or understanding the English language may be sufficient to deny the individual
    - the ability to meet the state's proficient level of achievement on state assessments
    - the ability to successfully achieve in classrooms where the language of instruction is English or
    - the opportunity to participate fully in society.

Screening and Identification. The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), the nation's educational law committed to equal opportunities for all students, was signed into action in 2015 and replaced the previous education law, "No Child Left Behind" (NCLB). ESSA is the reauthorization of the 1965 Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) and is aimed to ensure that all students in the United States have equal access to high-quality instruction. Regarding the education of ELLs, ESSA now requires

states to use a standardized criterion measure to identify ELLs for service and to exit students when special language services are no longer needed. ESSA additionally allows states to select from previously developed or develop for themselves an English language proficiency assessment, which will be used annually for all students receiving ELL support (Baker & Wright, 2021; Sugarman, 2018).

Federal law requires the identification of all ELLs. The process in which to determine this is determined individually state by state. A home language survey is the most common tool as it is easily presented to families at the time of registration. Zacarian (2011) indicates that a home survey is not intended to decide the eligibility for ELL support services but instead is used to screen students to determine who uses a language other than English at home. If the answer to any question on the home language survey indicates that a child uses a language other than English outside of school, the child must be assessed to determine ELL eligibility.

Upon determining the use of a non-English primary language in the home, students will be assessed on their ability to listen, speak, read, and write in English. It is common to see students test proficiently in listening and speaking but not in reading and writing. The assessment aims to identify a student's need for ELL services, establish an ELL's English proficiency level, and determine the number of ELLs in a district. Individual states are given the authority to determine which ELL identification assessment is utilized to elicit such results (Baker & Wright, 2021; Zacarian, 2011).

Appropriate Instructional Principles and Practice. School districts reactively respond to teachers' critical and requested needs while determining which tools, strategies, and instructional practices are appropriate and inclusive of Ell's language and

culture. Baker and Wright (2021) suggest that the highest priority is ensuring teachers accept and understand their students' represented cultures, heritages, and languages, seeing diversity certainly as a right of students but even more powerfully as a resource from which all can learn.

Gupta (2019) describes six recommended principles of second language learning to be embedded into practices that have been sculpted from second language learning research. These six principles emerged as critical components to designing successful opportunities that will positively impact learning for ELLs.

Know Your Students. It is essential to take the time to learn about every student in the classroom. Building relationships and establishing rapport will not only lead to trust in the process of learning but will also allow educators to respond in informed ways with instruction and motivate student learning (Gupta, 2019). According to Baker and Wright (2021), motivation to learn will directly influence the levels of proficiency when developing a second language. Students and their families feel valued by the school system when teachers are genuinely interested in their backgrounds. Efforts such as attempting to say hello to a family in their non-English native language show a desire to connect to their culture. Any attempt exhibited by teachers to show respect, honor for and preservation of a family's first language and culture will epitomize sensitivity and a welcoming attitude. Creating a student and family-friendly environment while valuing the use of one's home language sends the message that multilingualism is an asset from which all can learn and grow (Baker & Wright, 2021).

Create a Welcoming Classroom and School Environment. A welcoming environment is an expectation of all classrooms and teachers. Intentionally creating a safe

place where students can learn is essential in helping ELLs build confidence, increase stamina, and maintain motivation. While it is not only important to afford a welcoming and comfortable environment within individual classrooms but also just as important to build positive environments throughout the school-wide community (Gupta, 2019).

Building Background Knowledge. All learners bring to the learning environment prior knowledge. Recognizing and building upon this knowledge and the experiences from which the knowledge originated is essential. All children come from varied backgrounds and cultures from which teachers can draw, celebrating the cultural filter through which the information is described and shared. Failure to utilize this background knowledge in learning will not only provide additional barriers for ELLs who are eager to make connections but will also allow for missed learning opportunities for all others (Baker & Wright, 2021; Cain & Oakhill, 2011; Gupta & Lee, 2015).

Provide Comprehensible Input to Build Vocabulary. Learning a language does not require the same process as learning geography or philosophy. It would simply be inappropriate to think that one can come "to know a language" just by reading a book about it. Krashen (1985) describes this idea as "comprehensible input," which describes things that are heard or read. Krashen is careful to specify that one cannot just read or listen to anything to improve language but must be immersed in things that can be understood or comprehensible. It is vital for teachers to make messages easily understandable for students through strategies such as preteaching vocabulary, explaining definitions of words, and using realia, pictures, and cognates to which students can connect (Baker & Wright, 2021; Ellis, 2015; Lightbown & Spada, 2013).

***Include Frequent Opportunities for Interaction and Discussion*.** Peer learning can be a powerful tool in the classroom for ELLs. Encouraging and presenting opportunities for interaction and collaboration with peers will provide language use and practice for ELLs and build on classroom community. Although a very powerful strategy, it is a challenge for ELLs initially. Guidance and scaffolding will be needed (Baker & Wright, 2021; Ellis, 2015). Baker and Wright (2021) additionally recommend giving students lots of practice with group work while being intentional with grouping strategies. Allowing opportunities for ELLs to work with peers who speak their language as well as native English speakers are influential grouping mechanisms. It is also recommended, when appropriate, to encourage the use of the student's home language through the output of speaking and writing to deepen learning of content.

Use Multiple Modalities During Instruction. All students learn better when they can engage in their learning through preferred modalities or styles. A modality is a way in which content is introduced, practiced or interacted with, providing diverse presentations and experiences using different senses and skills throughout a lesson. Among many modes of instruction, technology is allowing for a myriad of scaffolded platforms, offering meaningful opportunities for engagement and creativity while navigating the language barrier. Technological advances have made it easier for materials to be translated and effective uses of social media platforms offer opportunities for online forums for learning and discussion (Gupta, 2019).

Educating English Language Learners. ELLs, unfortunately, are victims of teacher quality gap. Significant and imperative discussions in the research and detailed educational policy articulate the essence that "highly qualified teachers" are critical to

narrowing the achievement gap. Unfortunately, "what constitutes a highly qualified teacher of ELLs" has been left out of the conversation, leaving some to suggest that just being a "good teacher" is not good enough for ELLs (Gándara & Santibañez, 2016, p. 32). Mandates across the country are placing increased focus and heightened demands on educating teachers to address educational inequity to help align the teaching profession with the multilingual realities found in today's classrooms.

For school districts who are finding their population of diverse and non-native English-speaking students on the rise, they are left to ask, "Is a good teacher a good teacher for all?" English learners present unique needs to reach academic expectations that even good teachers, without the proper training, will fail to meet (Patton et al., 2015). While these demands are certainly not exclusive to rural teachers, the increase in diverse student populations in rural areas finds many good teachers feeling limited in skills, unprepared, and asking for help (Hoover & Erickson, 2015). In addition, the challenges of teacher recruitment and retention in rural areas not only limit availability for generally licensed teachers, but even more inhibits the access to those more specialized to work with ELLs. Administrators are responding to the needs of their teachers in the best way they know possible, through teacher professional development.

Teacher Professional Development

Professional Development refers to educational experiences designed to improve practice and outcomes and is seen as an obligation and opportunity for change and confirmation of current practice. While formats for professional development have changed considerably, one will still find in school districts throughout the nation the one-size-fits-all models, removed from contexts of schools and students and focusing on topics unrelated to teaching, learning or the current needs of students. The potential for

these formats to result in a change in teacher behavior or an increase in students' performance is unlikely.

Hargreaves and Fullan (2012) discuss the importance of professional development being placed in the hands of teachers, indicating that teaching is not technical, but needs reality to make it applicable. Allowing teachers the freedom of voice and choice to determine their own growth needs, set their own goals, identify what they need to meet those goals, and be allowed the space and time needed to do so is the basis of teacher development and what Patton et al. describe as *professional capital* (2015).

> "Developing professional capital is about helping people [teachers] to help themselves and help their students more effectively; it is not about manipulating them into complying with externally imposed requirements or delivering someone else's vision" (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012, p.1).

Attributes of Effective Professional Development

The methods of effective professional development have been debated for decades, with ineffective practices typically prevailing. In 2007, Fullan described the typical external practices used to impact instructional change as rarely "powerful enough, specific enough, or sustained enough to alter the culture of the classroom and school" (p.35). To transform these previously utilized ineffective practices, in 2015, the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) reauthorized the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) from 1965. ESSA placed a long-awaited definition of professional development within federal educational policy. This definition asserts the significance of continued educator learning as the key to helping students succeed with high academic standards (Leaning Forward, 2017).

All students depend on teachers to provide rigorous and impactful instruction that addresses individual student needs. The ethical responsibility of practicing teachers is to grow professionally and develop the most effective skill set required, through which the instruction for all learners can be supported (Cadero-Smith, 2020). Compelling professional development opportunities are necessary to equip teachers with the skills needed to provide a high-quality education; however, research has shown that teacher professional development does not frequently translate to solid learning outcomes (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017).

The 2015 ESSA definition acknowledges two critical truths about professional development. First, there is no one-size-fits-all solution for teacher learning. The new definition gives states, school districts, and teachers more freedom to choose professional development to best suit their needs. This includes using strategies such as scaffolding and differentiation for adult learners. Secondly, the new definition allows learners a chance to process and ask questions to be successful. “The ESSA states that PD should be ongoing and job-embedded, allowing teachers the time they need to actually learn” (Bednarick, 2018, p.1).

A powerful inclusion into the professional development definition was listing many types of professional learning that ‘may’ be what an educator chooses from which to learn, opening the door for educators to determine and choose their own learning paths. The intent is for educators to identify their needs based on their students' social, emotional, or academic needs and to engage in activities and experiences that will hold them accountable and build their educator capacity (Leaning Forward, 2017).

Adults bring with them previous experiences and knowledge that must be recognized and endorsed to enhance new learning. Designing professional development opportunities for adults must not only address *how* teachers learn but also *what* they learn about. Respectful acknowledgement of adult learning, also known as andragogy, must be considered when planning and preparing opportunities from which adult learners will grow and develop.

Respecting Adult Learners

Andragogy. The term andragogy was introduced to American educators in 1968 by Malcolm S. Knowles. While the term "andragogy" was initially coined in Germany over 150 years ago, it was Knowles who introduced the word and its context to the adult education field. Andragogy comes from the Greek word aner, meaning *man*, and agogus, meaning "leader of", therefore, andragogy refers to helping *adults* learn, and is most often referred to as a learner-centered approach (Knowles, 1983).

Moberg's (2006) article titled "Pedagogy is for Kids: Andragogy is for Adults" and Knowles' (1983) article titled "Adults Are Not Grown-up Children as Learners" attempt to differentiate between pedagogy (child-learning) and andragogy (adult learning), and further describe the needs for adult education to be tailored differently than child-directed education.

Knowles, an adult educator, through his work with and study of adult learning, collected ideas that led to specifically identified characteristics of adult learners. He declared that these characteristics, different from child learners, would require a different set of procedures from which to educate (1980, 1983, 1998). As described by Merriam and Bierema (2014), Knowles proposed the following six assumptions.

Andragogy Assumption #1 — The Learner's Self Concept. As learners mature, they become more independent and desire to self-direct. Aging learners take on more responsibility, requiring learning autonomy, power, and control in their learning process. Resentment and resistance often result when an instructor of adult learners uses pedagogical practice during instruction. When adult learners who experience choice and decision-making in many aspects of their lives find that they have no voice or independence in their learning, they may find themselves less successful, less motivated, and less willing in learning the content (Clardy, 2005; Merriam & Bierema, 2014).

Merriam and Bierema (2014) highlight the importance of the learning center's relaxing, comfortable, and adult-oriented physical environment. In addition to the physical climate, the psychological climate must be of "mutual respect and trust and an atmosphere of collaboration" (p. 49). Classroom climates that treat adults as adults and allow participants to assist in the planning and instruction of the learning experience, when appropriate, offer opportunities for autonomy and self-direction in learning.

Andragogy Assumption #2 – Experiences. With age comes accumulated experience, common sense, beliefs, rules, and backgrounds from which adults draw. Not recognizing learners for what they know can lead to resistance and rejection of the learning process. Cognitive psychologists such as Piaget and Bruner recognize the impact that experiences and prior knowledge has on processing information. Designers of adult learning opportunities have a greater responsibility of building on the background knowledge and experiences of their adult students than teachers of children (Clardy, 2005).

Knowles, Holton, and Swanson (2011) explain, “To children, experience is something that happens to them; to adults, experience is who they are” (p. 65). If adults are in situations where they perceive their experiences are being devalued or ignored, they perceive that they, as a person, are being rejected as well. In addition to disregarding one’s experience, this perception can result negatively to the first assumption, one’s self-concept, as well. It is crucial, therefore, for adult educators to take advantage of the experiences of adult learners, allowing them the opportunity to use those experiences to support their path of becoming self-directed learners (Merriam & Bierema, 2014).

Instructors of adults must be aware and prepared to respond to the possibility when life experiences cause barriers or provide challenges to new learning. Prior knowledge and past experiences, do, absolutely, and should, shape new knowledge, beliefs & values, however depending on the strength of these experiences, one might not see a need to extend that learning or may find ways to combat new learning.

Andragogy Assumption #3 — Readiness to Learn. The social roles of adulthood create a need for learning. Adults are engaged in multiple social roles, such as spouse, parent, community member, or worker. The demands for learning in each of these roles change, and the changing of these roles creates learning opportunities (Clardy, 2005). Adults who engage in learning opportunities will respond better when learning is needed. Powerful ways to offer opportunities to feed the adult learner’s readiness to learn, according to Knowles (1975), is to provide experiential opportunities. Examples may include providing videos of instructional strategies or routines being effectively implemented in classrooms, listening to podcasts that provide applicable and practical ideas for supporting students, collaborating with other professionals to share ideas, and

peer review meetings or observations in classrooms, which would all offer excellent experiential growth and development.

Andragogy Assumption #4 — Problem-Centered Orientation. Merriam and Bierema (2014) describe adult learners as problem-centered, not subject-centered. Adult learners prefer immediate application of what is studied to solidify their learning. In addition, stating clear objectives and instructions for what, why, and how something is being taught must also be unequivocal for motivational purposes. Clear and specific explanations are necessary to avoid what may appear to the learner as teacher-imposed instruction. While child learners typically trust their teachers and accept complete teacher decisions, adults require a more transactional approach (Knowles, 1988).

Andragogy Assumption #5 — Internal Motivation. Under the previous four assumptions for adult learning, a common thread is seen intertwining the need for internal rather than external motivation. The adult's motivation to learn is based on the learner's drive. Increasing one's job satisfaction, enhancing one's self-esteem, improving one's quality of life, and experiencing personal fulfillment leads to advanced learning (Clardy, 2005).

In the world of adult learning, most often, decisions made for learning growth, advancement, or future desires are done so by choice. While there certainly will be times when learning is required, for example, employer-mandated training, rather than chosen, most often, however, there is an element of choice allowed in the learning. When internally motivated, the individual is placed in the center of the learning opportunity, valuing self-direction, independence and voice and choice in their learning paths (Merriam & Bierema, 2014).

Andragogy Assumption #6 — The Need to Know. Adults respond more positively to learning if they know why it is essential before they start learning. They want to be able to apply and use their knowledge in the here and now (Clardy, 2005). This assumption pairs nicely with assumptions four and five, problem-centered orientation, and internal motivation. "If adults can see why it is important to learn something *before* they begin a learning activity, their motivation is that much stronger" (Merriam & Bierema, 2014, pg. 55). One such practical example would include sharing lessons, guiding questions, objectives, and purposes for learning before beginning instruction to inform learners of the importance of what is to come.

These six assumptions summarize the andragogical theory of adult learning. Knowles (1989) does effectively describe the needs of adult learners and his work is consistently and respectfully utilized in the adult learning world. His research and literature are studied for those who seek guidance for instructional support. To honor and value practicing teachers as competent professionals who bring expertise and knowledge to their field, it is important for professional development planners and designers to respectfully allow for opportunities to exist from which their adult learners can learn.

Self-Directed Learning. As Knowles was introducing the idea of andragogy in the early 1970s, a coexisting model of self-directed learning was appearing in research as well. Tough, in 1971, provided the first description of self-directed learning theory, which has since been used to design and develop adult learning opportunities. Justus, Rusticus, and Stobbe (2022) describe self-directed learning as "a process in which the students take the lead, with or without the help of others, in determining their learning needs and managing their learning strategies and outcomes" (p.1).

Self-directed learning allows learners to manage and guide their own learning, by identifying learning goals, developing plans to meet the goals, determining learning strategies and self-assessing the degree to which the goals have been met (Abd-El-Fattah, 2010). It is recognized that self-directed learning abilities do vary amongst individuals and not all learners are successfully able to regulate their own learning. The ability in which to successfully navigate a self-directed learning opportunity can be improved through experience and practice with autonomous learning activities (Fisher et al., 2001).

Self-directed learning is leaner-centered, supported by Knowle's assumptions of andragogy (Knowles, 1980). In this approach, learners play the lead role in learning while teachers or facilitators, helping to construct knowledge, do so in a facilitative way. Interaction with new learning can be done individually, in pairs, or in groups, with cooperative learning models offering opportunities for learners to deepen their understanding through discussions and interaction with other learners (Zohrabi et al., 2012).

"To become a strong self-directed learner, the learner must engage with the learning tasks and assume personal responsibility for learning" (Garrison, 1997, p. 1). Garrison (1997) additionally proposes a model of self-directed learning which focuses on a three-dimensional approach including self-management, self-monitoring and self-motivation. Facilitators can support self-directed learners by offering flexibility, choice, resources and timely feedback.

Transformative Learning. Change is challenging, especially in education. The saying *"if it ain't broke, don't fix it"* has been repeatedly expressed as an effort to resist change. The achievement gap or the reported increasing illiteracy rates are examples of

concerns that continually expose a broken system. It is broken, and the transformation of beliefs, understanding, and attitudes within the educational system is critical.

In correlation with Knowle's theory of Andragogy, and Tough's theory of Self-Direction, Mezirow's Transformative Learning theory also recognizes the acquired experiences that adults use as frames of reference, or structure through which understanding is gained from experiences, from which they function. These acquired experiences include "associations, concepts, values, feelings and conditioned responses" which define their life (Mezirow, 1997, p.5). Once these lines of action are set, human nature permits the rejection of ideas that fail to fit preconceptions or see specific ideas as unworthy of consideration. Mezirow (1997) further illustrates that unless disrupted, adult learners will develop solid habits of mind and points of view, which can be difficult to change.

In the field of education, there have been decades of research devoted, studies linked, and mandates attached to student achievement. As described by Martin et al. (2014), such directives from the top down have required attention to be paid to the rethinking and reshaping of teachers' instructional practices. Research has also shown that changing instructional practices, habits of mind, points of view, or ways of thinking is not easy (Martin et al., 2019). Examining how adults, as educators, transform their practices to lead to positive student outcomes aligns with Mezirow's (1997) transformational learning theory by exploring how adults make changes in their behavior, practices, and beliefs.

According to transformation learning theory, for a change of behaviors, practices, or attitudes to occur, there must be a problem that is not aligned with a current frame of

reference or conflicts with a belief system. “We have a strong tendency to reject ideas that fail to fit our preconceptions, labeling those ideas as unworthy of consideration” (Mezirow, 2003, p.5). Transformation of adult learning occurs when learners are faced with circumstances that allow movement toward a more self-reflective and inclusive frame of reference. Mezirow (1997) features three general areas that describe how adults transform their learning, followed by how educators may transform their thinking of instructional practices.

1. Adults are provided opportunities to examine their experiences and attached beliefs. After teachers are introduced to new instructional practices, it is critical to allow them time to reflect upon how this practice will fit into their knowledge, beliefs, and understanding of effective teaching methods.
2. Adults are provided opportunity to critically reflect, individually or with peers, about their knowledge, beliefs, and understanding of what is included in the newly presented instructional practices. While this can be a challenging conversation for many, it pushes learners to identify ways the innovative ideas interweave with current thoughts, practices, and beliefs.
3. Reflection on the conversation with others encourages adults to act, moving towards transforming beliefs and behaviors.

Transformation takes time. Change in adult behavior is slow and requires motivation to continue to want to morph and adjust to new learning. Teachers are more likely to work toward change, trust themselves to adjust their belief systems, and transform instructional practices if students are learning (Martin et al., 2014).

Educational research is continuously offering guidance to educational practice. Because of this, opportunity for change through professional development is frequent. Collaboration regarding theory and practice is essential but can also be dangerous. Martin et al. (2019) discusses the importance of providing professional development to meet the students' needs. If the school's context is not in need of or would not benefit from the latest research appearing in the administrative journals, not only will transformation be non-existent, but teachers' trust in future initiatives may also be thwarted.

Coburn (2006) found that teachers respond differently to professional development depending upon instructional philosophies and strategies they believe are or will be successful. Transformative learning will only take place when teachers are allowed to use their own beliefs and expectations while examining new ideas and content (Mezirow, 2003).

Successful professional development does have the power to transform beliefs and practices as well as improve student learning. "Principals and school leaders who have achieved success have allowed teachers to have voice, take control, or lead professional development that is meaningful to their school context" (Martin et al., 2019, p.182). Teachers, like students, require scaffolding and differentiation of their learning, thus bringing unique needs, interests, and levels of understanding to the experience. Teachers must have autonomy and permission to respond to their experiences for transformative learning to occur.

McClusky's Theory of Margin. An excellent theory to consider for adult learners, McClusky's Theory of Margin emphasizes the need to balance the demands (load) on a person with his or her coping mechanisms (power). The theory assists in

understanding the balance between motivation and barriers to adult learning. Biney (2022) suggests that McClusky's Theory of Margin is popular among adult learners, as it provides a very simple formula "'Power' divided by 'Load' equals 'Margin'" (p.101). Ultimately, if adults are to learn effectively, they must take care to ensure they have enough margin or power to manage the load. McClusky explains that to increase margin, one must decrease the load or increase power. Merriam et. al. (2007) suggests that when load continually matches or exceeds power, and one or the other is unable to change, the situation is susceptible to breaking down.

Merriam et al. (2007) explain that "McClusky's model does not directly address *learning* itself, but rather *when* learning is most likely to occur (p.96). Although learning may be easier for a student whose power is higher, that does not mean that learning will only occur under those circumstances. Learning can also occur when a learner's load is higher; it will just likely be more difficult. More power means a greater margin and perhaps more motivation available to participate in learning (Biney, 2022; Chao, 2009).

Core Features of Effective Professional Development

Patton et al., (2015) present eight core features of effective professional development that emerged from synthesizing scholarly articles investigating the topic. In collaboration with DiPaola and Hoy's (2014) goals of "building the capacity of teachers to help students learn" (p.101), the following core features are linked to teacher engagement, teaching practice, and student learning.

Teacher Engagement

***Based on teachers' needs and interests*.** Effective professional development will allow participant-identified needs to be transformed into new knowledge, skills, values,

and beliefs (Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 2011). Acknowledging teachers' prior knowledge and experiences and actively involving them in identifying their own learning needs leads to increased ownership in the professional development opportunity. Relevant learning focuses on teachers' real work in the classrooms with students. In addition, teacher autonomy, addressing how and with what methods the new learning will be studied, are key factors in effective professional development (Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 2011; Patton et al., 2012).

Acknowledge learning as a social process. Strong working relationships with colleagues and professional development facilitators are essential to enhance experiences that encourage sharing knowledge collaboratively rather than in isolation (Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 2011). Transformation of teachers' thinking is heightened when time is established for interactive feedback and discussion of learning. When teachers and facilitators know each other on a more personal basis, trust is enhanced, and strong, collegial relationships are built to work together toward shared goals (Patton et al., 2015).

Collaborative opportunities with learning communities of educators. Working together in learning communities has been a commonly used practice, allowing teachers to collaboratively form new visions of learning (Cochran-Smith and Lytle, 1999). Developed professional learning communities have agreed upon missions and values. Embracing members leads to safe and supportive environments, allowing teachers to take risks and engage in challenging discussions. Doing so will lead learners to deeper understanding and willingness to attempt new practices (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999; Kilbane, 2009). When camaraderie and respect are shown toward others, members feel

protected and in a space to openly take a risk and reflect upon failures and successes while sharing practice with colleagues (Parker et al., 2010).

***Ongoing and Sustained*.** Acquisition of new knowledge and application into practice to increase student achievement is the ultimate purpose of professional development (Vetter, 2012). The traditional one-shot professional development lecture or workshop is certainly capable of providing some potentially valuable information; however, research has continually concluded that applying this knowledge to practice or helping teachers become learners and thinkers through this design of delivery is unlikely (Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 2011). Effective professional development must be ongoing and sustained over time. Allowing learners to acquire new knowledge, practice implementation of the knowledge, and then follow up with group discussions of the effectiveness and experience of the implementation results in a more increased chance of moving theory into practice (Yoon, 2007).

Teacher Practice

***Active Learners*.** Hands-on work designed to build knowledge of academic content or offer support for student context is deemed by teachers as the most valuable approach in applicable professional development (Garet et al., 2001; Darling-Hammond et al., 2017). Examples of active learning, as opposed to sitting through a lecture, may include action research which would involve teaching and reflecting upon the experience, observing peers and giving or receiving feedback, participating in group discussions and sharing knowledge through professional learning communities. When teachers assume an active role in professional development opportunities, there is a focus on inquiry and

reflection, constructing of new meaning, and developing a deeper understanding through collaborative engagement in relevant and comparable tasks (Patton et al., 2012).

***Enhancing pedagogical skills and content knowledge*.** "Well-designed, effective professional development helps teachers master content, hone teaching skills, evaluate their own and their students' performance, and address changes needed in teaching and learning in their schools" (Darling-Hammond & Richardson, 2009). To acquire and apply knowledge to practice, teachers must engage in meaningful learning experiences, such as assessment, observation, and reflection (Garet et al., 2001; Darling-Hammond et al., 2017). Darling-Hammond and McLaughlin (2011) note that professional development focused on content and pedagogy will much more frequently stimulate participant interest in the development opportunity, strengthening the possibility of full participation as opposed to the one-size-fits-all models.

***Facilitated with Care*.** Successfully facilitated professional development is determined by the effectiveness of the outcome on teacher knowledge and its impact on student achievement. The "pedagogy of facilitation," as coined by Poekert (2011), requires a facilitator to guide rather than direct, using questioning rather than showing the way. It is important to listen rather than tell and effectively coach participants to reveal their own learning and understanding. Rather than impose vision, facilitators are skilled in listening and gently pushing toward the transformation (Patton et al., 2012).

Student Learning

***Improving Student Learning Outcomes*.** The intent of professional development activities is to directly link teachers' knowledge growth and increased instructional skills to improved student learning outcomes. Hattie (2009) reports that research suggests that

impactful and sustained professional learning for teachers is related to gains in student achievement. Although it is difficult to accurately determine the causal link between professional development and student achievement, intentionally designed professional development that includes the expectation of applying knowledge into planning and instruction, has the potential to transform teacher behaviors, resulting in positive student achievement (Knapp, 2003). Unfortunately, "professional development is too often planned and conducted based on a new teaching practice or other ideas rather than the consequences of its impact on students learning" (Patton et al., 2015, p.32).

There is little empirical evidence to report the direct correlation between teacher participation in professional development activities and positive impact on student outcomes. It can be confidently determined, however, that the previously described core features of professional development offer compelling recommendations designed to positively benefit student outcomes.

Personalized Professional Development using Online Learning

ESSA, the Every Student Succeeds Act (2015), has granted flexibility while challenging states, districts, and schools to rethink and redesign teacher learning and growth through relevant and accessible professional development opportunities. Educational leaders have begun to experiment with offering personalized professional development opportunities by creating or investing in micro-credentials. Micro-credentials (MC), as described by Hunt et al. (2020), are designed to allow learners to choose professional development that is meaningful to practice and will contribute to their skillset. Educator MCs are defined by four key features: competency-based, personalized, on-demand, and shareable (Crow and Pipkin, 2017).

MCs, or similar formats, are designed to oppose the negative, ineffective components that traditional PD typically offers. A whole group, one-size-fits-all model, with content selected to meet the district's needs and not the learner, are typical reflections of decisions made. These designs are also costly, provide little time for mastery, and offer unlikely opportunities for follow-up to the learning (Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, 2014). MCs, in contrast, combat these ineffective ways by offering personalized, competency-based, flexible, and collaborative methods from which teachers can, through self-direction, transform their learning and classrooms (Hunt et al., 2020).

Learner Agency. Adult learners better benefit in their learning when allowed to "make free or independent choices, to engage in autonomous actions, and to exercise judgment in the interest of others and oneself" (Campbell, 2012, p. 183). This is known as learner agency.

Learner agency supports the opportunity in one's learning for creativity, motivation, well-being, and happiness (Billett et al., 2006) and is strongly connected to autonomy, self-fulfillment, and a force for change (Calvert, 2016; Larsen-Freeman, 2019). It is through the opportunity for teachers to have voice and choice in their learning where agency is provided. Professional development voice and choice allow teachers to drive their own learning, often in response to their students' needs. Through this opportunity for agency, teachers' professional judgment is honored, and expertise is valued and recognized. Learner agency drives motivation, intrinsically moving one from knowledge of theory to practice. Daniel Pink's book Drive (2009) highlights the ineffectiveness of motivating using carrots and sticks (rewards and punishments) and

spotlights the importance of offering autonomy, opportunities for self-direction, and connection to others for learning. When activities are seen as beneficial and interesting, learners become more actively engaged and interested in accomplishing the task (Larsen-Freeman, 2019; Ryan & Deci, 2000).

Self-Efficacy. High-quality classrooms are typically designed by teachers who have a high sense of self-efficacy. As defined by Bandura (1977), self-efficacy refers to an individual's belief in their capacity to execute the behaviors needed to produce performance expectations. Teachers with high self-efficacy are capable of planning lessons to grow students' skills, involve students in meaningful ways, and effectively manage student behavior (Chacon, 2005). This self-efficacy, in return, reflects the confidence in one's control over motivation, behavior, and the social environment. As a result of a strong functioning and high-quality classroom, Zee and Koomen (2016) add that teachers with high self-efficacy tend to have improved psychological well-being for increased levels of job satisfaction, which positively impacts student growth and achievement.

Self-efficacy plays a key role in education as it involves human agency. According to Bandura (1977), human agency is the belief that individuals control the actions that affect their lives. Bandura additionally reports that self-efficacy, created by what one expects to happen as well as how one perceives their capabilities are to make the expectation happen. For example, even though a teacher may know that a specific instructional or behavioral strategy is designed to produce a certain outcome, unless that teacher believes in their ability to implement the strategy successfully, the outcome may not be successful.

Conclusion

There is a rapid increase in racial and ethnic diversity in rural America. This increase has significantly impacted the diversity of the student populations and the needs placed on school systems within rural communities. Financial, human, and geographic barriers present rural schools with difficult situations. While these situations are challenging, schools cannot remain stagnate. They must do what it takes to ensure a high-quality education for all students regardless of race, ethnicity, culture, or native language.

ELLs deserve educational programming responsive to their needs. Many school districts lack experience, training, resources, and expertise and, therefore, seek professional development opportunities from which to learn. Traditional forms of professional development, the "one-size-fits-all" and the "sit and get" models, typically have resulted in limited student achievement. Intentionally planned, ongoing, and sustainable learning opportunities, designed with focused adult learning attributes in mind, are more likely to result in positive outcomes for both teacher growth and development as well as student achievement outcomes.

The research aimed to understand how practicing teachers in rural settings describe the impact of individually designed professional development opportunities on their self-efficacy for teaching multilingual learners when provided with learning agency. In addition to their described impact, identified outcomes, because of personal voice and choice in professional development topics and methods were studied as were the described changes in confidence gained for teaching multilingual learners because of the professional development methods.

Chapter III:

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

This research study explored the impact that participation in a professional development academy allowing for learner self-direction had on practicing teachers' self-efficacy for teaching multilingual learners in rural school settings. The principal research question in this qualitative study aimed to determine *How do practicing teachers in rural settings describe their experience in the MLL Professional Development Academy*? *Specifically, how do they describe their self- efficacy for teaching multilingual learners, their application of new learning, and their perception of professional development.* The question in this phenomenological study was designed to understand the experiences of the participants and investigate the meaning behind those experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Phenomenology

Phenomenology is a paradigm that informs not only the methodological design through which the research will be examined but also is embedded with philosophically solid components. As a methodological design described by Creswell (2007), phenomenology determines the meaning of a phenomenon or *lived experience* through the related experiences of several individuals. The primary purpose of phenomenology is to reduce individual experiences with a particular phenomenon and to grasp the universal essence of the thing (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Researchers employing a phenomenological methodology collect data from persons who have experienced the

phenomenon, resulting in a developed, overarching description of the experience for all individuals, including what was experienced by the group of individuals as well as how they experienced it.

Philosophically, phenomenology draws heavily on the initial writings of Edmund Husserl, a German mathematician whose ideas have been further expanded by later philosophers. While using his philosophical ideas and arguments as their foundation, many researchers succeeding Husserl expanded on his perspectives, resulting in varied views of phenomenology. Stewart and Mickunas, as quoted in Creswell (2007, p. 59), while considering the diverse context, identified four philosophical perspectives in phenomenology:

- *A return to the traditional tasks of philosophy.* The return to the traditional tasks of philosophy that existed before philosophy became enamored with empirical science is a return to the Greek conception of philosophy as a search for wisdom.
- *A philosophy without presuppositions* – Phenomenology's approach is to suspend all judgments about what is real – the "natural attitude" – until they are founded on a more certain basis. This suspension is called "epoché" by Husserl.
- *The intentionality of consciousness*. – This idea is that consciousness is always directed toward an object. Reality of an object, then, is inextricably related to one's consciousness of it.

- *The refusal of the subject-object dichotomy.* This theme flows naturally from the intentionality of consciousness. The reality of an object is only perceived within the meaning of the experience of an individual.

In addition to the above-mentioned philosophical perspectives, there are two approaches, hermeneutic and transcendental phenomenology, typically considered by researchers using the phenomenological methodological approach. Both approaches are considered phenomenological in nature and differ in how the experienced phenomenon is defined. Van Manen (1990) described hermeneutic phenomenology as not just describing what occurred but also relying on the researcher's interpretation of the meaning of the lived experiences once the information has been collected from participants.

A varied way to approach phenomenological outcomes is through what Moustakas (1994) describes as transcendental. Transcendental, or psychological phenomenology, is focused less on the researcher's interpretation of the experience of the participant and more on the participants' descriptions. The operative word is describe, tasking the researcher, as accurately as possible, to describe the phenomenon while remaining true to the facts (Groenewald, 2004). Taking from Husserl's idea of *epoché*, or bracketing, Moustakas (1994) identifies the importance of researchers intentionally setting aside their own experiences and biases to allow a fresh perspective toward the examined phenomenon. Transcendental is defined as "in which everything is perceived freshly, as if for the first time" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 34). While Moustakas recognizes that this state is seldom perfectly achieved, there are ways in which researchers, prior to engaging in the research, will bracket out their own views through descriptive writing or

conversation with others of their own experiences before engaging in the experiences of others.

Transcendental phenomenology draws on the *Duquesne Studies in Phenomenological Psychology* as well as the data analysis procedures of Van Kaam and Colaizzi (Creswell, 2007; Moustakas, 1994). These procedures consist of the researcher identifying a phenomenon in which to study, bracketing out one's experiences with the phenomenon and collecting data from several persons who have experienced the phenomenon. The data is then analyzed, by the researcher, condensing the information from interview notes and transcripts, to coded statements and quotes which can then be reduced to emerged themes. After themes have been determined, the researcher will provide a *textural description* describing what participants experienced and a *structural description* describing how participants described the experience (conditions, situations, or context). The combination of these two descriptions is designed to illustrate an overall essence of the experience.

The phenomenological methodological approach, in this research, allowed the researcher to collect the natural and lived responses of those practicing teachers who engaged in self-agency strategies to strengthen their self-efficacy of supporting their multi-lingual learners (referred as MLL from here forward) in their classrooms. The rich and descriptive information collected from participants through this phenomenological study helped to gain insight into how practicing teachers perceived the impact that participation in a non-traditional professional development opportunity had on their self-efficacy. The first purpose of the study was designed to reveal gaps in practicing teachers' knowledge and competency of use of strategies for ELLs, after which they were

provided self-direction in their professional learning to support those self-perceived gaps. The second purpose was to explore the perceived experiences of the impact that self-agency in professional learning had on teacher self-efficacy. The third purpose was to use the data to support decision-making for effective professional learning opportunity topics and methods for practicing teachers. The overarching theme for this study is supporting ELLs, however, data collected was valuable information for further reform of professional development practices within rural areas, regardless of the topic to be studied.

Context of the study

The purpose of this research provided willing participants an opportunity to participate in a self-directed ELL focused asynchronous professional development academy allowing the participant self-agency in choice and voice in topics and methods of learning. The design of this less-traditional professional development model was based on an adult learning, andragogical model (Knowles et al., 2005), proposing six assumptions.

- Adults need to know why they need to know something before learning it.
- Adults see themselves as self-directed and need to be treated this way in learning activities.
- Adults possess a wealth of experience, which should be considered in learning activities.
- Adults are ready to learn those things that directly affect their lives currently.
- Adults are more internally motivated to learn than externally.

These assumptions indicate a clear difference between adult and child learner needs and should be utilized as a roadmap when designing professional development instruction for in-service teachers (Jones et al., 2020). To make outcomes of professional development opportunities more effective, Knowles (1983) suggests that the andragogy assumptions should be considered for specific learning activities, taking the age of the learners into account as well as the content to be developed. The professional development opportunity for teachers exposed PreK-12th grade teachers to ELL-focused self-directed learning opportunities and assisted them in exploring ways to move awareness of new knowledge and instructional strategies into their daily routines. To experience successful outcomes, many of the andragogical assumptions were considered in this model. Given the increasing population of diverse learners and the identified increasing lack of teacher confidence to support the diverse nature of the students (Bouck, 2018), providing opportunities for teachers to utilize their knowledge and expertise, while learning things directly affecting current professional lives was essential.

Environment/Space

Participants were invited to take part in a six-week independent, self-directed, professional development learning opportunity, which from here forward will be labeled the MLPDA (Multilingual Learner Professional Development Academy). Through the completion of a questionnaire/survey, in addition to providing some demographic information and answering questions regarding one's knowledge base and self-efficacy for teaching ELLs, participants enrolled in the Multilingual Learner Professional Development Academy (MLPDA). Upon enrollment, participants selected their top three choices from a list of ten options of topics and their top choice from a list of six methods.

Topic options from which to choose included characteristics of MLLs; best practices for supporting MLLs; differentiation and scaffolding instruction for MLLs; fostering oral language; MN ELL identification, entrance and exit requirements; understanding MN state ELL tests; communicating with families; evidence-based practices to support multilingual language development; understanding proficiency levels and MN ELL WIDA standards and their "Can Do" descriptors (see Appendix A).

Learning method options were virtual and asynchronous and included the following six options: reading short blog posts; reading professional development articles from sites such as Reading Rockets or Colorin' Colorado; listening to podcasts; learning from strategy-based tip of the week handouts or watching short strategy-based videos (see Appendix B). The researcher analyzed, noted and organized participant learning preferences and designed individualized learning plans for each participant. Throughout the six weeks of the study, every Wednesday a new resource, matching the content and method preference of the participant, was electronically delivered, allowing participants self-agency to determine interaction strategies such as completion, timing and pacing.

Professional Development Learning Academy

Following IRB approval, the MLPDA took place for six weeks, beginning on February 21, 2023, and concluding on March 31, 2023. Every Wednesday, an MLL focused professional development resource was shared with participants via email. The resource options included a blog post, a short YouTube video, a "tips of the week" handout, a podcast, or an article from various MLL focused educational websites. Appendices C, D and E include direct links to each resource that was used to support teachers in their learning. Of the methods offered, 16 participants requested short,

strategy-based videos, 12 requested strategy-based tips of the week handouts, nine preferred podcasts, 5 opted for various methods and 2 participants preferred receiving short professional development articles from sites such a Reading Rockets and Colorin' Colorado. Resources shared were vetted by the researcher for cultural responsivity and pedagogical accuracy and appropriateness prior to distribution.

Study Design/Method

Participants

The study was designed to gather perspectives from rural teachers and paraprofessionals regarding the impact that self-agency driven professional development opportunities had on their self-efficacy for teaching multilingual learners. The study involved three rural west central Minnesota school districts who, according to the Minnesota Department of Education data report card had student populations ranging from 379 – 1046 students, with an average of 5% of those students being multilingual learners. Participants were practicing PreK – 12th grade licensed teachers or paraprofessionals working within one of the three districts. Selection of the sample was purposive, and participation in the study was voluntary. Those who chose to participate completed a demographic questionnaire and survey from which responses were analyzed by the researcher to design individualized professional development choices. Participants did give consent to participate and upon completion of the six-week academy, received 7 hours of continuing education units and also satisfied the state's ELL requirement for relicensure.

Participant Selection or Recruitment

The study utilized the method of purposive sampling for both the survey and the interview portions of the study. Phenomenological studies are designed to select enough participants and interview opportunities to provide rich data which helps to describe the phenomenon being studied (Hennink et al., 2019). Given their professional experiences and positions as teachers, as well as the student populations with which these teachers work, participants were knowledgeable about both the professional development and multilingual learners' phenomena and brought forward experiences from PreK, primary, upper elementary, junior high and high school grade levels.

The study included 44 PreK-12th grade classroom teachers, content area, special education and intervention teachers with experience levels ranging from one to 30+ years. Of the 44 participants, 23 were PreK-6th grade teachers, 6 were high school content area teachers, 7 were special education teachers, 4 were licensed interventionists and 4 were multilingual learner teachers. 16 of the participants held bachelor's degrees, and 28 held master's degrees. 36 were monolingual speakers, and 8 were multilingual speakers.

According to Ezezika (2014), engaging early with participants in the field will support recruitment opportunities. For the past 15 years, the researcher has been the literacy specialist, instructional coach, and Multi-Tiered Systems of Support coordinator within the study's districts. It is accurate to report that nearly all participants in the study had previously engaged with the researcher in meetings, activities, or professional development trainings or workshops. The researcher had previously provided administrative, staff, and instructional support in these districts, led and worked with committees, teams, grade levels, and individuals through curriculum adoptions and

implementation, guided school improvement initiatives, implemented academic and behavior analytic learning systems utilization and led student support initiatives to ensure appropriate and effective programming for all students. Additionally, the researcher had been embedded into the school environments, was aware of each district's unique culture and system, had positive working relationships with the administration, and had levels of rapport built with almost all participants. Before sending the email inviting participation into the MLPDA, the researcher attended a staff meeting at each site and informed teachers of the study's opportunity, purpose, and structure. From the start, prior experiences with the researcher as well as communicating openly and effectively with potential participants improved trustworthiness.

Data Collection Methods

Data was collected through an initial 3-part questionnaire, a final questionnaire, weekly reflection prompts, and a formal, semi-structured interview. The initial questionnaire was distributed through email and was offered to all eligible participants. Completing the initial questionnaire was voluntary, and those who responded were automatically enrolled in the MLPDA. During the MLPDA experience, weekly response prompts were completed by participants, and finally, upon completion of the professional development academy, a follow-up questionnaire consisting of three open-ended questions relating to the experience was distributed. In addition to the follow-up questionnaire, purposefully selected academy participants, representative of the larger population, were contacted to request time for one formal interview.

To support the semi-structured interview process, as recommended by Seidman (2006) efforts were made to recruit a variety of interviewees based on a range of years of

teaching as well as a variety of grade levels and content areas taught. Participants were recruited and interviewed. Of those interviewed, three were high school content teachers, three were elementary teachers, two were special education teachers, one was an elementary reading interventionist, and one was an ELL teacher. Of the ten, one had been teaching less than five years, one had been teaching less than 10 years, three had been teaching between 10-15 years, one between 15 and 20 years and four had been teaching more than 20 years. In appreciation of their time, they were presented with a thank you note and a local coffee shop gift card following the interview.

Initial Questionnaire

All eligible participants received an email inviting them to complete the questionnaire. The questionnaire was distributed electronically through Qualtrics, and participants were informed, prior to the email being sent, of its delivery. Completion of the initial questionnaire was voluntary. There were three parts to the questionnaire through which information from respondents was collected. Those who responded to the initial questionnaire received the opportunity to participate in the MLPDA. Participation in the academy was optional. Completion of the survey was anonymous until the participant chose to participate in the academy. If they chose not to participate, neither their name nor email address was collected. Once consent was given to participate, each participant's name and email address was requested. The initial questionnaire consisted of three parts and can be viewed in Appendix F.

Part 1: Demographic Information. Participants answered demographic information questions regarding current teaching assignments, years of teaching, highest level of education, and number of ELL students in their classroom.

Participants indicated yes or no to questions regarding their mono or bi/multilingual status and responded to questions regarding their interest in learning additional languages. Collecting this information enabled the researcher to characterize the study's participant sample. This information was used to identify subsets of the populations and characterized them at the time of the study (Connelly, 2013).

Part 2: Teaching English Language Learners Scale (TELLS). To collect information regarding classroom teachers' current knowledge and confidence in supporting ELLs in their classrooms, participants completed the TELLS (Carney, 2012). The TELLS is a 23-question scale, asking participants to respond to questions using a Likert scale of 0 to 10 (0 – Certain Cannot Do at All; 5 – Moderately Certain Can Do; 10 – Certain Can Do) regarding their self-efficacy in designing and implementing ELL related activities in their classroom. In addition to the survey-style Likert scale questions, there were three follow up, open-ended questions.

Part 3: Professional Development Areas of Support. After completing the scale, participants were asked to indicate their interest in learning more about how they can support ELLs in their classroom. They were required to select **Yes** or **No.** A selection of **No** produced an automatically generated message thanking the respondent for participating in the survey, after which the survey ended. An answer of **Yes** allowed respondents to select their top three choices from a list of ten MLL-focused topic ideas about which they would like to further learn (see Appendix B). Upon selecting their topics of interest, participants were asked to

select how they would like to learn about those topics (see Appendix C). From the list of six methods, they were directed to select their top choice. For both the topics and methods lists, there was an open-ended option of "other" where participants could list one or more specific topics or methods they were interested in that were not originally listed.

Weekly Reflection Prompts

Following weekly interaction with learning materials, participants were asked to respond to a provided reflection prompt. The carefully structured prompts were designed to require participants to identify ways in which they would immediately apply their new learning in their classroom. Weekly reflection prompts used can be seen in Appendix G.

Final Questionnaire

Following the 6-week academy, participants were asked to share a description of their experience by answering three open-ended questions. Open-ended questions allowed academy completers to provide a more descriptive perspective of their experience. This assisted in better determining a generalizable essence of the experience. Questions used for the final questionnaire can be seen in Appendix H.

Semi-Structured Interviews

Allowing participants the opportunity to describe their general experience of the Multilingual Learner Professional Development Academy (MLPDA) and the impact it had on their self-efficacy for supporting multilingual learners in their classroom, semi structured interviews were held. Interviews, according to Creswell & Cresswell (2018), allow researchers to develop a rich and deeper understanding of participants' lived

experiences while eliciting a first-person perception of the phenomenon being studied. Interviews are useful when hearing and analyzing other's stories (Seidman, 2006).

The researcher conducted individual retrospective semi-structured interviews to understand the participants' learning experiences while engaged in the MLPDA. This allowed insight to be gained regarding the meaning made by participants from the experience, reducing the unintentionally inserted meanings held by the researchers (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Seidman (2006) describes an interview approach that uses primarily open-ended questions designed to guide the participant to reconstruct their experience with the phenomenon studied. While guidelines were prepared before the interview, with questions designed to check off the topics needed to gather specific responses, Robson and McCartan (2016) further describe the flexibility and freedom in semi-structured models. Sequencing and wording of questions and amount of time spent per topic required fewer constraints. Glesne (2016) further permitted the emergence of new and replacement of predetermined questions, if needed, to better generate more descriptive responses. The participants' responses led and guided the interviews, offering the opportunity to ask follow-up questions on the spot to learn more, rather than requiring strict adherence to a pre-planned schedule.

Seidman (2006) speaks favorably of the three-interview series, recommending that the interviewer return to visit following the phenomenon experience on three separate occasions to reach the depth and breadth contributing to rich data. Given the expectations of time required for each interview and the fact that the researcher was familiar with each interviewee, an alternative interview schedule was utilized. Seidman (2006), while preferring the more intense interview process, does recognize that

interviewing over two days and, on some occasions, even over one day will still produce reasonable results. Because the researcher had previously developed rapport with the interviewees, the decision was made to conduct just one interview with each interviewee.

Face to face interviews were conducted in the interviewee's classrooms. Interviews were audiotaped in their entirety with each participant's consent. Not wanting the fluency of the interview to be negatively impacted, the researcher completed dictation and transcription following the interview. This allowed appropriate interview fluency, limiting the distractions during the interview in order to attend to nonverbals and hesitations which otherwise may have been intentionally overlooked.

Analysis Techniques

The purpose of qualitative analysis techniques is to identify patterns and themes behind textual data by, as described by Cresswell (2018), "taking the data apart," making interpretations, and "then putting it back together" to determine the findings (p.10). Qualitative analysis is led by an inductive approach where "patterns, themes, and categories of analysis come from the data; they emerge out of the data rather than being imposed on them prior to data collection and analysis" (Patton, 1980, p. 306). "Reflexive iteration is at the heart of visiting and revisiting the data and connecting them with emerging insights, progressively leading to refined focus and understanding" (p. 2). All data was analyzed inductively, through the cycles of coding, driven by research questions, through which patterns and themes emerged.

Demographic Data

The demographic data collected at the beginning of the initial questionnaire was used to describe the sample of people who answered the questionnaire. As recommended

by Connelly (2013), the demographic data was reported in a narrative format, citing frequencies of each demography to provide a picture of the sample who was answering the remainder of the questions.

Teaching English Language Learners Scale (TELLS)

The Teaching English Language Learners Scale surveyed the two constructs of assessment and instruction and ELL support and resources. While the data was not used for quantitative purposes, it was available to qualitatively highlight or expose self-identified areas of need for individual participants.

Open Ended Questions

Prior to coding, an initial reading of the open-ended written survey responses was conducted to gain a broad understanding. Following the initial read, researcher generated labels (Saldaña, 2016), also described as in vivo coding, were created in the form of words, phrases and sentences, to capture the essence of the data.

Semi-Structured Interviews

The researcher fully transcribed audio recordings of each interview, and notes taken during the interviews were reviewed. Prior to beginning the cycles of coding, the transcript was precoded by circling, underlining, highlighting, and bolding rich or significant responses worthy of attention to be identified (Boyatis, 1998), as preliminary jottings were made in the margin of the text (Saldaña, 2016). Following this, a cyclical coding nature occurred, which Richards & Morse describe as "heuristic – an exploratory problem-solving technique without a specific formula to follow. Coding is not just labeling, it is linking" (2013, p. 137). Using coding for qualitative inquiry symbolically assigns summative, "essence-capturing" attributes for a portion of language-based data

(Saldaña, 2016, p. 3). In vivo coding was used to consider the actual language or terms used by the participants themselves.

Trustworthiness/Validity Techniques

Qualitative research is unique in that it offers researchers the opportunity to more intimately study phenomena and human experiences through narrated and storied details. So much can be learned from the lived experiences of others and therefore gathering data to do so is powerful. There is a degree of trust necessary not only in the information being shared but trust in the one sharing the information (Stahl & King, 2020). Trustworthiness is in direct correlation with the validity of the study. Validity, as described by Robson and McCartan (2016) is to identify that the research is accurate, correct, or true. As with any research, possibilities of threats to validity may emerge. Having an awareness and intentional recognition of these threats described below supported the validity throughout the phenomenological study.

Description

The data collected, reported and analyzed was accurate and complete. Data collected was generated by participants throughout the study through written open-ended forms as well as through lived accounts as described in semi-structured interviews. Open-ended and weekly journal prompts were universally asked of all participants. An outline of questions for the semi-structured interviews were determined before the interview, however, there was flexibility within the sequence and exact wording of the questions. Interviews conducted were audiotaped with consent and fully transcribed prior to coding to ensure accurate records of each participants' responses.

Interpretation

A participant's perspective or meaning made from the experience must be interpreted through the researcher's involvement within the setting, not from the researcher's prior experiences of expectations. Participant responses to open ended questions, weekly journal prompts, and interview transcripts were visited, revisited, and analyzed inductively through multi-cycles of coding. Through this process, categories and themes emerged from which participant perspectives and experiences were interpreted.

Bias

The close relationship that potentially forms between the researcher and the setting and the researcher and respondent, can expose bias. Remaining conscious and aware of the need to set aside biases, the researcher was guided by the following strategies, as summarized in Robson and McCartan (2016).

Prolonged Involvement. Prolonged involvement within a setting has been seen to reduce both reactivity and respondent bias. The researcher has worked within the study's settings for over fifteen years and has worked with most of the participants in the study for reasons other than this research. Rapport with most participants was established prior to the start of the research.

Triangulation. A widely used strategy, triangulation involves using multiple sources of data collected from a diverse range of individuals to enhance the rigor of research and reduce systemic bias. The data collected throughout the research came from a survey, open-ended survey questions, weekly response prompts, and semi-structured interviews. These varied data collection tools provided multiple data sources, reducing

interpretation bias and allowing an opportunity to compare data across measures and participants.

Audit Trail. Through each step of the study, a full record of all activities completed, conversations had, and decisions made was generated. Records such as interview notes, coding notes, journaling, memos, survey data, and communication with participants were organized and documented to support and explain the research process. This improved trustworthiness and validity by providing full transparency of the process followed, data collected, and analysis completed.

Bracketing. In phenomenologically designed research, much information comes through conversational encounters with participants as they describe their perspectives of the "lived experiences" being studied. The researcher, who is the instrument of analysis, may unintentionally transmit their misconceptions within and across the project, influencing how the data is gathered, interpreted, and presented (Tufford & Newman, 2012). Moustakas (1994)

identifies the importance of researchers intentionally setting aside their own experiences and biases to allow a fresh perspective on the phenomenon to be examined.

The researcher's role as a professional development coordinator, presenter, and attendee of many professional development sessions has offered experiences from multiple perspectives regarding professional development models. The researcher, also a professional development trainer, has seen the planning, preparation, and work elicited prior to a training and the necessary effort, attention, and detail needed during the training session. As an attendee, the researcher has felt the angst, boredom, restlessness,

excitement, and fulfillment of what professional development opportunities offer. Both lenses provided varied viewpoints which could easily lead to attitudes and judgments capable of contributing to biases within the research.

Tufford and Newman (2012) recommend using memos and reflexive journaling to support researchers in intentionally setting aside their own experiences and biases while allowing for fresh perspectives of the examined phenomenon. Memoing allows researchers to openly acknowledge and identify one's hunches and presuppositions while engaging with the collected data. Reflexive journaling, also described by Tufford and Newman (2012) is another recommended method of removing oneself from previous and personal experiences within the phenomenon. Journaling should commence prior to the beginning of the study and continue throughout as an effort to assist in sustaining a reflexive, biased-aware stance.

In recognition of the need for bracketing, the researcher began by journaling about the purposes of the study, interest in the research questions, and potential misconceptions. The journal was maintained throughout the data collection, analysis, and reporting of findings. In addition to journaling, throughout the study, a real-time memoing strategy was used to recognize and name thoughts and ideas to be confronted and reasons for decisions made to keep fresh, untarnished perspectives of the phenomenon emerging from the study.

CHAPTER IV

SUMMARY AND FINDINGS

ARTICLE #1

Empowering Educators in Rural America: A Study of Learner Agency Professional Development in Multilingual Learner Support

Demands on Education in Rural America

All schools in the United States share one common purpose: providing every child access to high-quality education to pursue meaningful life goals. If only education in America was this easy, especially in rural America. While receiving a quality education should be deemed an expected human right for all students, unfortunately, the experience afforded to many students educated in our nation's rural areas is less than excellent (Adams & Wood, 2015; Fishman, 2015). Inadequate fiscal resources, limited human capital, and geographic isolation create significant barriers, making it difficult for many rural schools to meet that one common goal (Culbertson & Billig, 2015). In addition to the previously mentioned barriers, rural school districts are also seeing an increase in demographic diversity, increasing the number of multilingual learners.

According to Darling-Hammond et al. (2017), the field of education is constantly changing. Changes in the world, changes in the local community, advances in science and brain research, and technological developments are just a few examples that morph and shape educational practices and drive the need for continued and ongoing teacher professional learning. Teachers are adult learners who have been explicitly trained to

teach child learners. This pedagogical training in teacher preparation programs and continuing education training is necessary to ensure children and young adults receive instruction in developmentally appropriate ways. DiPaola and Hoy (2018) explain that child-learner instructional methods are too often utilized in professional development experiences to support the development of adult learners. These practices are typically met with resistance, resulting in ineffective learning experiences. Adult learners, instead, better benefit when allowed to "make free or independent choices, to engage in autonomous actions, and to exercise judgment in the interest of others and oneself" (Campbell, 2012, p. 183). This is known as learner agency.

Learner agency supports the opportunity in one's learning for creativity, motivation, well-being, and happiness (Billett et al., 2006; Larsen-Freeman, 2019), which is strongly connected to autonomy, self-fulfillment and a force for change (Calvert, 2016; McGregor & Frodsham, 2022). It is through the opportunity for teachers to have voice and choice in their learning where agency is provided. Professional development voice and choice allow learners to drive their own learning, often in response to their students' needs. Through this opportunity for agency, teacher professional judgment is honored, and their expertise is valued and recognized. Learner agency drives motivation and intrinsically moves one from knowledge of theory to practice (Czyz, 2022). Daniel Pink's book Drive (2009) highlights the ineffectiveness of motivating using carrots and sticks (rewards and punishments) and spotlights the importance of offering autonomy, opportunities for self-direction, and connection to others for learning. When activities are seen as beneficial and interesting, learners become more actively engaged and interested in accomplishing the task (Kelly & Fogarty, 2015; Ryan & Deci, 2000).

Recent growth in the diverse learners' population in rural Minnesota schools has required immediate and reactive responses to meet the needs of the multilingual students and their families. The school districts' responses have typically been, when able, to provide traditional professional development sessions targeting the latest issues in an attempt to place a patch on the most significantly reported need. Patfield et. al (2023) indicate that, unfortunately, research studying the impact of traditional professional development practices most commonly used in educational settings consistently identifies ineffective, inefficient, and unproductive results. They further highlight significant concern in the awareness that these particularly poor practices do not lead to teacher growth and development nor positive impacts on student outcomes, yet they continue to be utilized.

This study aims to explore learner agency's impact on teachers' self-efficacy and the route taken from theory to practice through an innovative professional development model, offering an andragogical approach of voice and choice. The professional development content focuses on supporting multilingual learners in an attempt to respond to the present and immediate needs of a growing diverse population in rural school settings. The study intends to examine teachers' perceptions of the effectiveness of an alternative approach to professional development using the very relevant and critical topic of supporting multilingual learners.

The geographic area in which this study was conducted was in a very small, demographically rural region of west central Minnesota. School districts are small by nature, and according to the Minnesota Department of Education data center, the PreK – 12th grade student populations in the three districts involved in the study range from 379

to 1046 students. While on average, 95% of students enrolled in this trio of rural districts identify English as their native language, there are 5% of the population who identify as multilingual (Minnesota Report Card, n.d.).

Meeting the Needs of Multilingual Learners

When an initiative or area of need is identified in public schools, the customary practice is to address these needs through professional development opportunities. Unfortunately, the determined content and methods through which the content is received are far too often ineffective in driving the application of the new learning into practice (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017; Darling-Hammond & Richardson, 2009). In the case of rural schools that are currently doing their best to react to the increasingly diverse needs of their learners, if teachers were allowed to self-identify their cultural awareness and competency practices and then were given a voice in what topics they feel the need to further develop and choice in the methods of doing so, perhaps their learning would be more effectively applied to their Multilingual Learner (MLL) focused teaching practices.

Given the increasing MLL population in demographically rural areas, teachers, who have rarely had to consider using diverse culturally appropriate practices in their classrooms in the past, are now having to do so more thoughtfully. It is commonly noted that teachers are stronger in their awareness of culturally competent practices but less confident in applying that knowledge to their teaching practices and classroom routines (Bacon, 2018; Ross, 2012). Teachers must be culturally responsive to the needs of their students, and current practices in teacher development need to be revised to do so. Far too often, professional development topics and methods are universally determined for all

teachers, typically by the administration or the central office, employing a one-size-fits-all model (Darling-Hammond & Richardson, 2009; Darling-Hammond et al., 2017).

Current Professional Development Practices

The methods of effective professional development have been debated for decades, with ineffective practices usually prevailing. In 2007, Fullan described the typical external practices used to impact instructional change as rarely "powerful enough, specific enough, or sustained enough to alter the culture of the classroom and school" (p.35). To transform these previously utilized ineffective practices, in 2015, the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) reauthorized the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) from 1965. ESSA placed a long-awaited definition of professional development within federal educational policy. This definition asserts the significance of continued educator learning as the key to helping students succeed with high academic standards (Leaning Forward, 2017).

All students depend on teachers to provide rigorous and impactful instruction that addresses individual student needs. The ethical responsibility of practicing teachers is to grow professionally and develop a practical skill set through which the instruction for all learners can be supported (Cadero-Smith, 2020). Effective professional development opportunities are necessary to equip teachers with the skills needed to provide high-quality education; however, research has shown that teacher professional development does not always translate to solid learning outcomes (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017).

This study aims to investigate the following research questions:

How do practicing teachers in rural settings describe their experience of participating in the MLL Professional Development Academy (MLPDA)? Specifically, how do they

perceive the impact of their participation in an alternative professional development model?

Theoretical Framework

Self-Directed Learning Theory

A theory embedded in constructivism, and first given a comprehensible definition by Allen Tough and Malcolm Knowles in the early 1970's, is self-directed learning (SDL). Self-directed learning is the notion that learners control their own learning, deciding on what and how to learn (Merriam & Bierema, 2014). Merriam (2001) posits that the goal of self-directed learning is to develop a learner's capacity to be self-directed, additionally taking responsibility for one's own learning. SDL has been described both as an attribute that one possesses as well as a process in which one participates (Candy, 1991; Zee & Koomen, 2016). As a personal attribute, Brockett and Hiemstra (1991) suggest that when the learner takes responsibility for their learning, there will be a positive association with high self-efficacy.

In describing SDL as a process in which one participates, Knowles (1975) highlights this as an opportunity "in which individuals take the initiative, with or without the help of others, in diagnosing their learning needs, formulating learning goals, identifying human and material resources for learning, choosing and implementing appropriate learning strategies, and evaluating those learning outcomes" (p. 18).

While the goal for learners is to become self-driven, according to Grow (1991, 1994), one must not expect SDL to be accomplished individually at all times. The facilitator of the experience does have a role in monitoring and customizing the learning to meet the learner's needs. If something new is being introduced, which may be

unfamiliar to the learner, perhaps the facilitator becomes more directive, offering clarification or feedback if needed. If, on the other hand, the learners are situated to handle the learning opportunity independently, perhaps the facilitator's role is to be a consultant and resource provider (Merriam & Bierema, 2014).

During innovative professional learning opportunities, it is necessary for adult learners to have the opportunity to direct their own learning. This may occur by offering topics from which the learner could study. It may also require the facilitator to design the learning paths, but the route in which the learner takes would be individually chosen.

Method

Given the continued increase in diverse student populations in rural area school districts, classroom teachers are challenged with ensuring equitable learning opportunities for everyone. For many, little training or professional development has been provided within districts to support and guide appropriate educational opportunities. This qualitative study invited practicing teachers from three rural school districts in west central Minnesota to participate in a self-directed MLL-focused asynchronous professional development opportunity known as the *Multilingual Learner Professional Development Academy* (MLPDA). This independent learning experience offered participants self-agency in learning through voice in the topics of study and choice in the methods in which the topics were delivered. 44 voluntary participants took part in the MLPDA (Multilingual Learner Professional Development Academy), a six-week independent, autonomous, professional development learning opportunity. Participants' were asked to individually select their top three choices from the following topics: characteristics of MLLs; best practices for supporting MLLs; differentiation and

scaffolding instruction for MLLs; fostering oral language; MN ELL identification, entrance and exit requirements; understanding MN state ELL tests; communicating with families; evidence-based practices to support multilingual language development; understanding proficiency levels and MN ELL WIDA standards and their "Can Do" descriptors.

Learning method options were virtual and asynchronous and included the following six options: reading short blog posts; reading professional development articles from sites such as Reading Rockets or Colorin' Colorado; listening to podcasts; learning from strategy-based tip of the week handouts or watching short strategy-based videos. Using this information, the researcher developed individual learning plans for each participant incorporating topics and methods for individual participants. Each week, for six weeks, participants were provided electronically with one learning resource aligned to their requested topic or topics and preferred methods. After interacting with the weekly resource, participants provided individual insights regarding material application potential by responding to feedback generating prompts.

The selected resources were gathered from multiple online platforms offering valuable sources of actionable perspectives, teaching strategies, and classroom tips shared by educators who are experts in the field. The intent was for participants in the MLPDA to immediately apply new learning into practice.

Of the methods offered, 16 participants requested short, strategy-based videos, 12 requested strategy-based tips of the week handouts, nine preferred podcasts, five opted for various methods and two participants preferred receiving short professional development articles from sites such as Reading Rockets and Colorin' Colorado,

The purpose of the study

This study's design was multipurpose in nature. Drawing on the perspectives of participating teachers, not only did the study inform the field of universally effective professional development methods for adult learners, but also highlighted, through lived experiences, the impact on participants' self-efficacy for supporting multilingual learners.

Participant Demographics

The study included 44 PreK-12th grade classroom, content area, special education and intervention teachers with experience levels ranging from 1 to 21+ years (see Table 1). Of the 44 participants, 23 were PreK-6th grade teachers, six were high school content area teachers, seven were special education teachers, four were licensed interventionists and four were multilingual teachers (see Table 2). In addition to experience levels and focus areas, information regarding education levels (see Table 3) and a mono vs multilingual comparison (see Table 4) among participants is also provided. Participation in the study was voluntary and offered to all currently practicing, licensed teachers.

Table 1

Participant Experience

Teaching Experience	*n*	*%*
1-5 years	7	15.9
6-10 years	10	22.7
11-15 years	6	13.6
16-20 years	5	11.3
21+ years	16	36.3

Table 2

Grade Level Primarily Taught

	n	*%*
Prekindergartner	2	4.5

Kindergarten	5	11.3
1st grade	3	6.8
2nd grade	2	4.5
3rd grade	4	9.0
4th grade	2	4.5
5th grade	3	6.8
6th grade	2	4.5
Elementary Special Education	5	11.3
Elementary Interventionist	2	4.5
Elementary English Language Learners	2	4.5
Middle School/High School Math	1	2.2
Middle School/High School Social Studies	2	4.5
Middle School/High School FACS	1	2.2
Middle School/High School Spanish	1	2.2
Middle School/High School English	1	2.2
Middle School/High School Special Education	2	4.5
Middle School/High School Intervention	2	4.5
Middle School/High School English Language Learners	2	4.5

Table 3

Level of Education

	n	%
Bachelor's Degree	16	34.1
Master's Degree	28	66.9

Table 4

Participant Monolingual to Multilingual Speaker Comparison

	n	%
Monolingual Speakers	36	81.8
Multilingual Speakers	8	18.1

Data

In this study, four data sources were used including a pre and post study questionnaire, weekly reflections and a semi-structured participant interview to conclude the study.

Pre-Study Questionnaire

To begin, study participants received an online pre-study questionnaire consisting of four parts. The first three parts were designed to collect participant demographic information and participant pedagogical knowledge and application self-efficacy related to multilingual learners using 23 Likert-scale questions and three open-ended response questions. The fourth part of the questionnaire supported learner agency.

The Likert-scale questioned teachers' knowledge of culturally responsive pedagogical approaches and inquired about the application of those approaches. The purpose of the survey was to raise awareness between a teacher's understanding of pedagogy and the intentional execution of best practices in the classroom. For example, one question requested a response to a teacher's understanding of the meaning of an ELLs English proficiency level and the next question inquired about a teacher's confidence and ability to plan specific and differentiated programming for students' proficiency levels. The intent was to support teachers in self-identifying areas of professional growth and development needs, potentially individually distinguishing their gap between theory and practice.

Following the survey, three open-ended questions were presented to conclude the initial data collection. The open-ended questions allowed participants to reveal their self-identified efficacy of meeting the needs of their multilingual learners.

Post-Study Questionnaire

At the conclusion of the six-week-long study, participants were again asked to answer the same 23 Likert-scale questions from the pre-study questionnaire and then also provide qualitative responses to three additional open-ended questions. These questions

were designed to elicit participants' perspectives on the experience and recognition of personal growth attributed to participation in the professional development experience.

Weekly reflections

A weekly qualitative descriptive response from participants served as the second source of the study's data. Each week, participants received resources from the researcher based on their individualized learning plan. After interacting with the resource, participants responded to a reflection prompt. Six individual and unique questions were intentionally written to encourage teachers to think reflectively regarding the movement of their new learning into practice.

Semi-structured interviews

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with ten participants at the culmination of the study. A purposive sampling technique was used to select interview participants, allowing the researcher to gain valuable insight from various viewpoints and diverse perspectives related to the experience. The interview allowed participants to reconstruct their experience, offering a first-person, adult-learner point of view while detailing their experience with the less-traditional professional development model and the impact that participating in the academy had on their self-efficacy for supporting multilingual learners in their classroom. The interview was semi-structurally designed in order to balance structure and flexibility, allowing opportunities for more in-depth and participant-centered responses.

Data Analysis

Demographic Data

The demographic data collected with the initial questionnaire was used to describe the sampling of participants within the study. Frequencies of each demography are reported to provide contextual understanding of the sample population as well as highlight the representation and diversity as it relates to the study.

Likert-Scale Questions

Participants were asked to answer the Likert-scale questions based on a 10-point scale ranging from 1 as *can-not-do* to 10 certainly-*can-do*. While data collected from surveys such as this are typically used for quantitative purposes, obtaining statistical data was not the intent of this data collection process. Because data was collected using the survey before and after the study concluded, mean scores for each of the 23 questions were generated. Although the mean score results highlighted an increase in the mean (moving closer to certainly can do) for each question, the data was more indirectly used to identify for participants, areas in which they might feel intrinsically motivated to want to learn more about or to see personal growth.

Open-ended questions and Semi-structured interviews

Written and oral responses to the open-ended questions and transcripts of the semi-structured interviews were coded using in-vivo methods to qualitatively analyze the language-based data. Through multi-cycle coding, attributes emerged into major themes, interpreting teachers' perceptions of their lived experience of the innovative professional development interaction and how it impacted knowledge, self-efficacy and teacher wellness.

Findings

Feedback from teachers regarding the professional development purposes revealed, by all participants, that the concept is undoubtedly commendable. As indicated by Cadero-Smith (2020), it is the ethical responsibility for practicing teachers to grow professionally and many throughout the study indicated feeling, however, unsupported in their efforts by their districts. ESSA's 2015 definition acknowledges that there is no one-size-fits-all solution for teacher learning and teachers continue to report conflicting experiences. When asked to elaborate on district-provided professional development, teachers anecdotally describe hour or multi-hour-long sessions, where topics are selected based on "central office" determinations of what teachers or the district needs. Challenges of rural education do play a role in the topic decisions given limited human, financial, and capital resources and typically, the development topics determined are done so reactively, based on an immediate need, rather than proactively.

The following findings will report MLPDA participants' perceptions of what challenges professional growth as a result of teaching in a rural area and how, in response to these challenges, an innovative professional development model might offer a solution.

Challenges of Professional Development in Rural Settings

Isolation

Isolation was a shared consensus among teachers who feel that their rural locations prohibited growth and development opportunities. As described by many teachers in the study, the feeling of isolation is experienced for many reasons. One frequently cited example is that of one individual bearing the sole responsibility in their district for the instruction of their grade level or discipline area. There is limited common

prep time to allow for local collaboration, and days can go by without actively engaging in professional conversations. It becomes very lonely as teachers work in solitude and while networking, outside of the district with other role-alike professionals is a potential solution, the daily demands placed on teachers can make doing so challenging. One teacher highlighted feelings of professional stagnation and social isolation as a result of their rural demography:

> "Being the only interventionist in the elementary school is hard and not everyone in my district has the same drive and interests that I do. I sometimes feel like I'm floundering, on an island of my own, when trying to find somebody to run my ideas by. There just aren't many networking opportunities readily available unless I really go searching…which takes time and I get busy…so goes to the wayside."

Location to learning opportunities

We are seeing a reemergence of in-person professional development workshops and conferences for teachers following the COVID-19 Pandemic. While some may see this as a viable opportunity for networking and a potential approach to reduce the feeling of isolation, the majority of the teachers surveyed in this study are reconsidering the required outputs versus the reward of these approaches. The once motivating opportunity of leaving the district for a day and attending a professional learning conference is now more universally acknowledged as high effort for low yield. Typically, local training opportunities take a one-size-fits-all approach, often covering needed re-licensure topics or reactionary subject matter seen as "for the good of the group" but frankly not applicable to most. Unfortunately, to find training to fit the individualized needs of teachers in rural areas, travel is required. As described by many, the opportunity for relevant in-person professional development learning happens, at a minimum, 100 miles away. The district's financial burden to support their teachers to attend these events adds

up with registration, travel, and accommodation costs. Given the shortage of substitute teachers, a need for a substitute teacher for the day adds both a financial and human resource cost. As one special education teacher indicated:

> "There is no way I would attend a professional development session that would require me to be gone for a day from my students. I can't. Our district has very few subs, and they are used to cover sicknesses. If I would need a sub so that I could be gone to a conference, my colleagues would have to cover for me. They would have to take care of their students and basically babysit mine, and I just won't do that to them or to my students. Traveling to a workshop is just not worth it."

Of higher priority than even the financial cost of distant professional development is that of the cost of time. Time is precious and there are consequences to spending time. Teachers are becoming more protective of their time. Not only will attending training take them away from their students, but of more importance, will take them from their families. In addition to being away, the amount of time it takes to prepare to be gone from school and family to attend a workshop is, for many, is not worth the effort. The time and effort spent frontloading to prepare for a conference is not afforded to teachers when they return from a conference. As one teacher stated:

> "Conferences can be very good to attend, and I leave with lots of great ideas and good intentions of applying so much of that new knowledge in my classroom when I return. But then, life happens and I'm thrown back into the craziness of life and basically that binder full of good ideas gets put on the shelf, never to be implemented and then I feel guilty."

There is no time for implementation upon return. It is, however, still an ethical responsibility to professionally develop and make lifelong learning a priority, but with the challenges and barriers, the question by many teachers and district administrators is "How?"

Remote learning opportunities

The COVID-19 pandemic did highlight the possibilities afforded through the alternatives of remote and online options. Virtual learning platforms certainly remove some barriers associated with rural demography and can positively address challenges such as travel, cost and time. A common perception, however, by many teachers in the study, is that remote learning lacks efforts to keep learners engaged. Many report challenges to stay focused while online because it is so easy to multi-task. As one teacher said, "I know I shouldn't but I check and respond to emails, grade papers, make my grocery list and send texts to my husband and kids to make the most of time while on a Zoom meeting."

It is, however, still a critical and ethical personal responsibility to professionally develop and prioritize lifelong learning. With the previously described challenges and barriers, the question asked by many teachers and districts is "How do we optimize the return on investment for professional development?"

Empowerment and Ownership

It is customary that teachers reveal such themes as limited resources, top-down decision-making, heavy workloads, and lack of autonomy when describing reasons for deterring empowerment and ownership in their work. Post-experience semi-structured interviews from MLPDA participants additionally disclosed traditional professional development experiences within their districts as limiting input and disregarding teacher self-reported growth need areas.

When provided the opportunity to reflect on the perceptions of the innovative professional development opportunity, identified feelings of autonomy and self-agency

were consistently reported. Teachers reported that the interaction with the provided weekly resources offered innovative teaching methods and easy-to-implement strategy and activity design ideas. The flexibility of having choice over one's learning reportedly resulted in self-directed action and application in the classroom. Teachers consistently identified a much-needed restoration of motivation and increased confidence for making decisions regarding what is best for their students.

Having the freedom and independence to make decisions and choices in one's learning is a critical element for adult learners. The accounts from study participants emphasized how their purposeful, independent decisions positively influenced the transition of their learning into practice. In addition to what was being learned, the flexibility of when and how to learn the material was important as well. The power of autonomy in personal learning provided participants with the motivation and self-direction for growth and development.

Relevance and Practicality

The selection of relevant and engaging topics for adult learners is critical if the intent is to intrinsically motivate and inspire. The resources offered through the study were pertinent to the learners' immediate needs and offered ideas for instant and practical application. The topics were self-selected by the learner, thus allowing for self-driven engagement. As one teacher described, "The strategies were just what I was looking for. They filled a need that I knew I had and so I was excited to use them right away, and they were easy and worked!" The resources were personally relevant and as another participant indicated, "current, so I knew it was up to date best practice ideas."

"Little chunks and more often" is how another participant described their learning. "It was like I had my own professional development coach that knew what I needed. Not only did she save me time by providing me resources but also held me accountable to the finish just by being there." Other teachers indicated their excitement each week when they saw the email arrive, as they knew, the link to new learning materials would be included. The relevance to each individual person that the various resources provided along with the trust in knowing that the strategies were designed to be easily implemented ignited enthusiasm.

Sustainability of lifelong learners

Embracing a philosophy of continuous learning and personal development throughout one's career describes the importance of sustaining the desire of lifelong learning. Participants in the study revealed that when topics are relevant and new knowledge is readily applicable, the pursuit of learning is more excitedly endorsed. As one teacher noted "Actionable learning breeds further desires. The MLPDA experience allowed for me to apply my learning in my classroom the very day I learned it, and I saw the benefit for learners. Because of that, I wanted to learn more."

Throughout the experience, many teachers were introduced to influential learning websites, YouTube channels or podcasts that they had not interacted with before. In weekly reflections, study participants indicated subscribing to or joining sites or podcasts for future use, motivating them to use the resources in the future to further develop their toolbox. Fostering the foundation for learning while allowing autonomy, as through the MLPDA experience, cultivates future and potent lifelong learning.

Advocacy and Leadership

To professionally develop as a teacher means one is intentionally and systematically working on growing their skills, knowledge, and competencies in the field of education. Another emerging theme from MLPDA participant perceptions is that of advocacy and leadership. As one teacher indicated "Adult learning empowers and now that I know more, I want to do better…for kids and even for my profession…" This certainly means strengthening and utilizing effective strategies within the classroom, but even further, it could mean advocating for students, teachers, and the profession beyond the classroom. There was overwhelming support for the idea when asked about potentially emulating the MLPDA model using other topics of focus. Ideas such as mental health support, classroom management, intervention, differentiation, and supporting academic behaviors all emerged from that question. One participant indicated "if we want to be educated on what is relevant in our field, we have to find a different avenue. I think this model is the way to go and I will advocate for this option in our district."

Suggestions from participants also included utilizing professional development funding to support such initiatives and offering teachers time within work contracts to engage in enrichment and personal growth opportunities. When questioned further about how these ideas might come to fruition, there was acknowledgment by some participants that the impact that the experience had on them is empowering to advocate, lead, and make change. When asked what that might look like, one participant responded, "I'm on fire for this work, and I know what I would like the outcome to be, so now I just have to figure out how I can best make a difference."

Teacher Well-Being

Participant perceptions of their experience with the MLPDA have led to the final and extremely important emerging theme which is that of teacher well-being. While the term "teacher well-being" was never explicitly or directly mentioned by participants in the study, the theme was unveiled from the many specific examples shared regarding their experience with the MLPDA. While there are many factors and complexities in the educational field that lead to feelings of dissatisfaction and burnout, teachers indicated feeling very respected and heard when they were allowed to determine their own professional development path. Relevant learning in a self-directed and flexible environment led to feelings of value, acknowledgment, and validation, all critical components of teacher satisfaction.

During the follow up interviews, some participants expressed that prior to the start of the study, they were hesitant and perhaps even a bit skeptical regarding the ease at which participation in the study would be. There was concern regarding the amount of time needed weekly to engage, a worry about what new information would mean regarding classroom application and even self-doubt and worry regarding flawed previously used classroom strategies. One hesitant participant honestly stated at the start of the study "if this gets too hard for me due to how much time it is taking or if I don't agree with the information being shared, I will drop out." That participant completed all six weeks of the study and provided this concluding response:

> "I loved that it was self-paced and allowed me the freedom to choose how I wanted the information. It was good to have the weekly deadline as without that I would have put it off just due to the amount of daily tasks we have as teachers. I am grateful for the experiences and would love to do more PD like this."

Weekly and final reflection posts as well as semi-structured interviews, indicated much satisfaction with the experience. A sense of relief was reported by many and as one stated:

> "I felt good because I was provided affirmation for things I was already doing. I also am feeling much better because I also learned that the biggest impact to student learning can be just simple ideas. I do not need to overhaul my system, which is what I initially thought. I feel relief."

Additional positive comments were shared regarding the allowance of the flexibility of interaction with materials (where, when, and how) and the amount of time required each week. Most reported spending about 30 — 40 minutes each week, interacting with the materials and then reporting on ways to integrate and apply the ideas into the classroom. One even compared the time spent over the 6-week opportunity to the amount of time spent during a 1-day, 7 hour long, conference. The benefits and impact on students from the local, multi-week opportunity far outweighed the typical information applied after attending a day-long event. The flexibility of learning and the short, yet thought-provoking resources, shared by teachers in the field, was described by multiple study participants as fulfilling, useful, energizing, and empowering.

Conclusion and Implications

The Multilingual Learner Professional Development (MLPDA) experience was designed to provide practicing teachers in rural areas an experience using an innovative professional learning model to support growth and development in an area of imminent and recognized need. The findings provide insight into not only the effectiveness of the model used, but also in the learning acquired by the participants. The focus of implications in education will be on the professional development process and not the content.

The implications of this study have found that allowing adult learners to select the topics and also the methods from which to learn was found to be empowering. In addition to the voice and choice, the resources, which were intentionally selected to be short yet applicable, as well as the flexibility in terms of when and how to engage with the resources, resulted in perceived positive outcomes, and satisfied participants. Participants universally agreed that 6-weeks was an appropriate amount of time, indicating excitement each week to receive a new resource, yet recognizing the importance of intentionality and moderation, so as not to indulge excessively, potentially result in negative consequences.

The professional development model was designed to be a framework utilized in rural demographic school systems, which for this study, focused on the topic of multilingual learners. While it is imperative to acquire the skills to support multilingual learners, and this should certainly be a topic that is addressed using the model in the future, it is not, however, the only topic that could result in positive outcomes for students and teachers. The findings of the study revealed a flexible framework that has broad applicability across wide-ranging and diverse identified professional development needs.

Study Limitations

One frequently described limitation to the study was that of lack of collaboration opportunities within the professional development academy. While a benefit to the experience was that participants were able to flexibly interact with their resources, engaging in personal reflections of their experience, numerous participants indicated a desire for collaboration. In rural areas where there is a legitimate sense of isolation and loneliness in the workplace, providing opportunities for networking and synergy would seem like a fantastic idea. Many school districts currently utilize Professional Learning

Communities as avenues for local collaboration, growth and professional development. Sometimes, however, the structure and implementation of the PLC's do not yield the desired or anticipated results.

An excellent potential for future research could be twofold. One route could be that those involved in a future 6-week long professional development academy, as previously described in this research, could be provided the option of a brief, weekly collaborative gathering where discussions, reflections, or inquiry of current learning takes place. This would allow for participants to network and share experiences through social interaction, offering the opportunity for deeper learning.

A second option, in conjunction with or running separately from the previously described future study could be the addition of adding this framework of the professional development academy to a professional learning community. The study could explore the perceptions of the current benefits and challenges of already functioning PLCs within districts and the impact on those perceptions if a professional development framework, like the one described in this study, is added to the existing learning community. The impact on the strength and effectiveness of the professional learning communities could then be explored.

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ARTICLE #2

Transformative Teacher Professional Development for Multilingual Students

Introduction

While receiving a quality education should be deemed an expected human right for all students, unfortunately, the experience afforded to many students educated in rural areas of our nation is less than effective (Adams & Wood, 2015; Fishman, 2015). Inadequate fiscal resources, limited human capital, and geographic isolation create significant barriers making it difficult for many rural schools to meet that one common goal (Culbertson & Billig, 2015). In addition to the previously mentioned barriers, rural school districts are also seeing an increase in demographic diversity, increasing the number of multilingual learners.

In addition to the previously mentioned barriers, rural school districts are also seeing an increase in demographic diversity, increasing the number of multilingual learners. The National Center for Educational Statistic's [NCES] 2021 annual report indicates that there are currently over five million English Learners (ELs) in U.S. schools, with over 75% of those students speaking Spanish as their first language. Of additional importance to this statistic is that the growing wave of diversity is no longer primarily settling in the larger metropolitan areas, but ELLs and their families are more recently finding themselves in geographically rural areas. Because of this, Reed (2019) reports that in these rural settings, the rapid increase in racial and ethnic diversity has significantly impacted the diversity of the student populations within the school systems. These school systems face unique challenges in meeting the needs of the growing diverse

populations, with many teachers lacking best practice knowledge, confidence and competence needed to meet these students' academic, social, and emotional needs. While the classroom teachers, ethically and professionally, are eager to know how best to meet the growing diversity of needs within their classrooms, limited prior training and experiences, unchartered planning, pedagogical uncertainty, and lack of confidence all impact, often negatively, student outcomes (Bouck, 2018).

Common practice in schools, when teachers require new or additional knowledge to address needs, is to offer targeted professional development opportunities. The methods of effective professional development have been debated for decades, with ineffective practices usually prevailing. Fullan (2007) described the typical external practices used to impact instructional change as rarely "powerful enough, specific enough, or sustained enough to alter the culture of the classroom and school" (p. 35). In response to Fullan's study as well as many others, in 2015, to transform these previously utilized ineffective practices, the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) placed a long-awaited definition of professional development within federal educational policy. This definition asserts the significance of continued educator learning as the key to helping students succeed with high academic standards (Leaning Forward, 2017).

Administrators and teachers unquestionably acknowledge the need for continued learning and the value of professional development opportunities (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012). Unfortunately, productive approaches and effective techniques in theory do not always find their way into practice with challenges associated with rurality providing further layers of complexity (Leaning Forward, 2017). Finding effective ways, through

professional development opportunities to address the needs in rural areas necessitates innovative solutions (Cadero-Smith (2020).

The current study aims to investigate the impact of teachers' participation in a professional development program to their perceived growth for supporting English Leaners. PreK-12th grade individuals teaching in a rural area participated in an individualized professional development model which allowed for learner voice and choice to develop skills and self-efficacy in supporting multilingual learners in their classrooms. This 6-week long innovative approach, known as the Multilingual Learner Professional Development Academy, forwardly described as the MLPDA, was developed using andragogical teaching theories, allowed for self-agency and participant autonomy. The research question was "How does participation in the Multilingual Learner Professional Development Academy, an autonomous professional development program, affect teachers' perceived growth in their ability to support English learners in rural schools?"

Theoretical Framework

The beliefs that one holds regarding their ability to execute behaviors necessary for preferred or desired outcomes, as articulated in Bandura's self-efficacy theory, plays a pivotal role in shaping motivation, behavior and overall functioning (Bandura, 1977). The self-efficacy theory, suggests that individuals who are not experiencing success, have possibly not been provided with learning opportunities or modeling of examples that would support that learner in developing high levels of self-efficacy (Gallagher, 2012; Zee & Koomen, 2016). Exposure to successful outcomes cultivates continued positive outcome results and through engagement and work, self-efficacy grows (Zee and Koomen, 2016).

The implications of heightened self-efficacy, according to Bandura (1977), significantly influences motivation, effort, goal setting and persistence. Individuals with increased self-efficacy are more likely to pursue challenging goals, persist in the face of obstacles and resiliently overcome challenges (Bandura, 1977). Additionally, Bandura further suggests a correlation between self-efficacy and emotional well-being, implying that those with exhibited self-belief may experience reduced stress and anxiety when confronted with challenges (Zee & Koomen, 2016).

Malcom Knowles (1975) outlined in his Theory of Andragogy, the distinct characters of adult learners and how their educational needs differ the learning needs of children. Six assumptions about adult learning summarize the andragogical theory of adult learning. These six assumptions highlight the importance of the self-directed nature of adults, recognizing the importance of prior experiences, readiness to learn and the motivation driven by internal factors and perceived relevance (Merriam & Bierema, 2014).

Knowles (1998) recognizes that adults are not merely passive recipients of knowledge but instead must be active participants in the planning and evaluation of learning. The Theory of Andragogy critically influences the way in which programs are designed and delivered to adult learners by emphasizing autonomy, self-motivation and practical application of knowledge (Merriam & Bierema, 2014).

Mezirow's Transformative Learning theory recognizes the acquired experiences that adults use as frames of reference, or structure through which understanding is gained from experiences, from which they function (Mezirow, 1997). Transformation of adult learning occurs when learners are faced with circumstances that allow movement toward

a more self-reflective and inclusive frame of reference (Mezirow, 2003). Educational research is continuously offering guidance to educational practice and because of this, opportunities for change through professional development are frequent (Martin et al., 2019). Collaboration between theory to practice is essential but can also be dangerous. Martin, et al. (2019) discuss the importance of providing professional development to meet the learners' needs, furthering that f the school's context is not in need of or would not benefit from the latest research appearing in the administrative journals, not only will transformation be non-existent, but teachers' trust in future initiatives may also be thwarted.

Successful professional development does have the power to transform beliefs and practices as well as improve student learning. "Principals and school leaders who have achieved success have allowed teachers to have voice, take control, or lead professional development that is meaningful to their school context" (Martin et al., 2019, p. 182). Teachers, just like students, require scaffolding and differentiation of their learning, thus bringing unique needs, interests, and levels of understanding to the experience (Martin et al., 2014). Teachers must have autonomy and permission to respond to their experiences for transformative learning to occur (Martin et al, 2019).

Literature Review

Challenges Impacting Rural Education

According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2021), rural youth collectively represent nearly 25% of the student population in public schools in the United States. School systems within these rural areas face significant challenges that negatively impact their ability to reach the common goal: providing all students with a

high-quality education. Challenges include *inadequate fiscal resources* creating financial challenges due to reduced federal and state revenue and funding (Roza, 2015), *limited human capital* or the knowledge, skills and education possessed by available human workforce (Gagnon & Mattingly, 2015), and *geographic isolation*, or the physical separation from more densely populated regions (Glover et al., 2016).

The convergence of the three challenges can yield unfavorable results for students and teachers in general. The trifecta results in high teacher turnover and difficult teacher recruitment. While these issues have chronically been considered a dilemma in rural schools, they are now more than ever a crisis (Gagnon & Mattingly, 2015). "Teacher turnover impairs student performance, as does having less-experienced teachers without subject-matter expertise" (Banghart, 2021, p. 30). Gagnon and Mattingly (2015) also add that "teacher recruitment and retention challenges may create school environments in which a disproportionately higher number of rural students are taught by inexperienced teachers" (p. 23).

The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), the nation's educational law committed to equal opportunities for all students, was signed into action in 2015 and is aimed to ensure that all students in the United States have equal access to high-quality instruction. Ossa (2022) explains that while school districts are making every effort to do so, for those whom the growing diversity of population is rapid and unprecedented, they are often compelled to respond reactively resulting in less-than-ideal outcomes. School districts must acknowledge teachers' critical and requested needs while assuring the tools, strategies, and instructional practices are appropriate and inclusive of El:'s language and culture (Ossa, 2022). Baker and Wright (2021) suggest that the highest priority is

ensuring teachers accept and understand their students' represented cultures, heritages, and languages, seeing diversity certainly as a right of students but even more powerfully as a resource from which all can learn. Gándara & Santibañez (2016) suggest that just being a "good teacher" is not good enough for Els (p. 32).

English learners present unique needs to reach academic expectations that even good teachers, without the proper training, will fail to meet (Patton et al., 2015). While these demands are certainly not exclusive to rural teachers, the increase in diverse student populations in rural areas are finding many good teachers feeling limited in skills, unprepared and asking for help (Hoover & Erickson, 2015). In addition, the challenges of teacher recruitment and retention in rural areas not only limit availability for generally licensed teachers, but even more inhibits the access to those more specialized to work with ELs (Hoover & Erickson, 2015). Administrators are responding to the needs of their teachers in the best way they know possible, through teacher professional development (Darling-Hammond & Richardson et al., 2017; Patton et al., 2015).

Effective Professional Development Practices

Far too often, professional development topics and methods are universally determined for all teachers, typically by administration or the central office, employing a one size fits all model (Darling-Hammond & Richardson, 2009; Darling-Hammond et al., 2017). As described by Desimone and Garet (2015), teachers' responses to the same professional development will vary considerably, resulting in mixed outcomes for students. Teachers come to professional development opportunities with varying levels of experience and content knowledge and from various classroom contexts, all of which will influence what teachers need and are able to learn from the activity (Roschelle et al.,

2010). “The variation in teacher response to the same PD implies that PD should be calibrated to individual teacher needs (Desimone & Garet, 2015, p. 255).

Desimone and Garet (2015), identify some current trends in U.S. professional development that are shaping the character and quality of teacher PD. The trends do recognize that there is a broadening understanding of the importance of moving away from one-time workshops to experiences that are sustained over time (U.S. Department of Education, 2012). These trends also point to a more evident correlation between professional development and teacher evaluations often referred to as “differentiated PD” (Youngs, 2013).

“Differentiated PD” has been seen to typically manifest in two ways. One approach involves offering a range of options (including online experiences, workshops, reading, and other activities) aligned with specific aspects of teacher practice which were identified during teacher observations (Desimone & Garet, 2015). The other approach is to allow coaches and mentors to draw upon teachers’ strengths and weaknesses gathered through evaluation data to then tailor a plan from which the teacher to work (Allen, Pianta, Gregory, Mikami, & Lun, 2011). Personalization of professional development, as claimed by Stegman (2020), offers a significant advantage in that is aligned and tailored to the unique goals and self-identified preferences of each teacher.

Prescribed needs, according to Sogunro (2022), are those which are mandated or determined by the supervisor and seen as critical in order to address a deficiency or shortfall that needs to be corrected with the teacher. Decisions made, based on prescribed needs, do not involve teacher input and the effectiveness of doing so are likened to prescribing medication that does not meet the needs of the patient. The study further

identified the impact of professional development outcomes based on prescribed needs versus felt needs. *Prescribed needs*, according to Sogunro (2022), are those which are mandated or determined by the supervisor and seen as critical in order to address a deficiency or shortfall that needs to be corrected with the teacher. Decisions made, based on prescribed needs, do not involve teacher input and the effectiveness of doing so are likened to prescribing medication that does not meet the needs of the patient. In Sogunro (2022), more than three quarters of the study participants indicated never feeling motivated or excited for or satisfied with their professional development experiences and have felt no opportunity for application of the learning into practice.

On the contrary to prescribed needs, Sogunro (2022) additionally described *felt needs*, which highlight the involvement of individually identified needs. Teacher professional development needs "a shift from mandating professional development to empowering or enabling teachers to identify their own professional development needs" (Sogunro, 2022, p. 65). These self-identified areas of growth allow individuals the autonomy to fill the gap between where one is and where one needs to be. For teachers, felt needs identify a teacher's specific developmental need to improve capacity while offering such privileges as freedom or autonomy in continued learning. The outward support of professional integrity and respect of expertise and specialized training is motivating and powerful (Sogunro, 2022).

Sogunro (2022) is calling for a paradigm shift in professional development policy and implementation. Empowering teachers to learn based on felt needs, also known as teacher autonomy of choice, allows teachers the opportunities to decide on what they need that will make their work better (Sehrawat, 2014). To further corroborate this

notion, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation recently conducted a study on the impact of needs identification in professional development for teachers. This study found that "Teachers with more choice reports much higher levels of satisfaction with professional development – those who choose all or most of their professional learning opportunities are more than twice as satisfied with professional development as those with fewer options" (Gates & Gates, 2014, p. 10).

Personalization of professional development, as claimed by Stegman (2020), offers a significant advantage in that it is aligned and tailored to the unique goals and self-identified preferences of each teacher. The increasing availability of technology opens the doors of educators to a vast array of virtual professional learning opportunities, allowing teachers to access educational materials focusing on such topics as instructional methods, principles of social emotional learning, delivery and equity practices and culturally relevant pedagogy (Stegman, 2020). Additionally, modes such as webinars, podcasts, videos and other social media mediums offer further valuable assistance and flexibility for individualized professional learning (Lieberman & Miller, 2014; Stegman, 2020).

Successful outcomes of PD are found when explicitly linked to classroom lessons and instructional practices (Desimone & Garet, 2015). Garet and colleagues (2008, 2011) have found that less effective professional development outcomes result when there is limited opportunity to link new learning into daily practice. Providing teachers with deliberate support, guidance, and opportunities to integrate acquired knowledge or pedagogy into their daily instruction is strongly encouraged (Desimone & Garet, 2015).

Methods

The current qualitative research was conducted through a phenomenological lens, with the intent to determine the meaning of the phenomenon or *lived experiences* through the related experiences of several individuals. Data, collected before, during and after participation in the Multilingual Learner Professional Development Academy (known as MLPDA from here forward) to grasp what Cresswell and Poth (2018) identify as the universal essence of the thing. The study's design was multifaceted in nature. It was designed to explore the themes that emerged from the perceptions of teachers in rural settings who participated in an individualized professional development opportunity purposefully designed for adult learners. Attention was intentionally given to the themes highlighting teachers' perceived growth and ability for supporting multilingual learners.

Participants

The participants for this study were PreK – 12th grade teachers from three rural west central Minnesota school districts with total student populations ranging from 379 – 1046 and an average of 5% of those students being English Learners. Acknowledging their developing proficiency in multiple languages, the term "English Learners" is used in this paper due to is widespread usage. Selection of the sample was purposeful as participants were all teachers whose roles within the school districts fit the scope of the study (Hennink et al., 2019). The sample selection was also convenient in that participants were teachers within school districts where the primary researcher worked as a literacy specialist and professional development consultant. A total of 44 voluntary participants took part in the MLPDA for 6-weeks in February and March of 2023. These teachers had been teaching between 3-35 years, with 32 (72%) teaching in elementary

classrooms and 12 (28%) teaching in middle school or high school settings. 16 (34%) held a bachelor's degree and 28 (66%) held master's degrees with 36 (82%) being monolingual speakers and 8 (18.1%) being multilingual speakers.

Multilingual Learner Professional Development Academy (MLPDA)

MLPDA provides the participants with autonomous professional learning opportunities. Participants were volunteers who willingly elected to take part in the research project and engaged in a six-week long initiative. Addressing their *felt* needs (Sogunro, 2022), MLPDA was designed to have them interact with and learn from intentionally selected materials based on their individualize learning topic (e.g., characteristics of MLL's, best practices for supporting MLL's, understanding proficiency levels, fostering oral language, communicating with families) and method of learning preferences (e.g., blog posts, podcasts, YouTube videos, practitioner articles). Each week, participants would receive a brief individualized, English learner focused resource from which to learn. After interacting with the weekly resource, participants provided individual insights regarding material application potential by responding to feedback generating prompts.

The selected resources were gathered from multiple online platforms offering actionable perspectives, teaching strategies, and classroom tips shared by expert educators in the field. The sources included such resources as videos from The Language Lady's or Teachings in Education's YouTube channels, articles and blog posts from Edutopia and Colorin' Colorado! And Podcasts from the Cult of Pedagogy and Inspiring Young Leaners – Equipping ELLs.

To ensure the use of appropriate instructional principles and practices for English learners, Gupta's (2019) six recommended principles, sculpted from second language learning research were considered. These six principles emerged as critical components to designing successful opportunities that will positively impact learning for ELs. The six principles are (1) know your students, (2) create a welcoming classroom and school environment, (3) building background knowledge, (4) provide comprehensible input to build vocabulary, (5) include frequent opportunities for interaction and discussion and (6) use multiple modalities during instruction. When selecting materials for use when personalizing participants' professional development experiences, materials were vetted using the six critical component principles. The intent was to ensure the information shared was grounded in research.

Data Sources

Four data sources used to conduct this phenomenological study include a pre and post study questionnaire, weekly reflections and semi-structured participant interviews to conclude the study. (1) Participants completed a pre-study questionnaire that consisted of four parts: demographic information, a Likert scale, pre-assessment open ended questions and an opportunity to select topics and methods for learning. A total of 46 participants completed the questionnaire, and 44 out of 46 were used for data analysis. Two of the questionnaires were completed by instructional assistants but the study's focus highlighted perceptions of practicing teachers so those two questionnaires were not used.

The first part was designed to collect participants' demographic information. The second part was the 23-questions TELLS (Teaching English Language Learners Scale)

(Carney, 2012) which focused on pedagogical knowledge and application self-efficacy related to English learners.

The third part of the initial data collection process was to answer 3 open-ended questions (see Appendix A for questions) encouraging participants to express themselves freely and in their own words, allowing for more in-depth exploration of their experiences, perspectives, and feelings on the subject (Cresswell, 2007). The fourth and final part of the initial questionnaire allowed participants the self-agency and autonomy to make selections regarding their topics and methods of learning throughout the MLPDA (See Appendix B for offered topics and methods).

(2) A weekly qualitative descriptive response from participants served as the second source of the study's data. Each week, participants received individually selected resources from the researcher. After individually exploring their materials, participants shared their responses to a common reflection prompt. Each weekly reflection prompt was uniquely crafted, aiming to guide teachers in reflective thinking about the incorporation of their new learning into their instructional practices (See Appendix A for weekly reflection prompts). These reflection prompts generated personal anecdotes, emotions and unique insights, used to invoke further nuanced understanding of the research topic (Cresswell, 2007). Over the six-week period, 245 responses were collected, averaging 41 responses per week and ranging from one to 12 sentence responses.

(3) At the conclusion of the six-week-long study, participants were again asked to answer the same 23 Likert-scale TELLS questions (Carney 2012) and provide qualitative responses to three additional open-ended questions (See Appendix A for post-study

questions). These questions were designed to elicit natural, unscripted reflections of participants' true thoughts and feelings of the experience. Opportunity was also provided for recognition of personal growth attributed to participation in the professional development experience. A total of 38 participants completed the questionnaire.

(4) In addition, semi-structured interviews, a valuable data collection method to gain access to rich descriptions of the lived experience, were conducted to elicit first-person perspectives at the culmination of the study. A purposive sampling technique was used to select interview participants, allowing the researcher to gain valuable insight from various viewpoints and diverse perspectives related to the experience. 10 participants participated in the interviews. Each interview lasted 43.5 minutes on average and the total length of the interviews was 7 hours and 25 minutes. All interviews were audio recorded and transcribed for data analysis.

Data Analysis

The researcher was immersed in the data collection by designing and directly administering each of the instruments used within the study. Upon completion by participants, the researcher reviewed the written responses to the open-ended questions and weekly prompts to become familiar with the data. During the process of listening to and transcribing interviews, the researcher had an opportunity to become familiar with the context and content of the data, and recognized nuances, tones and meanings, ensuring the validity of the data.

The written responses to the open-ended questions, the weekly prompts and interviews were then coded using Saldaña's (2016) two coding stages. First cycle coding allowed the researcher to identify, through in-vivo coding, the exact words and phrases

used by the participants. Phrases and terms used by participants that described thoughts, feelings or experiences were highlighted using multi-colors. The purpose of qualitative analysis techniques was to identify patterns and themes behind textual data by, as described by Cresswell (2018), "taking the data apart," making interpretations, and "then putting it back together" to determine the findings (p.10). Qualitative analysis was led by an inductive approach where "patterns, themes, and categories of analysis come from the data; they emerge out of the data rather than being imposed on them prior to data collection and analysis" (Patton, 1980, p. 306). Words were then broken into smaller codes or units, such as "instructional practices", "new learning", "affirmation", "confusion", "ideas for future" and "motivation', dissecting participants perceptions and responses.

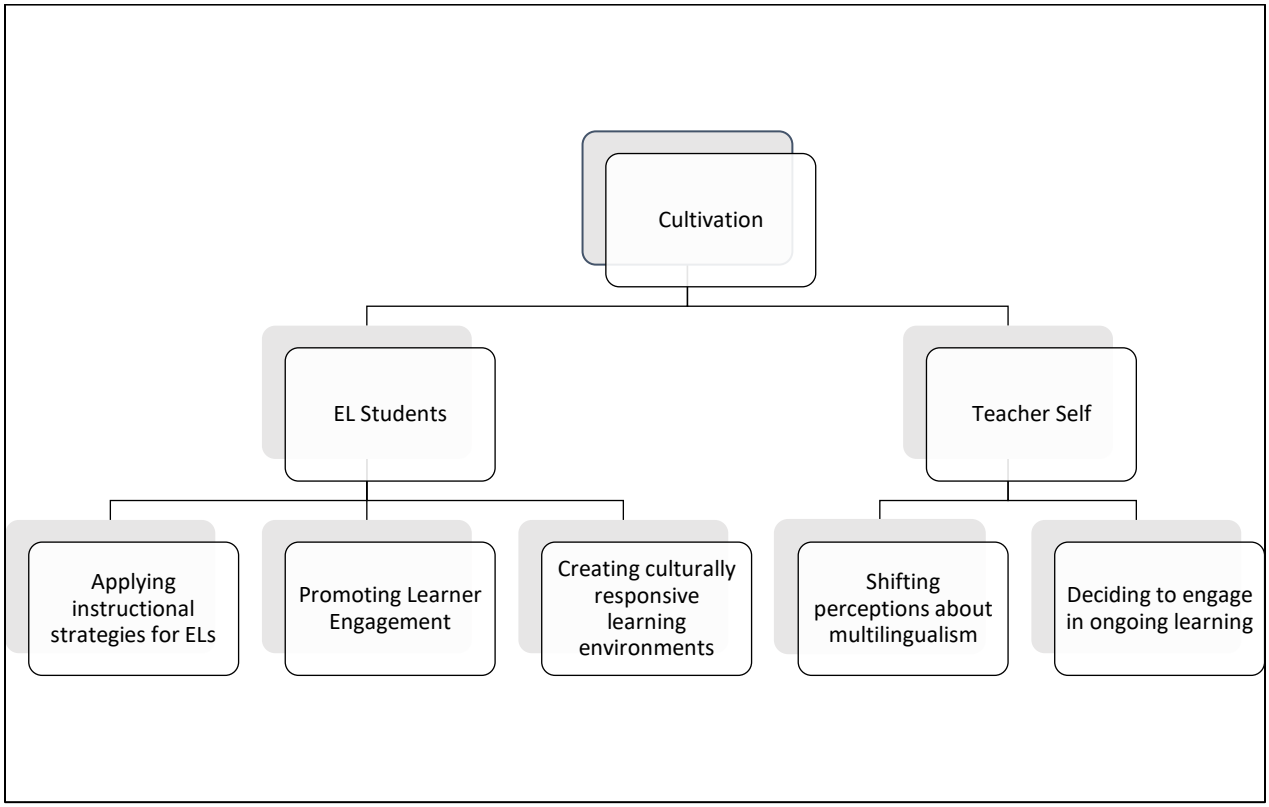
Second cycle coding was conducted in an attempt to condense the large amounts of codes into a smaller number of analytic units. In this stage, labels and descriptive codes were condensed to allow the most relevant aspects to emerge (Cresswell, 2018). The analytic units were grouped to develop a bigger picture. The three categories of *Instruction for English Learners, Context,* and *Self* initially emerged from the researcher's analysis. Upon further review and reflection with the researcher's collaborator, *Instruction for English Learners* and *Context* merged into *EL Students* and *Self* better labeled as *Teacher Self* resulting in two final categories.

Figure 1 describes the theme that emerged from the categories developed from the study's specific and individual codes. The overarching theme of cultivation signifies the profound influence that the participation in the MLPDA had on teacher's perceptions of

the implications of the experience. Shared perceptions collected through multiple data sources resulted in the following findings.

Figure 1

MLPDA Participant Perceptions



Findings

This study examined participants' perceptions of the impact of an alternative professional development model on their self-efficacy of teaching English learners. The researcher identified across multiple sources of data a theme with two parts. Upon experiencing the phenomenon of the MLPDA, teachers consistently identified ways in which their transformation through the experience provided them self-efficacy to cultivate and strengthen their English language students and themselves as teachers. The theme was interpreted by referring to the results of the pre-study questionnaire and

identifying patterns across data sources. According to the pre-study questionnaire, when asked to define their role in supporting their ELs, meeting the needs of their students was frequently identified. The word ALL, when describing students, was capitalized in multiple responses, signifying the inclusion of everyone.

Perceived Growth to Cultivate English Learners

After the completion of the professional development program, participants discovered that certain effective teaching practices and strategies, which they were familiar with, are particularly beneficial for cultivating English learners and accordingly gained confidence to apply them into practice for English learners. As teachers work to cultivate multilingual learners in their classrooms, the following words and phrases taken directly from a variety of weekly reflection journals alluded to impactful evidence-based practices effective for multilingual learners: *wait time, think time, slower pace, avoidance of idioms and acronyms, use of realia, use of visuals, using labels,* and *thoughtful use of body language*. Also, many learned that approaches such as using *interactive activities, think/pair/share, group discussions, goal setting, building background knowledge and vocabulary building* are all identifiable best practices for supporting language acquisition. Teachers mentioned that they learned that these evidence-based practices that they have known and used would also be effective for English learners. “It made me feel so good that I am already doing these things” was a remark made by an interviewee when discussing the support offered to her students, further replying “even if it wasn’t new knowledge for me, it made me feel good to learn that what I was doing, was good for them.” Another teacher reported through a reflection prompt that they “use strategies like these some of the time, but knowing that they are good for all kids, I can be better.”

When participants were asked through open-ended questions about their preparedness for supporting their ELs, a frequent response indicated a realization or transformation in thinking that their currently existing toolbox of strategies designed for their English monolingual students would prove to be equally effective for their multilingual learners. This was surprising for participants, as many presumed there would be an additional, exclusive inventory of strategies needed for supporting EL's. Given these tools were ones in the toolbox, a described sense of relief, affirmation, and growth in self-efficacy were reported.

Furthermore, participants emphasized the strong relationship between student engagement and empowerment. One participant during an interview explained "empowerment leads to ownership of learning and the only way I can get students to feel empowered is to make sure they are engaged." Similarly, another participant responding to a weekly journal prompt added, "After reading this week's research, I now know that if I expect my students to be engaged, this will help them to feel empowered."

Through interview and reflective prompt responses, participants shared specific insights gained from their learning experiences and outlined strategies for implementing their newfound knowledge. One participant's written journal response summed up a variety of insights highlighting the importance of student-centered engagement activities when responding "I love the idea of structured talk, I need to do less talking and my students need to do more." Another participant, during an interview, described their realization of the promotion of learner engagement through formative assessments. "I will use more CFU strategies, like thumbs up/thumbs down, or whiteboard responses to make sure all students are participating" while another journal entry added "I didn't want

to make my students feel bad by asking them something they didn't know, so I didn't ask them anything. They are capable, moving forward, I will be expecting them to engage." Engaging students to empowerment, one additional participant responded "I will no longer shy away from calling on all students. I now know that they need to know that I believe they can do it."

Teachers' belief in students is empowering. A teacher must not just provide opportunities for engagement but must also convey to their students and believe that in their classroom, all students are capable of succeeding. As noted through multiple reflection responses and interview quotes, a common thread emerging from the participants voices was that of unintentional underestimating capabilities and limiting expectations. Teachers indicated the revelation of unconscious bias through this experience, admitting to watering down the expectations for their students, assuming they would not be able to do it. During an interview, one teacher indicated that "we must take our MLLs seriously, they are intelligent. Goodness gracious, they are learning multiple languages, so of course they are smart, they just need to be seen as such and be given a chance." While another teacher revealed, through written reflection that MLLs "are working twice as hard to produce half as much" while yet another reminded that "a lack of language does not equal a lack of intelligence.

One teacher's written reflection humbly described their transformation beginning with shame and ending with empowerment:

"Yes, I've learned what to do, but even more, I've learned what not to do. I've made choices in the past that I will not make in the future with what I expect my ELLs in my classroom to do. Most of the time, the disservice I've done for my students is that I haven't expected enough. I can't change the past, but I know better, so now, moving forward I will do better."

While this information, for most participants, was not new, the frequency in which it was mentioned through their voices indicated a significant impact. Not only did interacting with the weekly resources offer a way to support teachers in engaging and empowering their students, but it also revealed a transformation of a new sense of engagement leading to empowerment for the teachers themselves.

Recognizing the significance of establishing a culturally responsive environment emerged as the third vital finding from participants' voices. Ensuring inclusivity and meaningful connections will positively impact academic success. When asked, based on new learning what participants may do different, "embrace the beauty of the culture(s) represented in my classroom" was an individual's response that spoke for many. Voices heard through interviews and written responses both included intentions and ideas such as *engaging in cultural studies*, *endorsing festivals and celebrations*, *allowing culture sharing-sessions during class*, *intentionally expressing interest in the culture and ask students questions* and *ensuring the classroom décor and books in the library represent the classroom identities*. One interviewee stated "I need to provide opportunities to add to each culture and not take it away" followed by another recognizing that "students deserve to be recognized for who they are [in classrooms.]"

Learning the importance of accurately pronouncing a student's name was the most frequently reported code throughout the study. This seemingly easy strategy evoked emotional responses from many who regrettably remembered instances where children went for months with their names being mispronounced or were only allowed to use one last name rather than two. One interviewee eloquently articulated, "Use correct name

pronunciations, what a great reminder. Simple, yet so validating." That teacher, from that day forward, was determined to learn the appropriate pronunciations of all the children in the school, vowing to never mispronounce a student's name again. That teacher after deep reflection indicated, "the benefit will far exceed the work I put into learning each child's name."

Using one's native language to support 2nd language acquisition, another strategy which highlights cultural sensitivity, surfaced frequently in responses as well. Those who mentioned its importance did so reporting a sense of relief to see that this practice, backed by evidence, should be universally accepted. While many reported seeing a broader acceptance within their districts, few did indicate continued pockets of resistance. One participant reflected in a written response, "I am disappointed in how we are treating our families. Not allowing them to use their native languages for communication and as a tool to help learn English is wrong." Additionally, a participant responded, "A student's home language is their identity, it is in that language where their roots run deep, it is not for me to take that away." Finally, a participant concluded their written response with, "I learned this week" wrote a participant "that identity is everything to a student, yet something, that within a minute can be taken away if we are not careful." Findings unveiled a heightened sense of confidence in the abilities of teachers when cultivating their Els.

Cultivating Perceived Self Growth

Teachers are dedicated professionals actively seeking ways to better enhance the overall well-being and success of their students. After participating in a professional development program which placed a strong emphasis on autonomy, independence and

self-agency, participants self-identified perceived transformative changes, citing shifting perceptions of multilingual learners and increased motivation and desire for continued and ongoing learning.

Before beginning the professional development program, participants admitted their uncertainty when asked how they felt about supporting English learners. Responses to many pre-study open ended questions began with words and phrases such as I *am unable to…., I don't know how…, I don't have the experience with…, I feel very unprepared…, I find it difficult.* Once participant began their journey through the professional development program, the journal responses each week and the interview responses at the end of the experience, revealed that nearly all participants experienced perceived significant mindset changes regarding their ability to support their Els and even more specifically regarding their perceptions about the Els. The transformation for many was the simple yet powerful affirmation that they were already engaging in appropriate, supportive practices for their students. This experience allowed many to express relief, comfort and confidence in knowing *I do have tools in my toolbox…I was already using the suggested strategies…the strategies are simple, specific and applicable…I felt affirmed as a teacher.*

In addition to participants seeing a transformation in themselves as teachers, even more powerful was the transformation described in their perceptions of their Els. It is not uncommon for monolingual English speakers to see multilingual learners at a disadvantage. As one monolingual participant reflected, "admittedly, before listening to this week's podcast, I felt bad for my students who didn't know English and I was bummed for them. Now, I'm bummed for me that I only know English." Multilingualism

offers such a range of enriching benefits. One participant now recognizes more clearly just how hard her multilingual students are working to become proficient in multi languages and highlighted during her interview that for those students, "their hard work and work ethic that has been targeted toward language learning is now revealing itself through other areas of learning and life." She further predicted that her "middle school multilingual learners will certainly be at the top of their class when they graduate" given their benefits awarded through multilingualism.

Cognitive capacity in this context refers to the load required when on an individual when one is multilingual. Participants' voices frequently mentioned as a result of their learning, that worthy of awareness, cognitive capacity should not be used as an excuse or reason for reducing expectations. One monolingual teacher reluctantly shared through a written reflection her awakening:

> "My students are intelligent. I think I knew this, but I don't think I believed it. This professional development opportunity required me to reflect on my practices, and my biases, and helped me to realize I expect less of my multilingual learners. I expect that they will struggle and then I find myself being surprised when they don't. When they are able to do it, I'm sad at myself for thinking that about my intelligent students."

Another teacher, who is also monolingual reported "Until now, I've never really thought about it in this way, but we have to pump up the Spanish speaking students in our school. It's an advantage to speak BOTH languages. Our monolinguals, like me, are at a disadvantage".

Participants frequently referenced, as a result of their weekly learning opportunity, a transformative shift in their perspective on multilingualism. Instead of viewing linguist diversity as a deficit, they now recognize the richness and depth that multilingual students

bring to the learning environment for all students. Cultivating the knowledge and self-efficacy of participants through their autonomous professional development experience not only resulted in self-awareness of personal growth and development but it also revealed the strengths and assets of multilingualism that was previously undetected.

For six weeks, MLPDA participants interacted with learning materials intended to perpetuate their learning. The intent was not to just provide additional knowledge, but further enhance confidence in one's ability to increase awareness and move the new learning immediately into practice, shifting, refining and modifying practices and perceptions while igniting motivation for continued learning. One participant, through a journal entry, described after participating for just two weeks, their increased, intentional mindfulness of their Els in their classroom, admitting to "thinking about them more often and watching them more often" throughout the day. Another participant indicated that after each week's podcast, they "observe their Els a little more and frankly, pay more attention to them." The experience, many reported, generally heightened their personal awareness of their Els in their classrooms.

Voluntary participants in the experience did so because they saw a need within themselves to learn more about how to better support their ELs in their classrooms. When asked during an interview why they chose to participate, a teacher of 3 years responded "full disclosure, I had no idea what I was doing with my Els in my classroom. I couldn't not participate." Another teacher who had been teaching 27 years, when asked the same question indicated, "I don't know much, and to do what's best for my kids, I had to fill a gap I knew I had." Participants, regardless of their years of experience in their field, saw the need in themselves and this opportunity, for them, filled a void.

In addition to accomplishing these things, participants' voices illustrated something further emerging from their experience. Many described their new learning as empowering, motivating and potentially perpetual. Participants, seeing colleague's materials that were different than theirs, inquired about gaining access to alternate modes of study. Others reported subscribing to YouTube channels and Podcast series to continue their learning beyond the experience. For adult learners, successful experiences ignite intrinsic desire for continued growth, and results of this experience, for many, propelled continue learning beyond the study's conclusion.

While the MLL topic was captivating for participants and the resources used were motivating and engaging, the method in which the learning occurred was frequently reported by participants as an important contributor to their transformative experience. When asked to reflect upon the process in which their continuous learning was facilitated, many, through written reflection and interview responses, highlighted the benefits of the opportunity's *flexibility, pace, allowance of learner agency* and *bite-sized offerings*. The "short, yet thought provoking" style of the resources as well as the "trustworthy, vetted resources", according to participant responses, bolstered learners' knowledge acquisition as well as their motivation for continued participation.

Discussion/Conclusion

This study revealed the potential that an individualized professional development model utilized in a rural education setting had on teacher self-efficacy when self-agency in learning was respected. Rural education settings have long grappled with persistent barriers of geographical isolation, limited access to resources and teacher recruitment difficulties and more recently, find themselves challenged with responding to an

increasingly diversified student population (Culbertson & Billig, 2015 & Reed, 2019). While this presents an amazing opportunity for school and community enrichment to embrace the benefits of diversity, traditional professional development attempts have been ineffective at best.

In rural areas where resources are limited and geographic isolation makes off-site professional development opportunities challenging, administrators reactively become the voice of the teachers, often determining one topic from which all will learn. This is described by Darling-Hammond et al. (2017) as an ineffective one size fits all model. Desimone and Garet (2015), however, describe current trends in U.S. professional development that may be changing the makeup of traditional PD. The trends do support the importance of moving away from one-time workshops to experiences that are sustained over time (U.S. Department of Education, 2012).

Youngs (2013) describes the concept of "differentiated PD" offering a range of learning options and activities, much like the MLPDA, including online experiences, readings, and other activities from which to learn. In Youngs' (2015) case, however, the topics were selected based on administrator, mentor or coach evaluative identified needs unlike the self-selected topic choice that was offered through the MLPDA.

Sogunro's (2022) study of teacher perspective's regarding professional development necessitated the shift from mandated professional development topics, also known as *prescribed needs,* to more intentionally considered self-identified needs, known as *felt needs*. The study's findings encouraged the practices of allowing adult learners to focus on self-prioritized learning to influence motivation while contributing directly and positively to long-term sustainability. The impact of Sogunro's (2022) research was

highly influential in the professional development process utilized in the MLPDA, offering participants the opportunity to express their needs,

Voluntary participants in the MLPDA were encouraged to identify their *felt needs* within the multilingual learner domain. Participants were prompted to select areas within the multilingual learner domain where they believed they could gain further knowledge and benefit from learning. These topics of study then became the foundation of their learning during their experience. The MLPDA, further allowing for learner self-agency in addition to topics choices of study, also allowed learners to identify modes preferences as well as how and when they interacted, throughout the week with the materials.

Denying teachers the respect and opportunity to determine what is best for their own learning runs contrary to what is known regarding adult learning's best practices. As the findings of this study show, teachers encounter motivation through self-directed learning, as was advocated by Malcolm Knowles (1975), the renowned father of contemporary adult learning theory. Given that teachers' individualized needs are inherently unique, the significance of targeting teacher productivity through personalized professional development should not be overlooked. Outcomes, when offered these opportunities, as described by participants in the MLPLDA, have successfully transformed learning, practices, understanding and belief while positively impacting one's self-efficacy. Mezirow's (1997) transformative learning theory further posits that for transformative learning to occur, teachers must have autonomy and permission to react to their experiences. The MLPDA allowed for participants, through their interaction with chosen materials and self-directed learning, to disrupt or challenge their original

thoughts or understanding and find new, transformed way of approaching their instructional strategies used and interactions with their ELs.

The MLPDA involved participants who were educators in PreK-12th grade classrooms, each responsible for teaching a diverse range of subjects, ages, and topics. Additionally, all teachers brought with them varying levels of experience spanning from 3 years in the profession to over 30 years in the field. Remarkably, regardless of the grade level taught, content areas or number of years in the profession, the findings reported overwhelmingly impressive outcomes. The study revealed that in the context of supporting multilingual learners, the cultivation of EL students and the teachers themselves uncovered potential and opportunities for future application for all teachers.

Implications

While addressing professional development needs in rural areas, it is critical to recognize that although multilingual learners may be a top priority for many, they may not hold the same level of importance for all. Since ongoing professional growth and learning, however, are a fundamental responsibility for all practicing teachers, it is imperative to offer opportunities that align with *felt needs* as described by Sogunro (2022), rather than focusing solely on *prescribed needs.* Although the MLPDA was designed to provide a robust and practical professional development opportunity targeted toward supporting multilingual learners, it is important to note that the project's structure is flexible and designed to cater to varied topics identified by any teacher.

Teacher reported outcomes after participating in the innovative professional development opportunity could significantly impact the educational landscape of supporting the growth and development of teachers. A critical and necessary shift in the

use of professional development resources, including time, money and training is needed, requiring reevaluation of the traditional professional development structures that are currently used in many school districts. Embracing an innovative model will more effectively meet the challenges faced by rural school districts, conveying the importance and commitment to continuous improvement while adapting to educational needs. By valuing innovative, ongoing professional development, local education systems are likely to enhance the quality of teaching while ultimately improving student outcomes. This opportunity structure may be one that most effectively provides a bridge from theory to practice.

A teacher's time is coveted and therefore, they are, rightly so, hesitant to continue with professional development requirements that yield limited benefits. Teachers do see the benefit and need for continual learning and are eager to engage in programs that offer practical strategies and align with their personal learning goals. Educators who have experienced the transformative potential of effective professional development will likely be more willing to commit to ongoing learning. Participants of the MLPDA, when asked, indicated embracing motivation to engage in a future comparable professional development experience given the positive impact and outcomes of their efforts. Modeling for colleagues their eagerness to repeatedly engage in a learning process continuously, not only has a profound impact on their personal professional growth but can also elicit a culture of professional growth and continuous improvement with their educational community.

Study Limitations

One frequently described limitation to the study was that of lack of collaboration opportunities within the professional development academy. While a benefit to the experience was that participants were able to flexibly interact with their resources and engage in personal reflections of their experience, numerous participants indicated a desire for collaboration. In rural areas where there is a legitimate sense of isolation and loneliness in the workplace, providing opportunities for networking and synergy would seem like a fantastic idea. Many school districts currently utilize Professional Learning Communities as avenues for local collaboration, growth and professional development. Sometimes, however, the structure and implementation of the PLC's do not yield the desired or anticipated results.

Further Research

An excellent potential for future research could be twofold. One route could be that those involved in a future six-week long professional development academy, as previously described in this research, could be provided the option of a brief weekly collaborative gathering where discussions, reflections or inquiry of current learning takes place. This would allow for participants to network and share experiences through social interaction, offering the opportunity for deeper learning.

A second option, in conjunction with or running separately from the previously described future study could be the addition of adding this framework of the professional development academy to a professional learning community. The study could explore the perceptions of the current benefits and challenges of already functioning PLCs within districts and then impact on those perceptions if a professional development framework,

like the one described in this study, is added to the existing learning community. The impact on the strength of the professional learning communities could then be explored.

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Appendix A: Open-Ended Questions Data Collection Source

	Pre-Study Questionnaire Open Ended Questions
1.	In what ways do you feel prepared to support our ELL students?
2.	In what ways do you feel unprepared to support your ELL students?
3.	How do you perceive your role in meeting the needs of your ELL students?
Week #	*6-Weekly Reflection Journal Prompts*
1	Based on my study materials this week, what were my most important takeaways?
2	Based on your interaction with this week's study materials, what might you do differently in your classroom?
3	Based on this week's study materials, how will you use this learning to help impact students?
4	What is something, from this week's learning, that challenged or changed your thinking?
5	Based on this week's study materials, why is what you learned this week meaningful or relevant?
6	Based on your study materials this week, what is one thing you can use with your students tomorrow?
	Final Questionnaire Open Ended Questions
1.	In what ways did this experience guide you in better supporting multilingual learners?
2.	What, from this experience, helped you to implement your new learning into your daily practice?
3.	What benefits and/or challenges can you identify from your experience with the self-directed and self-paced professional development opportunity?
4.	If given the opportunity in the future, would you be interested in participating in this form of a professional development model again?
5.	Based on this week's study materials, why is what you learned this week meaningful or relevant?
6.	Based on your study materials this week, what is one thing you can use with your students tomorrow?

Appendix B: Topics and Modes for MLPDA Learning

Topics from which participants selected			
Characteristics of MLLs	Best practices for supporting MLLs	Differentiation/scaffolding instruction	Fostering oral language
MN Ell identification, entrance and exit requirements	Understanding MN state ELL tests (ACCESS)	Communicating with families	Evidence-based practices to support multilingual language development
Understanding proficiency levels	MN ELL WIDA standards and their "Can Do" descriptors		

Modes of learning from which participants selected		
Reading short blog posts	Reading professional development articles from sites such as Reading Rockets and Colorin' Colorado	Watching short strategy-based videos (i.e. YouTube)
Listening to podcasts	Strategy-based tip of the week handouts	Various resources (a bit of everything)

ARTICLE #3

Empowering Educators: Exploring The Impact of an Innovative Professional Development Opportunity on Teacher Learning

Demands on Education in Rural America

All schools in the United States share one common purpose: providing every child access to high-quality education to pursue meaningful life goals. If only education in America was this easy, especially in rural America. While receiving a quality education should be deemed an expected human right for all students, unfortunately, the experience afforded to many students educated in our nation's rural areas is less than excellent (Adams & Wood, 2015; Fishman, 2015). Inadequate fiscal resources, limited human capital, and geographic isolation create significant barriers, making it difficult for many rural schools to meet that one common goal (Culbertson & Billig, 2015). In addition to the previously mentioned barriers, rural school districts are also seeing an increase in demographic diversity, increasing the number of multilingual learners.

According to Darling-Hammond et al. (2017), the field of education is constantly changing. Changes in the world, changes in the local community, advances in science and brain research, and technological developments are just a few examples that morph and shape educational practices and drive the need for continued and ongoing teacher professional learning. Teachers are adult learners who have been explicitly trained to teach child learners. This pedagogical training in teacher preparation programs and continuing education training is necessary to ensure children and young adults receive instruction in developmentally appropriate ways. DiPaola and Hoy (2018) explain that

child-learner instructional methods are too often utilized in professional development experiences to support the development of adult learners. These practices are typically met with resistance, resulting in ineffective learning experiences. Adult learners, instead, better benefit when allowed to "make free or independent choices, to engage in autonomous actions, and to exercise judgment in the interest of others and oneself" (Campbell, 2012, p. 183). This is known as learner agency.

Learner agency supports the opportunity in one's learning for creativity, motivation, well-being, and happiness (Billett et al., 2006; Larsen-Freeman, 2019), which is strongly connected to autonomy, self-fulfillment and a force for change (Calvert, 2016; McGregor & Frodsham, 2022). It is through the opportunity for teachers to have voice and choice in their learning where agency is provided. Professional development voice and choice allow learners to drive their own learning, often in response to their students' needs. Through this opportunity for agency, teacher professional judgment is honored, and their expertise is valued and recognized. Learner agency drives motivation and intrinsically moves one from knowledge of theory to practice (Czyz, 2022). Daniel Pink's book Drive (2009) highlights the ineffectiveness of motivating using carrots and sticks (rewards and punishments) and spotlights the importance of offering autonomy, opportunities for self-direction, and connection to others for learning. When activities are seen as beneficial and interesting, learners become more actively engaged and interested in accomplishing the task (Kelly & Fogerty, 2015; Ryan & Deci, 2000). Unfortunately, far too often learner agency is not supported by traditional professional development practices.

Recent growth in the diverse learner's population in rural Minnesota schools has required immediate and reactive responses to meet the needs of the multilingual students and their families. The school districts' responses have typically been, when able, to provide traditional professional development sessions targeting the latest issues in an attempt to place a patch on the most significantly reported need. Patfield et. al (2023) indicate that, unfortunately, research studying the impact of traditional professional development practices most commonly used in educational settings consistently identifies ineffective, inefficient, and unproductive results. They further highlight significant concern in the awareness that these particularly poor practices do not lead to teacher growth and development nor positive impacts on student outcomes, yet they continue to be utilized.

This study aimed to explore how a non-traditional, professional development model for practicing teachers employing opportunity for learner agency through voice and choice impacts teachers' self-efficacy. The content of focus for this study was that of multilingual learners in an attempt to respond to the present and immediate needs of a growing diverse population in rural school settings, however, while the topic must be motivating to participants, the study intends to examine, in general, teachers' perceptions of the effectiveness of an alternative approach to professional development.

The geographic area in which this study was conducted was in a very small, demographically rural region of west central Minnesota. School districts are small by nature, and according to the Minnesota Department of Education data center, the PreK – 12th grade student populations in the three districts involved in the study range from 379 to 1046 students. While on average, 95% of students enrolled in this trio of rural districts

identify English as their native language, there are 5% of the population who identify as multilingual (Minnesota Report Card, n.d.).

Current Professional Development Practices

The methods of effective professional development have been debated for decades, with ineffective practices usually prevailing. In 2007, Fullan described the typical external practices used to impact instructional change as rarely "powerful enough, specific enough, or sustained enough to alter the culture of the classroom and school" (p.35). To transform these previously utilized ineffective practices, in 2015, the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) reauthorized the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) from 1965. ESSA placed a long-awaited definition of professional development within federal educational policy. This definition asserts the significance of continued educator learning as the key to helping students succeed with high academic standards (Leaning Forward, 2017).

All students depend on teachers to provide rigorous and impactful instruction that addresses individual student needs. The ethical responsibility of practicing teachers is to grow professionally and develop a practical skill set through which the instruction for all learners can be supported (Cadero-Smith, 2020). Effective professional development opportunities are necessary to equip teachers with the skills needed to provide high-quality education; however, research has shown that teacher professional development does not always translate to solid learning outcomes (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017). Unfortunately, the traditional professional development methods used are often ineffective for adult learners, resulting in the limited influence of transferring the new learning into practice. This study aimed to determine the impact that learner agency in

non-traditional professional development approaches have on teachers' self-efficacy to implement new knowledge into classroom routines.

This study aimed to investigate the following research questions:

How do practicing teachers in rural settings describe their experience of participating in the MLL Professional Development Academy (MLPDA)? Specifically, how do they perceive the impact of their participation in an alternative professional development model?

Theoretical Framework

McClusky's Theory of Margin

An excellent theory to consider for adult learners, McClusky's Theory of Margin emphasizes the need to balance the demands (load) on a person with his or her coping mechanisms (power). The theory assists in understanding the balance between motivation and barriers to adult learning. Biney (2022) suggests that McClusky's Theory of Margin is popular among adult learners, as it provides a very simple formula "'Power' divided by 'Load' equals 'Margin'" (p.101). Ultimately, if adults are to learn effectively, they must take care to ensure they have enough margin or power to manage the load. McClusky explains that to increase margin, one must decrease the load or increase power. Merriam et. al., (2007) warns that when load continually matches or exceeds power, and one or the other is unable to change, the situation is susceptible to breaking down.

Merriam, et. al., (2007) explain that "McClusky's model does not directly address *learning* itself, but rather *when* learning is most likely to occur (p. 96). Although learning may be easier for a student whose power is higher, that does not mean that learning will only occur under those circumstances. Learning can also occur when a learner's load is

higher, it will likely be more difficult. More power just means a greater margin and perhaps more motivation available to participate in learning (Biney, 2022; Chao, 2009).

Teachers' days are spent managing many tasks and responding to the high demand. For most teachers, these demands do not disappear at the end of a school day. Grading, planning and communicating with parents, to name a few, create a continued load to stay up to date with the latest educational trends and strategies designed to meet the needs of their students, not to mention the expectation of teachers. In response to McClusky's Theory of Margin, perhaps offering professional development opportunities that are power producing and load reducing will enhance teachers' margin (motivation) for learning to occur.

Method

Given the continued increase in diverse student populations in rural area school districts, classroom teachers are challenged with ensuring equitable learning opportunities for everyone. For many, little training or professional development has been provided within districts to support and guide appropriate educational opportunities. This qualitative study invited practicing teachers from three rural school districts in west central Minnesota to participate in a self-directed MLL-focused asynchronous professional development opportunity known as the *Multilingual Learner Professional Development Academy* (MLPDA). This independent learning experience offered participants self-agency in learning through voice in the topics of study and choice in the methods in which the topics were delivered. 44 voluntary participants took part in the MLPDA (Multilingual Learner Professional Development Academy), a six-week independent, autonomous, professional development learning opportunity. Participants'

were asked to individually select their top three choices from the following topics: characteristics of MLLs; best practices for supporting MLLs; differentiation and scaffolding instruction for MLLs; fostering oral language; MN ELL identification, entrance and exit requirements; understanding MN state ELL tests; communicating with families; evidence-based practices to support multilingual language development; understanding proficiency levels and MN ELL WIDA standards and their "Can Do" descriptors.

Learning method options were virtual and asynchronous and included the following six options: reading short blog posts; reading professional development articles from sites such as Reading Rockets or Colorin' Colorado; listening to podcasts; learning from strategy-based tip of the week handouts or watching short strategy-based videos. Using this information, the researcher developed individual learning plans for each participant incorporating topics and methods for individual participants. Each week, for six weeks, participants were provided electronically with one learning resource aligned to their requested topic or topics and preferred methods. After interacting with the weekly resource, participants provided individual insights regarding material application potential by responding to feedback generating prompts.

The selected resources were gathered from multiple online platforms offering valuable sources of actionable perspectives, teaching strategies, and classroom tips shared by educators who are experts in the field. The intent was for participants in the MLPDA to immediately apply new learning into practice.

Of the methods offered, 16 participants requested short, strategy-based videos, 12 requested strategy-based tips of the week handouts, nine preferred podcasts, five opted

for various methods and two participants preferred receiving short professional development articles from sites such as Reading Rockets and Colorin' Colorado.

Links to the resources are provided in the tables below and are sorted by method and defined as videos (see Table 1), strategy-based tips and articles (see Table 2) and podcasts (see Table 3). Origination and location of the resource as well as a short description are also provided in the tables.

Table 1

Videos

Links	Origination	Short Description
ELL & ESL Teaching Strategies	YouTube channel: Teachings in Education	Offers effective strategies and recommended practices to consider when working with and supporting Multilingual Learners.
Supporting Oral Language Development in Dual Language Learners	CECE Early Childhood videos at Eastern Connecticut State	Explores the importance of preserving a child's first language, the four states of English acquisition for dual language learners, and strategies to use with dual language learners to develop oral language skills.
Foundations of Teaching Els: Nuts and Bolts of Teaching English Learners in a "Typical" MN district	Bethel University	Minnesota-specific ELL identification, entrance and exit requirements information.
Accommodations for ELL Students — Tips and Strategies	YouTube channel: Dr. Sandra Quiñones-Hemphill, The Language Lady	18 accommodations are provided that can be used in classroom instruction to assist ELL students in comprehending the material they are teaching.
What to do first: Creating a welcoming ELL classroom environment	Colorin Colorado	Present important first steps that will help ELLs feel welcome and get them on the path to academic success.
Understanding the Different Levels of ELL students	Inspiring Young Learners – Equipping ELLs	This video will help identify the 5 different language acquisition levels that students might be in and offers quick tips on differentiating their needs.

Sheltered Instruction WIDA Can-Do Descriptors	YouTube Channel: TeacherCoachAmbroise	WIDA standards and CanDo Descriptors are discussed for Sheltered Instruction of ELLS.
WIDA ACCESS — What does the test even LOOK like?	Elkhart Instructional Tech	The video provides a description of the WIDA ACCESS test format, including common student struggles, what the test looks like and how to prepare EL students for success.
Sheltered Instruction: Essentials of working with English Language Learners (ELLs)	TeacherCoachAmbroise	Provide three essential components of instructional preparation, delivery, and assessment.
Teaching Vocabulary Activities and ESL Teaching Games for ESL Learners	Dr. Sandra Quiñones-Hemphill, The Language Lady	5 vocabulary activities to pre-teach vocabulary to ESL learners.
Differentiating with your ELL students	YouTube Channel: Madly Learning	Planning, implementing and assessing in your regular classroom and how you can modify and plan lessons that integrate your ELLs.
ENL 2-Minute Tips: Preventing the Summer Slide	Alliance for Catholic Education	Looking at the "summer slide" and sharing some creative ways to keep students engaged with language and learning over the summer break.
Bridging Social Conversation into Academic Discourse with English Language Learners	YouTube Channel: SanBdoCitySchools	In the video, 6th grade teacher demonstrates strategies that she uses to encourage English Language Learners to participate in academic discourse

Table 2

Tips of the Weeks/Article

Links	Origination	Short Description
6 essential strategies for teaching English Language Learners	Edutopia	A brief which provides teachers with ways to adopts or adapt best practices while encouraging continuous learning in the real world.
5 ways to ensure clarity for ELLs	Edutopia	Planning, implementing and assessing in your regular classroom and how you can modify and plan lessons that integrate your ELLs.
Oral Language Development and ELLs: 5 Challenges and Solutions	Colorin Colorado!	Dr. Lindsey Moses Guccione shares five key challenges and tips related to oral language development of ELLs.
How to Motivate ESL Students	Busy Teacher	How to Motivate ESL Students: the 10 best ways to increase teenage student motivation.
Innovative strategies for teaching English Language Learners	UMASS Global	Read about 5 effective ELL strategies to consider to tailor classroom instruction and support English Language Learners.
Proven tips, tools, and strategies to teach English Language Learners — Differentiation Instruction for English Language Learners	Susan Fitzell – an educational author of practical strategies based on brain research	Ideas provided to differentiate instruction for English Language Learners
7 steps to a Language-Rich Interactive Classroom	Newsletter by educational author and speaker John Seidlitz	Describes a seven-step process that creates a language0rich interactive classroom environment in which all students can thrive.

Goal Setting with English Learners and multilingual students	MultiBrief: Erick Hermann: Educational consultant specializing in teaching English learners:	Tips to bolster motivation and self-efficacy
5 Ways to welcome ELL Families into your Classroom	Inspiring Young Leaners	Building relationships and communicating with families of MLLs.
23 things Educators can do to support MLs	Valentina Gonzales – educational consultant	23 Practical and efficient ways to support multilingual learners in classrooms.
A Picture is Worth a Thousand Words	Colorin' Colorado!	Using pictures, drawing and paintings to stimulate children's imaginations and get them thinking about the story in a new way.
10 Strategies for building relationships with ELLs.	Colorin' Colorado!	Pedagogical strategies that help build relationships with our MLLS to positively impact student learning.
Part 1: 10 Steps to building reading comprehension in ELLs (Steps 1-5) Part 2: 10 Steps to building reading comprehension in ELLs (Steps 6-10)	Raise the Reading Bar	Teaching strategies and ideas supporting ELLs in your classroom
Don't let monolingual agendas lead multilingual learners	Valentina Gonzales – educational consultant	A few key ideas are examined to support differentiated instructions for multilingual learners

Table 3

Podcasts

Links	Origination	Short Description
12 Ways to Support English Learners in the Mainstream Classroom	Cult of Pedagogy	Students, administrators and parents are interviewed about the psychological and social dynamics of school, trade secrets, academic research, and other juicy things you'll never learn in a textbook."
3 — ELL Scaffolding Strategies	Classnotes Podcast – IDRA (Intercultural Development Research Association)	Practical and useful strategies for teachers across disciplines who are looking to increase instructional capacity and add to their toolkit of strategies.
Breaking Down Language Levels	Inspiring Young Learners — Equipping ELLs	Supporting teachers in better understanding the language levels when speaking about ELLs
Three Ways to Move beyond the ESL Worksheet	Inspiring Young Learners – Equipping ELLs	Fostering the oral language of your MLLs.
3 Ways to Connect with Parents of ELLs	Inspiring Young Learners – Equipping ELLs	Ideas to support building relationships and communicating with families of MLLs.
Easy Ways to Incorporate SEL with our ELL Students	Inspiring Young Learners – Equipping ELLs	Best practice ideas for supporting ELL students in the area of Social Emotional Learning (SEL)
Strategies for Teaching Speaking to English Language Learners	Classroom Q and A with Larry Ferlazzo	Supporting students to gain confidence in speaking English in the classroom.
Avoiding the Most Common Mistakes When Teaching English Language Learners On-site and Virtually	Classroom Q and A with Larry Ferlazzo	Practical types for avoiding the most common mistakes we often make when teaching English Language Learners

The purpose of the study

This study's design was multipurpose in nature. Drawing on the perspectives of participating teachers, not only did the study inform the field of universally effective professional development methods for adult learners, but also highlighted, through lived experiences, the impact on participants' self-efficacy for supporting multilingual learners.

Participant Demographics

The study included 44 PreK-12th grade classroom, content area, special education and intervention teachers with experience levels ranging from 1 to 21+ years (see Table 4). Of the 44 participants, 23 were PreK-6th grade teachers, six were high school content area teachers, seven were special education teachers, four were licensed interventionists and four were multilingual teachers (see Table 5). In addition to experience levels and focus areas, information regarding education levels (see Table 6) and a mono vs multilingual comparison (see Table 7) among participants is also provided. Participation in the study was voluntary and offered to all currently practicing, licensed teachers.

Table 4

Participant Experience

Teaching Experience	*n*	*%*
1-5 years	7	15.9
6-10 years	10	22.7
11-15 years	6	13.6
16-20 years	5	11.3
21+ years	16	36.3

Table 5

Grade Level Primarily Taught

	n	*%*
Prekindergartner	2	4.5
Kindergarten	5	11.3
1st grade	3	6.8
2nd grade	2	4.5
3rd grade	4	9.0
4th grade	2	4.5
5th grade	3	6.8
6th grade	2	4.5
Elementary Special Education	5	11.3
Elementary Interventionist	2	4.5
Elementary English Language Learners	2	4.5
Middle School/High School Math	1	2.2
Middle School/High School Social Studies	2	4.5
Middle School/High School FACS	1	2.2
Middle School/High School Spanish	1	2.2
Middle School/High School English	1	2.2
Middle School/High School Special Education	2	4.5
Middle School/High School Intervention	2	4.5
Middle School/High School English Language Learners	2	4.5

Table 6

Level of Education

	n	%
Bachelor's Degree	16	34.1
Master's Degree	28	66.9

Table 7

Comparison of Monolingual and Multilingual Speakers

	n	%
Monolingual Speakers	36	81.8
Multilingual Speakers	8	18.1

Data

In this study, four data sources were used including a pre and post study questionnaire, weekly reflections and a semi-structured participant interview to conclude the study.

Pre-Study Questionnaire

To begin, study participants received an online pre-study questionnaire consisting of four parts. The first three parts were designed to collect participant demographic information and participant pedagogical knowledge and application self-efficacy related to multilingual learners using 23 Likert-scale questions and three open-ended response questions. The fourth part of the questionnaire supported learner agency.

The Likert-scale questioned teachers' knowledge of culturally responsive pedagogical approaches and inquired about the application of those approaches. The purpose of the survey was to raise awareness between a teacher's understanding of pedagogy and the intentional execution of best practices in the classroom. For example, one question requested a response to a teacher's understanding of the meaning of an ELLs English proficiency level and the next question inquired about a teacher's confidence and ability to plan specific and differentiated programming for students' proficiency levels. The intent was to support teachers in self-identifying areas of professional growth and development needs, potentially individually distinguishing their gap between theory and practice.

Following the survey, three open-ended questions were presented to conclude the initial data collection. The open-ended questions allowed participants to reveal their self-identified efficacy of meeting the needs of their multilingual learners.

Post-Study Questionnaire

At the conclusion of the six-week-long study, participants were again asked to answer the same 23 Likert-scale questions from the pre-study questionnaire and then also provide qualitative responses to three additional open-ended questions. These questions were designed to elicit participants' perspectives on the experience and recognition of personal growth attributed to participation in the professional development experience.

Weekly Reflections

A weekly qualitative descriptive response from participants served as the second source of the study's data. Each week, participants received resources from the researcher based on their individualized learning plan. After interacting with the resource, participants responded to a reflection prompt. Six individual and unique questions were intentionally written to encourage teachers to think reflectively regarding the movement of their new learning into practice (see Table 8).

Table 8

Weekly Reflective Prompts

Week	Reflection response
1	Based on my study materials this week, what were my most important takeaways?
2	Based on your interaction with this week's study materials, what might you do differently in your classroom?
3	Based on this week's study materials, how will you use this learning to help impact students?
4	What is something, from this week's learning, that challenged or changed your thinking?
5	Based on this week's study materials, why is what you learned this week meaningful or relevant?
6	Based on your study materials this week, what is one thing you can use with your students tomorrow?

Semi-Structured Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 10 participants at the culmination of the study. A purposive sampling technique was used to select interview participants, allowing the researcher to gain valuable insight from various viewpoints and diverse perspectives related to the experience. The interview allowed participants to reconstruct their experience, offering a first-person, adult-learner point of view while detailing their experience with the less-traditional professional development model and the impact that participating in the academy had on their self-efficacy for supporting multilingual learners in their classroom. The interview was semi-structurally designed in order to balance structure and flexibility, allowing opportunities for more in-depth and participant-centered responses.

Data Analysis

Demographic Data

The demographic data collected with the initial questionnaire was used to describe the sampling of participants within the study. Frequencies of each demography are reported to provide contextual understanding of the sample population as well as highlight the representation and diversity as it relates to the study.

Likert-Scale Questions

Participants were asked to answer the Likert-scale questions based on a 10-point scale ranging from 1 as *can-not-do* to 10 certainly-*can-do*. While data collected from surveys such as this are typically used for quantitative purposes, obtaining statistical data was not the intent of this data collection process. Because data was collected using the survey before and after the study concluded, mean scores for each of the 23 questions were generated. Although the mean score results highlighted an increase in the mean (moving closer to certainly can do) for each question, the data was more indirectly used to identify for participants, areas in which they might feel intrinsically motivated to want to learn more about or to see personal growth.

Open-Ended Questions and Semi-Structured Interviews

Written and oral responses to the open-ended questions and transcripts of the semi-structured interviews were coded using in-vivo methods to qualitatively analyze the language-based data. Through multi-cycle coding, attributes emerged into major themes, interpreting teachers' perceptions of their lived experience through an innovative professional development interaction and how it impacted knowledge, self-efficacy and teacher wellness.

Findings

Feedback from teachers regarding professional development purposes revealed, by most participants, that the less than traditional professional development concept is undoubtedly commendable. As indicated by Cadero-Smith (2020), it is the ethical responsibility for practicing teachers to grow professionally and many indicated feeling, prior to this experience, however, unsupported in their efforts by their districts. ESSA's 2015 definition acknowledges that there is no one-size-fits-all solution for teacher learning and teachers continue to report conflicting experiences. When asked to elaborate on district-provided professional development, teachers anecdotally describe hour or multi-hour-long sessions, where topics are selected based on "central office" determinations of what teachers or the district needs. Challenges of rural education do play a role in the topic decisions given limited human, financial, and capital resources and typically, the development topics determined are done so reactively, based on an immediate need, rather than proactively.

The following findings will report MLPDA participants' perceptions of their experience with engaging in a non-traditional format of a professional development model. The findings will further elaborate on specific areas in which participants felt supported, motivated and challenged throughout the process interceding with McClusky's Theory of Margin. McClusky's Theory of Margin emphasizes the need to balance the demand (load) on a person with their coping mechanisms (power) (Day & James, 1984). This assists in understanding the balance between motivation and adult learning. According to Biney (2022), when an individual's power exceeds the load, they have a healthier buffer to manage stress and maintain well-being. If, however, the individual's

load exceeds the power, negative outcomes such as stress, burnout, fatigue and exhaustion may be noted. The idea is to have a healthy balance. When determining the perceptions of the impact that a non-traditional professional development experience had on one's learning capacity, load and power were considered to determine the effect. Implications and use of the participants' perceptions will be further discussed.

Load

The variable of load, in McClusky's equation refers to the stressors and demands that one feels in their life (Merriam, et. al., 2007). For teachers, the demands such as lesson planning, teaching, classroom management, meeting the needs of all learners, attending meetings and grading name only a few of the expectations vying for attention. This does not take into account the professional responsibility of continuous learning nor the heavy and even more demanding expectations that are felt on these individuals outside of school. While most teachers are very good at balancing and prioritizing expectations, sometimes the load placed on the individual outweighs the power or the capacity that the individual has to lift the load, and life becomes overwhelming, and burnout occurs.

Teachers do understand the importance of continuous learning and do desire to professionally develop. In its most traditional form, however, the time required, effort demanded, and topics presented can be too much, too heavy and too boring. When study participants were asked to describe typical professional development opportunities or experiences, similar responses resulted, including attending a workshop or conference, or listening to a speaker or local in-service training. Some examples offer choice in learning,

such as workshops or conferences, but often the local in-service trainings are mandated, based on what administrators see as needs.

While conferences and workshops are often an option for learning in many educational settings, teachers in the rural areas are finding the load required to attend these trainings too heavy. Typically, these opportunities are often located 75 – 100 miles away, happening during the workday and requiring the teacher to be absent from school. As one participant described, to attend, travel in either the early morning or evening before is required and additionally, sub plans must be prepared prior to leaving, that is if a substitute can even be secured for the day. There is a substitute teacher shortage.

Time given by teachers outside of their schoolwork hours is not compensated for, but neither is it free. Many teachers describe the time required for sub prep and travel as too costly and taxing professionally but more importantly personally, and many are just not willing to give that time for free anymore.

Many state that while their districts are not willing to pay a teacher for the time spent preparing to be gone from school, they will however, pay for travel, accommodations and registration for conference attendance. Because these costs for districts are less now, given fewer teachers choosing this option for professional development, many are wondering if there is a way to alternatively compensate for those who choose to continue their learning closer to home.

Some participants did mention and appreciate the opportunities available for attending workshops online and that districts are allowing teachers to participate in peer led discussions and book studies as alternative options as well. While many reported an

appreciation for the variety and level of choice offered for learning with the online option and have found some to be very rewarding. According to most who like the online options, the best-case scenario is if the online training is recorded and made available to the teacher at a more convenient time. This might avoid the need to be out of the classroom and the preparation time it takes to do so.

Book studies and collaborative discussion times have seen a rise in popularity. Teachers are given the opportunity to gather, collaborate and professionally discuss a common book selection read, or podcast heard, or video viewed. Responses from those who have participated in such learning opportunities find them empowering and specifically appreciate the varying perspective and take-aways from the readings that people bring to the table to share. Book studies seem like an effective way of gaining new knowledge and they are offered locally. The challenge with this, however, is that typically teachers themselves are responsible for the generation of the study materials, logistical planning for the study, and the preparation for leading the session and while it may not seem like a lot, many teachers just do not have the power for the planning and preparation.

Participants were asked their perspective regarding the load demands that the MLPDA experience placed on them. Almost all reported positive feedback regarding the time requirements, ease of material interaction and quick pace to complete the reflections prompts. Participants reported that it required less than one hour of time per week and as one participant reported “activities were short and sweet, and I was able to immediately connect to them. I also appreciated that they [the resources] were recent, from the last 5 years, so I trusted the information was credible.” Another participant noted that receiving

"little chunks but more often was so helpful," and yet another appreciated receiving resources "that I knew were trustworthy, and I didn't have to take the time to find them myself and I didn't have to worry if they were good or not, I was able to trust that they were."

Reflection prompts were written in ways that required participants to consider immediate application of new learning. As one participant stated, "The snippets of weekly information and easy to use strategies did not require a lot of time to figure out how to implement the strategies." Participants further reported that the strategies made sense and required very little effort to put into practice, while other participants reported that although learning occurred, it didn't feel like it was a staff development activity.

> "I was very relaxed the whole time, it was leisurely. Once I set my weekly routine, the six weeks went so fast. I set aside 15-20 minutes, clicked on the link and read through the resource. I was much more focused than if I were in a room with a bunch of people. [In a larger training] I would for sure be checking my phone for texts or email, I would be distracted. For this, I wasn't".

Almost all participants reported the load required to participate in the MLPDA as bearable and minimal.

Power

Flexibility is power. Flexibility allowed participants options on how they used their resources of time and energy. One participant described their appreciation of flexibility saying "if I didn't have time today, I could do it tomorrow" not having to feel bad, or guilty, or stressed about it.

Choice is power. Participants liked having options, sharing that the experience created less of a cognitive load because "it's easier to learn when it is something you are

interested in learning about." All participants were volunteers so not only did they choose to participate, but they also got to choose what learning to engage in and how.

Motivation is power. One participant shared feeling "motivated to learn because the topic was applicable" while another shared "I like having options." The learners reported feeling empowered and driven to learn, requiring less of a cognitive load due to interest and choice. Choice in a topic increases power and reduces load.

In addition to having choice regarding what and how to learn, participants also indicated power in having choice as to when to learn. One participant stated, "I have a little commute to work in the morning, so I really enjoyed the podcasts for that reason." Another participant indicated taking one hour on the weekends and enjoying it, sharing that it felt no different than taking an hour and scrolling on professional development social media sites. Their learning was embedded into a time of day that was not only available, but also enjoyable. Being offered the opportunity as to when participants chose to interact with their learning helped them to feel as if their time was respected. Having the choice to engage, as one participant said "when I can do it on my own time" ensures the power is available.

Finally, participants indicated appreciation for the opportunity to interact with the materials and engage in immediate reflection to move learning to practice. Many described the challenges with traditional "sit and get" situations where no time is given to process and make plans for implementation. This non-traditional opportunity which allowed choice in terms of content, method, and time, respected participants time by requiring a short interaction this week and helped participants to see the application of the new materials into practice results in positive feedback and feelings from participants.

Merriam, et. al., (2007) explain that "McClusky's model does not directly address *learning* itself, but rather *when* learning is most likely to occur (p.96). Participants universally reported a better margin for learning when their power was high, and their load felt lower.

Conclusion

Conclusion and Implications

The Multilingual Learner Professional Development Academy experience was designed to provide practicing teachers in rural areas an experience using an innovative professional learning model to support growth and development in an area of imminent and recognized need. The findings provide insight into how the model effectiveness allowed learners to immediately move new learning into practice.

The implications of this study have found that allowing adult learners to select the topics and methods from which to learn is empowering. In addition, the resources, intentionally selected to be short yet applicable, were satisfying to participants. Participants universally agreed that six-weeks was an appropriate amount of time, indicating excitement each week to receive a new resource, yet recognizing the importance of intentionality and moderation, so as not to indulge excessively, resulting in negative consequences.

The professional development model was designed to be a framework utilized in rural demographic school systems, which for this study, focused on the topic of multilingual learners. While it is imperative to acquire the skills to support multilingual learners, and this should certainly be a topic that is addressed using the model in the future, it is not, however, the only topic that could result in positive outcomes for students

and teachers. The findings of the study revealed a flexible framework that has broad applicability across wide-ranging and diverse identified professional development needs.

Study Limitations

One frequently described limitation to the study was that of lack of collaboration opportunities within the professional development academy. While a benefit to the experience was that participants were able to flexibly interact with their resources, engaging in personal reflections of their experience, numerous participants indicated a desire for collaboration. In rural areas where there is a legitimate sense of isolation and loneliness in the workplace, providing opportunities for networking and synergy would seem like a fantastic idea. Many school districts currently utilize Professional Learning Communities as avenues for local collaboration, growth and professional development. Sometimes, however, the structure and implementation of the PLC's do not yield the desired or anticipated results.

An excellent potential for future research could be twofold. One route could be that those involved in a future six-week long professional development academy, as previously described in this research, could be provided the option of a brief weekly collaborative gathering where discussions, reflections or inquiry of current learning takes place. This would allow for participants to network and share experiences through social interaction, offering the opportunity for deeper learning.

A second option, in conjunction with or running separately from the previously described future study could be the addition of adding this framework of the professional development academy to a professional learning community. The study could explore the perceptions of the current benefits and challenges of already functioning PLCs within

districts and the impact on those perceptions if a professional development framework, like the one described in this study, is added to the existing learning community. The impact on the strength of the professional learning communities could then be explored.

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CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

The recent growth in the population of non-native English-speaking children in rural Minnesota schools have required immediate, yet reactive responses to meet the needs of multilingual students and their families. The typical school district response to such needs has been to provide a traditional, sit and get, or workshop style professional development experience for teachers to feed the need. Districts often will secure an expert in the field to speak to their staff and swiftly provide, in a conventional way, a broad overview of the characteristics of multilingual learners, a brief explanation of language acquisition levels and conclude with language development and differentiation strategies to be implemented into the classroom. Unfortunately, research studying the impact of traditional professional development practices most commonly used in education settings consistently identifies ineffective, inefficient, and unproductive results. Teachers admit their general lack of presence in these situations, reporting that they become distracted by competing forces. Rarely do teachers experience the movement of new learning into practice during these situations. Of significant concern is the awareness that these particularly poor practices do not lead to teacher growth and development nor positive impacts on student outcomes, yet they continue to be utilized (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017; Wei, et al., 2010).

The challenges addressed in this study were multi-faceted. The study recognized the demands that the evolving demographics in rural MN was placing on school districts

to respond to their increasingly diverse student populations and it identified the pressures placed on teachers to be skilled in doing so. In addition, the need to acknowledge and embrace andragogical learning methods for adult learners was identified in highlighting the shortcomings of typical and commonly used professional development approaches. The study's focus was to explore learner agency's impact on teacher' self-efficacy when implementing multilingual learner strategies after participating in an innovative professional development initiative offering learner's voice and choice. The study, however, produced implications with much broader impacts.

The researcher developed a professional development opportunity, known as the Multilingual Learner Professional Development Academy (MLPDA) designed to support practicing teachers in building skills and increasing self-efficacy for supporting their multilingual learners. The professional development opportunity was less than traditional in that it provided participants with voice and choice in their content and methods of learning. The study's design, based on an adult learning, andragogical model (Knowles, et. al, 2005), acknowledged the unique needs of adult learners while considering the constraints exemplified by rural settings, such as inadequate fiscal resources, limited human capital, and geographic isolation.

The profession of education, in general, is universally challenging. Complexities added due to rural demography, however, tend to exacerbate difficulties in many ways and for many reasons. Finding applicable, attainable and realistic approaches to deliver high-quality and meaningful educational experiences for students and their families is critical and continuing education of teachers is an important and impactful place to start.

Results of the study informed the field in multidimensional ways. Not only did the study provide insight regarding how best to support teacher efficacy in providing effective and appropriate programming for teachers of multilingual learners, but it also contributed to the field's understanding regarding professional development practices in general, and the impact that learner's self-agency and autonomy has on teacher's overall perceived well-being.

According to Darling-Hammond et al. (2017), the field of education is constantly changing, intensifying the demands placed on teachers. When asking a teacher about the most challenging part of their job, they will often refer to that "constant change." Change is hard and exhausting, yet inevitable. School districts' approaches and efforts to supporting their educators in responding to the change is critical and a significant contributing factor to teacher well-being. The qualitative study utilized a phenomenological approach to examine the lived experiences of 44 participants in a six-week, self-directed Multilingual Learner (MLL) focused asynchronous professional development opportunity known as the *Multilingual Learner Professional Development Academy (MLPDA).* This independent learning experience offered participants self-agency by allowing their voice in the topics of study and choice in the methods through which they learned. The following discussion will reveal the themes that emerged from the experience, including participants portrayals of the challenges of effective professional development in rural settings, perceptions of the impact of participating in an innovative professional development experience and finally, the impact that participation in the MLPDA had on new learning and growth related to supporting

multilingual learners. The voices of the research participants, PreK-12th grade teachers in rural MN are the narrators in this story.

Challenges of Professional Development in Rural Settings

Isolation was a shared consensus among teachers who experienced their rural location as a contributing factor for prohibitive growth and development opportunities. One frequently cited example is that of one individual bearing the sole responsibility for the instruction of their grade level or discipline area. Many identified limited common prep time to allow for collaboration or engagement in professional conversation resulting in feelings of professional stagnation.

In-person professional development workshops and conferences are reemerging since the COVID-19 Pandemic. While some teachers see this as a viable opportunity for networking and potential reduction of feelings of isolation, the majority of the teachers, when asked, indicated a reconsideration of attendance of day long, out of the building workshops, citing the required outputs versus the reward of these approaches. While these workshop experiences cost the district money for teachers to attend, of even higher priority of consideration is the cost of time. Time is precious and there are consequences to spending time. Teachers are becoming more protective of their time and not only will attending trainings take them away from their students, and families to attend the training, but the amount of time required to prepare to be gone is not worth the effort. Many also claim that because time is not afforded for implementation of new ideas upon returning from a conference, far too often, the information gained from the training remains in the binder on the shelf, resulting in limited application to practice. For many,

the costs in terms of money, time, and effort required to attend a distant professional development learning opportunity was far more taxing than the rewards gained.

Personal Impact of the Innovative Professional Development Opportunity

McClusky's Theory of Margin, (Day & James, 1984) emphasizes the need to balance the demand (load) on a person with their coping mechanisms (power). This assists in understanding the balance between motivation and adult learning. According to Biney (2022), when an individual's power exceeds the load, there is a healthier buffer to manage stress and maintain well-being. If, however, the individual's load exceeds power, negative outcomes, such as stress, burnout, fatigue, and exhaustion may be noted.

Teachers do repeatedly report their understanding of the importance of continuous learning to respond to the constant changes in education. In its most traditional form, however, the time required, effort demanded, and topics presented can be too much, too heavy, and too boring. Participants reported that in typical professional development experiences, when the load was too heavy, and the teachers' power was too light, the outcomes of these experiences, as a result, lacked effectiveness and efficiency.

Load

As Day and James (1984) described, intrinsic motivation will be increased when power exceeds load. Study participants were asked their experience regarding the load demands required from participation in the MLPDA experience. Overwhelmingly positive feedback was reported, highlighting limited time requirements, ease of material interaction and a quick completion pace. Participants report requiring less than one hour of time per week and as one participant reports "activities were short and sweet, and I was able to immediately connect to them". Another participant stated that "the snippets of

weekly information and easy to use strategies" did not require significant time to implement and yet another participant appreciated receiving resources that they knew were already vetted and trustworthy, not needing to take on the load of finding accurate and engaging materials.

Power

In addition to limited load requirements, to continue with the conversation of McCluskey's Theory of Margin, (Day & James, 1984) participants found the MLPDA experience power producing. Flexibility and choice are power. Participants reported feeling empowered and motivated through the opportunities of choice and self-agency. A resonating theme amongst participants was the appreciation for the opportunity to interact with the materials through immediate reflection. The opportunity respected participants' time by requiring only short interactions each week and reflection prompts provided an immediate space for planning and applying. Many participants described this as empowering and a push to action, resulting in positive results for students and productive feelings from teachers.

Impact of the MLPDA on New Learning for Supporting MLLs

Mezirow's Transformative Learning Theory (Mezirow, 1997) recognizes the acquired experiences that adults use as frames of reference or structure through which understanding is gained. This understanding will remain firm, rejecting ideas that fail to fit within the understanding, unless disrupted through new learning. The word "transformation" as defined in Mezirow's Transformative Learning Theory did not appear in writing, nor was it used orally during interview discussions with participants, however, the theme of transformation was frequently present. Through this experience,

participants described the disruption of their thinking or beliefs. Through reflections of new knowledge, participants collectively identified positively impacted instructional practices, habits of mind, points of view, and ways of thinking when making decisions regarding multilingual learners.

The reflections of many participants in various ways humbly revealed unconscious bias, self-awareness, and a commitment to change. One teacher, recognizing self-transformation, began a reflection highlighting guilt and shame, but ending with empowerment.

> "Yes, I've learned what to do, but even more, I've learned what not to do. I've made choices in the past that I will not make in the future with what I expect my ELLs in my classroom to do. Most of the time, the disservice I've done to my students is that I haven't expected enough. I can't change the past, but I know better, so now, moving forward I will do better."

Underestimating Capability and Limiting Expectation

Many admitted, prior to participating in the MLPDA experience, watering down expectations for their MLLs, assuming they would not be able to do class expectations. One teacher cautioned that "we must take our MLLs seriously, they are intelligent. Goodness gracious, they are learning multiple languages, so of course they are smart, they just need to be seen as such and be given a chance."

Additionally, cognitive capacity and the load required when one is multilingual is important to be considered. It does not, however, serve as a reason to reduce expectations. One teacher reluctantly shared her awakening:

> "My students are intelligent. I think I knew this, but I don't' think I believed it. This professional development opportunity required me to reflect on my practice, and my biases, and helped me to realize I expect less of my multilingual learners.

> I expect that they will struggle and then I find myself being surprised when they don't. When they are able to do it, I'm sad at myself for thinking that about my intelligent students."

The Recognition and Respect of Identity

Following interactions with weekly learning resources, some participants revealed a heightened awareness of the importance of students' identity, sense of belonging, and feeling of respect. One teacher described her feelings of shame after learning that a student may feel invisible and unacknowledged if the teacher does not pronounce their name correctly. From that day forward, the teacher vowed to learn the names of all the children in the school and to ensure they never mispronounce a student's name again. That teacher ended her reflections with "the benefit will far exceed the work I put into learning each child's name."

Creating a Safe and Inclusive Space to Foster Learning

Designing a classroom where students can be themselves, ask questions, use the language they are most comfortable with to support their learning, share about their cultures, and learn from others is a classroom that embraces diversity will feel safe and inclusive for all. From her weekly learning, one participant reflected upon the importance of the learning environment and how learning is most successful when the brain is in a comfortable and relaxed state. To find that relaxed state, students must feel safe and trusting in their learning environment. Another teacher reflected on her personal experience of currently learning Spanish. This teacher recently personally encountered what it felt like to be in an uncomfortable learning environment. She recognized and related to the painful feeling of needing to respond in a quick manner, but not being able to find the words to do so. After being in her students' shoes, she believes now more than

ever in the importance of focusing on trying versus perfection, further commenting "we need to allow our language learners to be ok with best attempts, they do not need to be perfect." In a final post comment, after the six-week MLPDA, out of embarrassment and guilt, one teacher described her *aha* moment when she realized, supporting multilingual learners is "so much more than just translation only."

Instructional Practices for Language Acquisition

Through reflection, many participants seeking appropriate instructional practices to support their MLLs were surprised at the simplicity. Techniques seen as robust, general instructions strategies are also found in the research identifying as powerful instructional strategies for language acquisition. Many indicated their presumption that there was an additional, exclusive inventory of strategies just for supporting MLLs, but reported a sense of relief and affirmation when they learned that many effective tools for supporting their MLLs were already in their toolbox.

Implications

It is human nature to continue to learn and grow. Professionally, this is ethically critical, especially in the ever-changing field of education. The professional expectation, from the field, is that all educators will continually learn and expand their knowledge throughout their career, ensuring their teaching practices are reflecting up-to-date pedagogical research and best practices. There is a shared recognition that ongoing learning is critical for the profession and few educational professionals will rebut this. Just like students, however, professional development opportunities must be designed to meet the diversified perspectives among teachers regarding professional development topics that reflect the diverse experience and needs within the educational community.

When provided the opportunity to voluntarily participate in a self-directed, asynchronous, professional development opportunity, teachers reported feelings of engagement and motivation. Some described the experience as transformational and were energized by putting the new knowledge into action. Feelings of empowerment, affirmation, relief, influence, and motivation were reported by participants who were able to see the impact of moving their learning to practice.

Contribution to the field

The robust scope of this study involves the convergence of the three influential concepts of rural education, professional development, and linguistic diversity. These concepts certainly are worthy of and have solid clarifying research in isolation. This study, however, merges all three areas to inform decision-making for administrators, support practicing teachers and most importantly improve outcomes for all students. All schools in the United States share one common goal: providing every child access to high-quality education to pursue meaningful life goals, and the findings from this research are designed to advance the field for that purpose.

All participants indicated that, in the future, if given the opportunity, they would be motivated to participate in another six-week professional development model. Topics such as differentiation, classroom management, social emotional learning or technology were included when asked for suggestions. While the model used in the research focused on multilingual learners, the research findings indicate that model would be broadly applicable and generalizable to other areas of study.

Study Limitation

The study's design was intentional in gathering information from rural school settings with an increasingly diverse student population. The researcher purposefully selected three school districts from which to draw the participant sampling. While all participants did meet the participant sampling criteria, and there were 44 participants providing their voices and experience perceptions, the sampling was ultimately limited to west central Minnesota rural schools.

Future Contributions to the Field

One frequently described limitation to the study was that of lack of collaboration opportunities within the professional development academy. While a benefit to the experience was that participants were able to flexibly interact with their resources, engaging in personal reflections of their experience, numerous participants indicated a desire for collaboration. In rural areas where there is a legitimate sense of isolation and loneliness in the workplace, providing opportunities for networking and synergy would seem like a fantastic idea. Many school districts currently utilize Professional Learning Communities as avenues for local collaboration, growth and professional development. Sometimes, however, the structure and implementation of the PLC's do not yield the desired or anticipated results.

An excellent potential for future research could be twofold. One route could be that those involved in a future six-week long professional development academy, as previously described in this research, could be provided the option of a brief weekly collaborative gathering where discussions, reflections or inquiry of current learning takes

place. This would allow for participants to network and share experiences through social interaction, offering the opportunity for deeper learning.

A second option, in conjunction with or running separately from the previously described future study could be the addition of pairing this framework of the professional development academy to a professional learning community. The study could explore the perceptions of the current benefits and challenges of already functioning PLCs within districts and the impact on those perceptions if a professional development framework, like the one described in this study, is added to the existing learning community. The impact on the strength of the professional learning communities could then be explored.

Finally, paraeducators' are critical team members and highly valued in the classroom and are tasked with taking on increasingly more responsibilities within classrooms. Conducting a very similar study involving paraeducators as targeted participants could contribute significantly to the field by improving educational practices and creating more collaborative learning environments.

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Appendix A. Multilingual Learner Focused Topics

Characteristics of MLLs	Best practices for supporting MLLs	Differentiation/scaffolding instruction	Fostering oral language
MN Ell identification, entrance and exit requirements	Understanding MN state ELL tests (ACCESS)	Communicating with families	Evidence-based practices to support multilingual language development
Understanding proficiency levels	MN ELL WIDA standards and their “Can Do” descriptors		

Appendix B. Methods for Learning

Reading short blog posts	Reading professional development articles from sites such as Reading Rockets/Colorin' Colorado	Watching short strategy-based videos
Listening to podcasts	Strategy-based tip of the week handouts	Various resources

Appendix C. Video Resource Links

Links	Origination	Short Description
ELL & ESL Teaching Strategies	YouTube channel: Teachings in Education	Offers effective strategies and recommended practices to consider when working with and supporting Multilingual Learners.
Supporting Oral Language Development in Dual Language Learners	CECE Early Childhood videos at Eastern Connecticut State	Explores the importance of preserving a child's first language, the four states of English acquisition for dual language learners, and strategies to use with dual language learners to develop oral language skills
Foundations of Teaching Els: Nuts and Bolts of Teaching English Learners in a "Typical" MN district	Bethel University	Minnesota-specific ELL identification, entrance and exit requirements information
Accommodations for ELL Students — Tips and Strategies	YouTube channel: Dr. Sandra Quiñones-Hemphill, The Language Lady	18 accommodations are provided that can be used in classroom instruction to assist ELL students in comprehending the material they are teaching
What to do first: Creating a welcoming ELL classroom environment	Colorin Colorado	Present important first steps that will help ELLs feel welcome and get them on the path to academic success
Understanding the Different Levels of ELL students	Inspiring Young Learners – Equipping ELLs	This video will help identify the 5 different language acquisition levels that students might be in and offers quick tips on differentiating their needs.
Sheltered Instruction WIDA Can-Do Descriptors	YouTube Channel: TeacherCoachAmbroise	WIDA standards and CanDo Descriptors are discussed for Sheltered Instruction of ELLS.
WIDA ACCESS — What does the test even LOOK like?	Elkhart Instructional Tech	The video provides a description of the WIDA ACCESS test format, including

		common student struggles, what the test looks like and how to prepare EL students for success.
Sheltered Instruction: Essentials of working with English Language Learners (ELLs)	TeacherCoachAmbroise	Provide three essential components of instructional preparation, delivery, and assessment
Teaching Vocabulary Activities and ESL Teaching Games for ESL Learners	Dr. Sandra Quiñones-Hemphill, The Language Lady	5 vocabulary activities to pre-teach vocabulary to ESL learners
Differentiating with your ELL students	YouTube Channel: Madly Learning	Planning, implementing and assessing in your regular classroom and how you can modify and plan lessons that integrate your ELLs.
ENL 2-Minute Tips: Preventing the Summer Slide	Alliance for Catholic Education	Looking at the "summer slide" and sharing some creative ways to keep students engaged with language and learning over the summer break
Bridging Social Conversation into Academic Discourse with English Language Learners	YouTube Channel: SanBdoCitySchools	In the video, 6th grade teacher demonstrates strategies that she uses to encourage English Language Learners to participate in academic discourse

Appendix D. Tips of the Week/Article Resource Links

Links	Origination	Short Description
6 essential strategies for teaching English Language Learners	Edutopia	A brief which provides teachers with ways to adopts or adapt best practices while encouraging continuous learning in the real world
5 ways to ensure clarity for ELLs	Edutopia	A brief which provides teachers with ways to adopts or adapt best practices while encouraging continuous learning in the real world
Oral Language Development and ELLs: 5 Challenges and Solutions	Colorin Colorado!	Dr. Lindsey Moses Guccione shares five key challenges and tips related to oral language development of ELLs
How to Motivate ESL Students	Busy Teacher	How to Motivate ESL Students: the 10 best ways to increase teenage student motivation
Innovative strategies for teaching English Language Learners	UMASS Global	Read about 5 effective ELL strategies to consider to tailor classroom instruction and support English Language Learners.
Proven tips, tools, and strategies to teach English Language Learners — Differentiation Instruction for English Language Learners	Susan Fitzell – an educational author of practical strategies based on brain research	Ideas provided to differentiate instruction for English Language Learners
7 steps to a Language-Rich Interactive classroom	Newsletter by educational author and speaker John Seidlitz	Describes a seven-step process that creates a language0rich interactive classroom environment in which all students can thrive
Goal Setting with English Learners and multilingual students	MultiBrief: Erick Hermann: Educational consultant specializing in teaching English learners:	Tips to bolster motivation and self-efficacy

5 Ways to welcome ELL Families into your Classroom	Inspiring Young Leaners	Building relationships and communicating with families of MLLs.
23 things Educators can do to support MLs	Valentina Gonzales – educational consultant	23 Practical and efficient ways to support multilingual learners in classrooms
A Picture is Worth a Thousand Words	Colorin' Colorado!	Using pictures, drawing and paintings to stimulate children's imaginations and get them thinking about the story in new way.
10 Strategies for building relationships with ELLs.	Colorin' Colorado!	Pedagogical strategies that help build relationships with our MLLS to positively impact student learning.
Part 1: 10 Steps to building reading comprehension in ELLs (Steps 1-5) Part 2: 10 Steps to building reading comprehension in ELLs (Steps 6-10)	Raise the Reading Bar	Teaching strategies and ideas supporting ELLs in your classroom
Don't let monolingual agendas lead multilingual learners	Valentina Gonzales – educational consultant	A few key ideas are examined to support differentiated instructions for multilingual learners

Appendix E. Podcast Resource Links

Links	Origination	Short Description
12 Ways to Support English Learners in the Mainstream Classroom	Cult of Pedagogy	Students, administrators and parents are interviewed about the psychological and social dynamics of school, trade secrets, academic research, and other juicy things you'll never learn in a textbook."
3 — ELL Scaffolding Strategies	Classnotes Podcast – IDRA (Intercultural Development Research Association)	Practical and useful strategies for teachers across disciplines who are looking to increase instructional capacity and add to their toolkit of strategies.
Breaking Down Language Levels	Inspiring Young Learners — Equipping ELLs	Supporting teachers in better understanding the language levels when speaking about ELLs
Three Ways to Move beyond the ESL Worksheet	Inspiring Young Learners – Equipping ELLs	Fostering the oral language of your MLLs.
3 Ways to Connect with Parents of ELLs	Inspiring Young Learners – Equipping ELLs	Ideas to support building relationships and communicating with families of MLLs.
Easy Ways to Incorporate SEL with our ELL Students	Inspiring Young Learners – Equipping ELLs	Best practice ideas for supporting ELL students in the area of Social Emotional Learning (SEL)
Strategies for Teaching Speaking to English Language Learners	Classroom Q and A with Larry Ferlazzo	Supporting students to gain confidence in speaking English in the classroom
Avoiding the Most Common Mistakes When Teaching English Language Learners On-site and Virtually	Classroom Q and A with Larry Ferlazzo	Practical types for avoiding the most common mistakes we often make when teaching English Language Learners

Appendix F. Initial Questionnaire

Supporting ELLs in your Classroom
Please take a few minutes to complete the survey below. The purpose of this survey is to gather information that will allow us to assist you, through professional development opportunities, to support your ELLs.

Part 1: Demographic Information

D1. Select all boxes that represent your current position.

1. PreK
2. Primary (K-3)
3. Intermediate (4-6)
4. Jr. High (7-8)
5. High School (9-12)

D2. How long have you been teaching?

1. 1-5 years
2. 6-10 years
3. 11-15 years
4. 16-20 years
5. 21+ years

D3. Select the highest level of education you have received.

1. Bachelor's Degree
2. Master's Degree
3. Doctorate Degree

D4. Please indicate your gender.

1. Male
2. Female
3. Non-binary/third gender
4. Prefer not to say

D5. How many ELL students do you currently teach?

1. 1
2. 2-4
3. 5-7
4. More than 7

D5. Is English your native language?

1. Yes
2. No

D6. What is your Native Language? (list)

D7. What would you consider your English Proficiency to be?

1. Beginning
2. Intermediate
3. Advanced

D8. Do you speak a second language?

1. Yes
2. No

D9. Would you like to learn a second language?

1. **Yes**
2. **No**

Part 2: Teaching English Language Learners Scale (TELLS)

	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1. Monitor ELL students' understanding of directions											
2. Use ongoing assessment for ELL students											
3. Perform assessments at a level for ELL students' language proficiency and current functioning											
4. Teach classroom expectations to ELL students											
5. Model classroom tasks for ELL students											
6. Highlight key points for ELL students in some way (outlines, lists, etc.)											
7. Provide authentic (accurate) visual aids for ELL students											
8. Use mechanical aids, real objects, music, art, games, and hands-on experience to reinforce ELL students' learning											
9. Redirect ELL students who are persistently off task											
10. Plan evaluations that accommodate individual differences among my ELL students											
11. Use repetition for ELL students											
12. Learn new strategies to use with my ELL students											
13. Identify ELL students' individual English proficiency											
14. Post common expectations in the classroom in English for ELL students											
15. Use members of the community as resources for working with ELL students and their families											

16. Locate materials in ELL students' native languages											
17. Encourage homework support activities staffed by bilingual teachers, volunteers, etc. for ELL students											
18. Learn certain words and phrases in ELL students' native language											
19. Praise ELL students for their accomplishments using a phrase in their native language											
20. Encourage ELL students to use their native language											
21. Greet ELL students with a phrase in their native language											
22. Pair ELL students with bilingual students who can speak the same language											
23. Provide native language instructional support for ELL students											

0 – Certain Can Not Do at All 5 - Moderately Certain Can Do 10- Certain Can Do

Open Ended Questions

1	In what ways do you feel prepared to support your ELL students?
2	In what ways do you feel unprepared to support your ELL students?
3	How do you perceive your role in meeting the needs of your ELL students?

Part 3: Professional Development Self-Agency

P1. Are you interested in learning more about how you can support the ELLS in your classroom? **1.** Yes **2.** No **P2. Which Areas of ELL Professional Development might you find helpful? (Select your top 3 choices)** **1.** Characteristics of ELLs **2.** State legislation and ELL requirements **3.** Assessment analysis of ELLs **4.** MN ELL standards – WIDA **5.** Research-based program models for ELL education **6.** MDE's ELL Identification, Entrance and Exit requirements **7.** Evidence-Based practices to support English Language Development **8.** Understanding MDE's state ELL tests (WAPT-M; ACCESS) **9.** WIDA "Can Do" descriptors **10.** Communicating with families **11.** Learning about home cultures	**P3. In what ways are you interested in learning further about teaching ELLs?** **1.** Reading short blog posts sent weekly via email **2.** Watching short, strategy-based videos sent weekly via email **3.** Receiving a weekly "tip of the week" email **4.** Listening to ELL focused podcast episodes **5.** Investigating ELL focused activities through sites like Teachers Pay Teachers, Colorin' Colorado, Reading Rockets **6.** Other **P4. Optional: Is there anything further that you might find helpful in learning better how to support the ELL population in your schools?**

Appendix G. Final Questionnaire

1	In what ways did this experience guide you in better supporting multilingual learners?
2	What, from this experience, helped you to implement your new learning into your daily practice?
3	What benefits and/or challenges can you identify from your experience with the self-directed and self-paced professional development opportunity?
4	If given the opportunity in the future, would you be interested in participating in this form of a professional development model again?
5	Based on this week's study materials, why is what you learned this week meaningful or relevant?
6	bii

Appendix H. Weekly Journal Prompts

Week	Reflection Prompts
1	Based on my study materials this week, what were my most important takeaways?
2	Based on your interaction with this week's study materials, what might you do differently in your classroom?
3	Based on this week's study materials, how will you use this learning to help impact students?
4	What is something, from this week's learning, that challenged or changed your thinking?
5	Based on this week's study materials, why is what you learned this week meaningful or relevant?
6	Based on your study materials this week, what is one thing you can use with your students tomorrow?