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Teachers' Perceptions and Experiences Related to Preparing English Language Arts Students for American Literature End-of-Course Exams

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This is to certify that the doctoral study by

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has been found to be complete and satisfactory in all respects,
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the review committee have been made.

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Abstract

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MA, University of Phoenix, 2012

BA, Albany State University, 2008

Project Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

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Abstract

Students in the local school district have continued to score below the state average on the standardized American Literature end-of-course (EOC) assessment. It was unclear what 9th-, 10th-, and 11th-grade teachers in the district were doing to prepare students for success on the American Literature EOC. The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to examine teachers' perceptions of the reason for the low assessment scores and their experiences implementing instructional strategies to prepare students for the American Literature EOC. The conceptual framework for the study was Hunter's model of mastery learning and explicit instruction. The research questions focused on teachers' experiences preparing students to score "proficient" and "distinguished" on the EOC exam and what resources, if any, teachers needed to better prepare students for the exam. A purposeful sample of eight English Language Arts (ELA) teachers in the district who taught 9th-, 10th-, or 11th-grade participated in individual semi structured interviews. Data were analyzed inductively using NVivo software to identify the emergent themes, which were professional development, reading instruction/strategies, direct instruction, test-driven instruction, collaboration, and preassessments. The results were used to create a 3-day professional development to help the district's 9th-11th grade ELA teachers prepare students to be more successful on the American Literature EOC. The insights from this study may benefit positive social change in the local district and other school districts statewide by identifying district interventions that teachers can incorporate into their lessons to increase overall student achievement on the EOC assessment for American literature.

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Dedication

I would like to dedicate this project study to my husband, my children, and my parents. Without their support, encouragement, and assistance, this project would not have been possible.

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First and foremost, I would like to thank God for His grace and mercy throughout this doctoral process. Without His blessings, none of this would have been possible. Next, I would like to thank the following people who supported me every step of the way. To my chair, Dr. Heather Caldwell, thank you for your patience, insight, and knowledge. Your guidance and unwavering support throughout this process was invaluable. To my second committee member, Dr. Barbara Hunter, your valuable feedback and thought-provoking questions helped me to push myself further than I could have ever imagined. Thank you. It has been both a privilege and honor to complete this doctoral study under your guidance.

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Table of Contents

List of Tables

List of Figures

Section 1: The Problem

Beginning in 2002 with the implementation of No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB), authorities in the U.S. mandated national and statewide tests to ensure that students reached proficient levels on standardized assessments as outlined by the designers of the assessments (Whitney & Candelaria, 2017). This required states to conduct annual assessments that were linked to state standards. Schools were given 12 years (i.e., until 2014) to reach 100% proficiency on these exams, as determined by state-set proficiency goals (Lyons & Dadey, 2017).

Over the past 2 decades, during which the Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015 (ESSA) succeeded NCLB, the U.S. Department of Education has actively made changes to statewide standardized testing programs and used the test results of students to evaluate teachers' instruction and further decide on school reform (Dworkin & Quiroz, 2019). For the state of Georgia, statewide standardized testing has gone through various transformations over the last 7 years from 2014-2021. At the start of the 2014-15 school year, the Georgia Department of Education (GADOE) implemented a new assessment system, Georgia Milestones, to measure how well students have learned the knowledge and skills outlined in the newly adopted Common Core Georgia Performance Standards.

The Georgia Milestones Assessment System includes four achievement levels that "describe student mastery and command of the knowledge and skills outlined in Georgia's content standards" (GADOE, 2020d, p. 1). These four levels include students' evidence of being a distinguished learner, proficient learner, developing learner, or beginning learner. In addition, this new assessment transitioned from the sole use of

multiple-choice questions to assess basic skills to more rigorous test items that require students to read and comprehend cross-curricular texts and then to construct several written responses, including open-ended (constructed-response) items in English Language Arts (ELA; GADOE, 2020d).

As a result of these changes, there has been added pressure for both ELA teachers and students to perform at higher levels in order to meet the demands of statewide assessments (Jackson, 2021). Research has shown that students are not entering high school with the literacy skills they need to learn and achieve mastery on high school-level standards (Merga, 2020; Merga et al., 2020; Williams-Collins, 2019). According to the National Center for Education Statistics, approximately one third at or above the proficient level in reading in the National Assessment of Educational Progress in 2019 (National Center for Education Statistics, 2020, p. 1). Therefore, this can be interpreted to mean that the remaining 66% of 8th-grade students are below the National Assessment of Educational Progress proficient achievement level in reading. This is significant because this means that 66% of eighth graders are entering high school below grade level proficiency; teachers are then required to prepare 9th-, 10th-, and11th-grade students for the American Literature end-of-course (EOC) assessment administered to students in the 11th grade. In turn, these 11th-grade ELA students are expected to perform on grade level scoring proficient and distinguished on this standardized assessment.

Some students have mastered reading and writing standards to receive distinguished and proficient levels of mastery on these tests, yet other students have struggled to pass, which has a rippling effect on other aspects of the education system,

such as schools' and teachers' accountability. In fact, at the federal, state, and local levels, the accountability system based on testing has become the cornerstone of educational reform initiatives (Smith & Benavot, 2019). The GADOE uses the results of the assessments to identify students failing to achieve mastery of content. These results help to provide teachers with feedback about instructional practice and to assist school districts in identifying strengths and weaknesses so that priorities in planning educational programs may be established (GADOE, 2020d).

Although many components of the educational system rely heavily on the results of statewide assessments, the underlying reasons for students not performing at or above proficient levels are unclear. Many students encounter difficulties beyond their control that can negatively affect their academic performance. These challenges include student-, teacher-, and family-related factors such as stress, anxiety, and lack of sleep (Pascoe et al., 2020). In addition, others have argued that state standards do not allow flexibility for interpretation and instructional approaches that have the potential to set the stage for standardized education and teaching as a whole (Botzakis et al., 2014; Hightower, 2017).

The problem that I investigated in this study is that 11th-grade ELA students in the local school district have been performing below the state average for the last 5 years on the American Literature EOC exam and it is unclear what 9th, 10th-, and 11th-grade ELA teachers are doing in their classrooms to prepare students for success on the American Literature EOC administered in the 11th grade. Therefore, it is important to understand how 9th-, 10th-, and 11th-grade ELA teachers are preparing students for the American Literature EOC when they enter high school. The study includes an overview

of the current literature on the local districts' current practices in ninth- through 11th-grade ELA classrooms, teachers' perceptions of reasons students are underperforming in ELA, and experiences with preparing ELA students for American Literature EOC exams.

The Local Problem

Poor performances on standardized tests can have severe consequences for teachers, school leaders, and schools (Goldhaber & Ozek, 2019). When student achievement fails to meet certain standards, individual teachers, as well as school and district administrators, are accountable for the students' performance (Geiger et al., 2020; Lorimer, 2019; Ryan et al., 2017). The problem under investigation in this study is that 11th-grade ELA students in the local school district have been performing below the state average for the last 5 years on the American Literature EOC exam, and it is unclear what 9th-, 10th-, and 11th-grade ELA teachers are doing in their classrooms to prepare students for success on the American Literature EOC administered in the 11th grade. Therefore, it is important to understand how 9th-, 10th-, and 11th-grade ELA teachers are preparing students for the American Literature EOC when they enter high school. Subsequently, there is a need to understand ninth- through 11th-grade ELA teachers' perceptions and experiences related to preparing students to score as proficient or distinguished on the 11th-grade American Literature EOC (GADOE, 2020d).

In 2014, the GADOE amended the EOC to include various genres of writing such as narrative, argumentative, and informational writing as a requirement to show mastery of grade-level Georgia Standards of Excellence. Since the implementation of the amended Georgia Milestone Assessment System EOC, 11th-grade students in the local

district have consistently scored below the state average in both writing and multiple choice (conventions, literary elements, vocabulary, cause and effect, etc.). The last full administration of the American Literature EOC in which scores were reported and published on the GADOE website was prior to the COVID-19 pandemic in Winter 2019. The state average of 11th-grade students receiving scores of "proficient" and "distinguished" was 32.7%, whereas the local district's average was lower, at 25.1% (GADOE, 2020d).

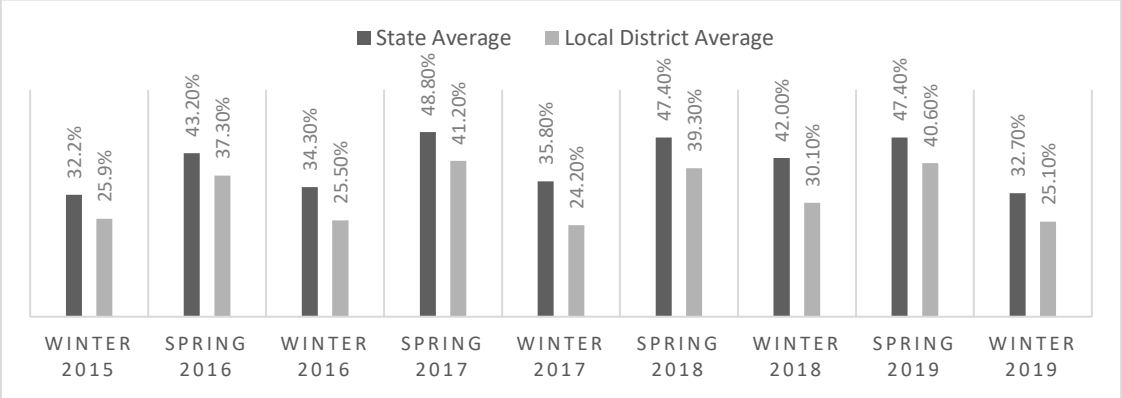
The statewide scores for the Spring 2020 administration of the assessment are not available due to the statewide testing cancellation as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. The state suspended the Spring 2020 EOC assessment administrations in March 2020. Additionally, Winter 2020 scores have not been released yet; however, Spring 2021 EOC was administered, and scores were released statewide. The results of 11th-grade American Literature EOC were published; however, some factors changed that may have altered the district and state's scores. Some of the changes were that many students received virtual instruction following interruptions and closures, opportunities to learn were reduced due to the health and safety measures that were implemented, and fewer students participated in these administrations as compared to prior years (GADOE, 2020e).

Therefore, for the purpose of this study, I used scores from the last 5 years, 2015-2019, of the regular testing administration. Since 2014, the trend has remained the same, with fewer of the local district's students scoring proficient and above on the American Literature EOC than the statewide assessment average. The percentages of students

scoring proficient and above on the American Literature EOC for the last 5 years for the state and local district can be found in Figure 1.

Figure 1

State Average vs. Local District: Proficient or Above Scoring on the American Literature End-of-Course Assessment



Note. I created this figure using Georgia Milestones Assessment System data from the Georgia Department of Education's (2020d) website.

Three of the seven areas identified for improvement on the local district's strategic improvement academic plan for 2019-2024 were increasing the percentage of high school students' (a) achieving mastery of standards in ELA, (b) achieving progress in ELA proficiency, and (c) demonstrating college and career readiness in literacy. Educational leaders determined these areas of focus by analyzing various documentation collected from the 24 high schools in the local district. These included classroom observations, individual high schools' consolidated school improvement plan, and Georgia Milestone EOC scores. Changes based on evaluation of these results were used to govern areas of development for the local school district.

The local district's curriculum and instruction coordinator for ELA stated that students may perform poorly on the EOC because many students do not enter the high school reading and writing on grade level. Consequently, students who struggle with grade-level literacy tend to struggle on the grade-level assessment, according to the ELA curriculum and instruction coordinator. The GADOE reported that 34.5% of 11th grade students statewide performed below proficient levels in American literature and composition in 2019 (GADOE, 2020e).

Many researchers have proposed that high school teachers deliver both reading and writing instruction to develop literacy skills by addressing the specific literacy needs of students (Scott et al., 2018). Teachers are, therefore, expected to deliver effective instruction to students to foster a better understanding of content-specific texts (Merga, 2020; Merga et al., 2020; Williams-Collins, 2019). According to the district's ELA curriculum and instruction coordinator, district-wide classroom observations and American Literature EOC scores raised concerns about writing instruction in ninth- through 11th-grade ELA classrooms. He stated that "students struggle with reading two texts and then responding via constructed response, or reading an informational text and then writing a narrative response." Furthermore, he noted that the skill of writing narrative responses after reading stimuli is not explicitly taught in ninth- through 11th-grade ELA classes throughout the district.

Graham (2019) noted that to meet writing objectives required in the new assessments and state standards nationwide, many teachers need to make significant changes to how they teach writing. However, some researchers contend that high school

teachers are not enthusiastic to take on the task of teaching literacy content such as basic reading comprehension and writing skills during instructional time (Meyers & VanGronigen, 2020). Additionally, Listyani (2018) asserted that every strategy that teachers employ in their classrooms is context-dependent. With these findings, English content teachers must incorporate new strategies to integrate teaching literacy in the classroom to align with the state's standards to effectively improve writing instruction in various genres and content areas.

The district's strategic improvement plan also noted areas for improvement in curriculum and instruction in ELA that included district-wide professional development (PD) for writing instruction on the secondary level. According to the district's ELA coordinator of curriculum and instruction, "the area of the American Literature EOC where we receive the score of "zero" the most is the extended narrative response." According to the rubric provided on the American Literature EOC assessment, students could receive a zero on the extended narrative response if they left the section blank, copied directly from the stimuli, did not write enough to score, were off topic or offensive, or wrote their responses in any language other than English. As an action plan, district leaders plan to conduct classroom walkthroughs to assess instructional best practices for teaching and learning. However, the local district remains challenged with identifying the effectiveness of instructional strategies in 9th- through 11th-grade ELA classrooms to increase low Georgia Milestones American Literature EOC scores in the 11th grade. The identified gap in practice is that despite the district plans and initiatives,

it is still unclear what ELA teachers are doing in their 9th-, 10th-, or 11th-grade classrooms to prepare students for the American Literature EOC taken in the 11th grade.

Ninth, 10th, and 11th grade ELA teachers informed local district administrators of challenges integrating writing instruction and other instructional strategies into their lesson plans. Several teachers in the district have informally reported that they have difficulty planning and implementing reading and writing instruction in preparation for the American Literature EOC for various reasons. Some explanations include time, resources, pressure from administration, and limited experience with implementing writing instruction in preparation for standardized assessments.

One challenge, according to Teacher 1, is that some teachers feel that there is no collaboration between middle school and high school teachers, specifically, eighth and ninth grade to align instruction to better support grade level preparation for the American Literature EOC. Consequently, other teachers, such as Teacher 2, have expressed that ninth and tenth grade ELA teachers begin at a disadvantage because many students enter high school from middle school unprepared to learn and perform at grade level. This opinion is supported by the earlier mentioning of the 8th grade National Assessment of Educational Progress assessment, which revealed that 67% of students entering high school were below proficient levels in reading, as reported by the National Center for Education Statistics in 2020. Furthermore, Wilson (2018), indicated that predictors of poor high school academic performance include low grades and standardized test scores in middle school literacy. Therefore, there is a major learning gap in reading and writing between students' eighth and ninth grade years in English, according to Teacher 3.

Students in the district are socially promoted from middle school into high school, even when the data does not support academic promotion, said Teacher 1. As a result, some teachers may feel added pressure with additional task of providing interventions for struggling readers and writers when attempting to prepare students for academic success on grade level ELA standards and on the American Literature EOC. The informal opinions expressed by these 9th, 10th, and 11th grade ELA teachers and curriculum coordinators provide some evidence to support the necessity and purpose of this study.

While some factors perceived to contribute to the district's lagging EOC scores include low writing scores, underperforming 9th, 10th, and 11th grade students, and gaps in literacy instruction across the local district, the identified gap in practice is that despite the district plans and initiatives, it is still unclear what ELA teachers are doing in their 9th, 10th, or 11th grade classrooms to prepare students for the American Literature EOC administered in the 11th grade. In order to affect change in the local district's American Literature EOC scores, the purpose of this study is to explore English teachers' perceptions of the reasons for the local problem and experiences with implementing instructional practices in 9th, 10th, and 11th grade classrooms in preparation for the American Literature EOC administered to 11th grade students to find possible solutions for the districts' low scores.

Rationale

ELA academic requirements for high school and middle school students differ, assistant principal of instruction noted. A study conducted of ELA middle school courses in the United States revealed that only 1% of ELA assignments required students to write

for extended periods of time (Gallagher, 2017). According to the secondary (6-12) ELA curriculum and instruction coordinator for the district, students in middle school are generally taught Level 1 (recall) and Level 2 (skills and concepts) skills on the Depth of Knowledge wheel; however, high school courses and standardized assessments require students to think and respond to questions using Level 3 (strategic thinking) and Level 4 (extended thinking) skills. This difference in academic requirements highlights the importance of implementing effective instructional practices to close the gap between middle school and high school achievement in ELA and prepare students for the more rigorous academic demands of high school (Crosnoe et al., 2015; Merga et al., 2021).

Specialized attention to curriculum is a common theme in schools across the target state for those students passing at proficient levels and above (Chen et al., 2021). Passing the EOC with proficient or above indicates that students have mastered the Georgia Standards of Excellence. Focus on curriculum is also often referred to as *academic content*, *learning targets*, and *standards*, but regardless of the terms that are used, curriculum "focuses on what students should know, understand, and be able to do in a course or subject in school" (Speer, 2017, p. 25). It is important to note the curriculum districts across the state are using to get students to master the state ELA standards and perform at proficient and distinguished levels on standardized assessments.

Teachers play a significant part in the academic achievement of students (Francisco & Celon, 2020). When teachers identify and understand their role in their students' comprehensive academic achievement, their instructional practices can be instrumental in closing the achievement gap (Francisco & Celon, 2020). Understanding

teachers' perceptions of the reasons for the local problem and their experiences implementing instructional practices in 9th-through 11th-grade ELA classrooms can help to determine if changes in the curriculum are needed to increase 11th-grade ELA students' achievement on the American Literature EOC in the local district.

Evidence of the local problem is supported by the low achievement scores of 11th-grade ELA students taking the American Literature EOC in the local school district in Georgia, based on archival data collected from GADOE (2020f) and the local district's improvement action plan and initiatives. An assistant principal of instruction in the local district shared the following:

> The addition of the constructed response items on the EOC have caused the English language arts standardized test scores to decline across the district because the students simply are not used to writing complete sentences and paragraphs when responding to a question. They are used to responding to multiple choice questions.

According to the district's curriculum and instruction coordinator for ELA,

> Students struggle with reading two informational texts and responding to prompt that ask them to synthesize information from both texts to argue a point or reading an informational text, then being required to write a narrative that includes information from the non-fiction stimulus text.

As Figure 1 depicts, the district's test scores have consistently lagged behind the state's average. Specifically, the district's scores were, on average, 10% lower than the states on the last 10 assessment administrations (winter and spring) consecutively

spanning over 5 years (GADOE, 2020d). This steady gap in achievement between the district and state averages validates this study. Additionally, this investigation of English teachers' perceptions and experiences related to implementing instructional practices in ninth- through 11th-grade ELA classrooms in preparation for the American Literature EOC is also important because of federal mandates (e.g., NCLB and ESSA) that require accountability related to student performance (U.S. Department of Education, 2021).

Due to the significant achievement gap, district leaders have incorporated several PD sessions to improve American Literature EOC exam scores and provide instructional support for teachers. The local district often requires teacher leaders from high schools all over the district to attend workshops, engage in collaborative planning meetings weekly, and participate in professional learning sessions monthly on various topics believed to be the main reasons for the low standardized test scores, the curriculum and instruction ELA coordinator noted. Some of the supports provided by the district to address the local problem include: (a) cowriter electronic writing assistance, a computer system that can support diverse writing needs for students, (b) coteaching and co-planning workshops for teachers, (c) narrative writing instructional practices workshops for ELA teachers, (d) literacy ambassador/coaches in each secondary level school, (e) constructed response instructional workshops for teachers, and (f) differentiated instruction training.

District leaders implemented these programs, workshops, and initiatives to improve 9th- through 11th-grade teachers' instructional practices in ELA to close the achievement gap and increase student achievement on the EOC, the curriculum and instruction ELA coordinator noted. However, the problem of low American Literature

EOC scores and clarity on how teachers are preparing 9th-, 10th-, and 11th-grade students for success on the American Literature EOC remains an issue to be resolved within the local district. This study, therefore, offers insight into the gap in instructional practices of high school English teachers by exploring teachers' perceptions and their experiences related to 9th-, 10th-, and 11th-grade ELA students when attempting to increase student achievement on the American Literature EOC administered in 11th grade.

Lack of academic proficiency in high school ELA is a serious concern because of the risks associated with low grades and standardized test scores (Alcine, 2019). The effects of low grades and low standardized test scores can impact students beyond high school. Students who experience academic challenges throughout high school may not be successful in college or may choose not to apply to a college or university due to the differences in academic demands (Goux et al., 2017).

Cervetti and Hiebert (2019) noted that 32% of high school students have low-level literacy skills. With the shift to the more rigorous Common Core State Standards (CCSS) by some states and the adoption in Georgia of the Georgia Standards of Excellence in 2015, high school students are now required to read more informational texts and demonstrate an understanding through application and writing (Cervetti & Hiebert, 2019; Williams-Collins, 2019). This means that students are required to write more informational and argumentative text so show their understanding. However, according to Williams-Collins (2019), many teachers are not adequately preparing students to develop these types of literacy skills.

Although there are numerous factors that influence students' writing abilities, many children do not receive the writing instruction (i.e., descriptive, argumentative, comparative, and narrative) at school that more rigorous standards and assessments require (Graham, 2019). Additionally, ELA teachers are often tasked with the responsibility of teaching secondary students to comprehend reading material on top of their contractual obligations to teach grade-level mandated curriculum and state standards necessary to prepare students for standardized state assessments, while the teaching of writing is often neglected. Although teachers may be knowledgeable in their content area, it is evident, through student performance, that teaching high school students to comprehend and apply the information through written constructed response is difficult, possibly because they are not confident writers themselves (Williams-Collins, 2019).

Very few researchers have addressed ELA teachers' perceptions of the problem of students' low standardized test scores and experiences implementing writing instructional practices used to prepare 9th-, 10th-, and 11th-grade students leading up to the American Literature EOC administered to 11th grade students. This lack of research indicates a gap in knowledge regarding teachers' perceptions of the causes of poor academic proficiency on the American Literature EOC assessment among 11-grade students and experiences with instructional practices used to better prepare 9th- through 11th-grade students leading up to the test. Students' level of achievement varies across the United States, including in the target state, which, in turn, created the need for research about teachers' perceptions of the reasons for the local problem and their experiences with implementing

instructional practices to prepare students for success on the American Literature EOC at the local district level.

In summary, I conducted this study for several reasons. Lack of proficiency in 11th-grade ELA is a concern because of risks associated with low grades and standardized test scores (Alcine, 2019). Students who experience academic challenges throughout high school may not be successful in college. Therefore, there is a need for an alignment between middle and high school academic requirements to ensure that students are college- and career-ready upon graduating high school (Goux et al., 2017). Furthermore, teachers' instructional practices are instrumental in closing the achievement gap (Francisco & Celon, 2020). Federal mandates such as NCLB and ESSA have placed further emphasis on rigorous standards and assessments that require writing (U.S. Department of Education, 2021). Students are now expected to show mastery of standards on the standardized assessments (i.e., writing complete sentences and paragraphs when responding to a question), according to Graham (2019) and the assistant principal of instruction on the project site. Very few researchers have addressed the problem of ELA teachers' perceptions and experiences related to preparing 9th-, 10th-, and 11th-grade students for success on the American Literature EOC. I conducted this study to address this gap in the literature.

Definition of Terms

The following definitions of salient terms provide clarity and context for this study:

Academic achievement: Academic outcomes that indicate the extent to which a student has met or exceeded their learning goals in the form of grade-level standards (GADOE, 2020d). Academic achievement is often measured through statewide examinations or continuous assessments such as benchmarks (GADOE, 2020d).

Beginning learners: Students who do not yet demonstrate proficiency in the knowledge and skills necessary at this grade level/course of learning, as specified in Georgia's content standards (GADOE, 2020d). The students need substantial academic support to be prepared for the next grade level or course and to be on track for college and career readiness (GADOE, 2020d).

Common Core State Standards (*CCSS*): A set of standards created in 2009 aimed at ensuring states across the U.S. provided standardized instruction to prepare students to graduate high school prepared for college, career, and life. (Hightower, 2017).

Curriculum: "The lessons and academic content taught in a school or in a specific course or program" (Education Glossary, 2015a, p. 1).

Developing learner: Demonstration of partial proficiency in the knowledge and skills necessary at this grade level/course of learning, as specified by Georgia's content standards (GADOE, 2020d). These students need additional academic support to ensure success in the next grade level or course (GADOE, 2020d).

Distinguished learner: A student who demonstrates advanced proficiency in the knowledge and skills necessary at this grade level/course of learning, as specified in Georgia's content standards (GADOE, 2020d). These students are well prepared for the

next grade level or course and are well prepared for college and career readiness (GADOE, 2020d).

Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015 (*ESSA*): An educational act beginning in 2015 that requires all students in the United States be taught to high academic standards that will prepare them to succeed in college and careers. ESSA also ensures that vital information regarding students' academic performance is communicated through annual statewide assessments that measure students' progress toward those high standards (U.S. Department of Education, 2017).

Explicit instruction: "A systematic method of teaching with emphasis on proceeding in small steps, checking for student understanding, and achieving active and successful participation by all students" (Rosenshine, 1987, p. 34).

Georgia Milestone Assessment System: A Georgia comprehensive testing system across Grades 3-12 that includes open-ended and technology-enhanced questions to better gauge students' content mastery (GADOE, 2020d).

Georgia Standards of Excellence: Georgia's clear expectations for instruction, assessment, and student work (GADOE, 2020g). They define the level of work that demonstrates achievement of the standards, enabling a teacher to know "how good is good enough" (GADOE, 2020g).

Instructional practices: Learning strategies employed by the instructor that are content related and promote student learning (GADOE, 2020f). These instructional strategies could include role-playing and peer coaching, which is intended to lead to higher academic achievement of students (Adamson & Lewis, 2017).

No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (*NCLB*): "The first national law to require consequences for U.S. schools based on students' standardized test scores" (Whitney & Candelaria, 2017, p. 2).

Proficient learner: Demonstration of proficiency in the knowledge and skills necessary at this grade level/course of learning, as specified in Georgia's content standards (GADOE, 2020d). The students are prepared for the next grade level or course and are on track for college and career readiness (GADOE, 2020d).

Significance of the Study

This study is significant because the results could uncover additional reasons for the local district's 11th grade students' low American Literature EOC scores. Additionally, the results could reveal which instructional strategies 9th through 11th grade ELA teachers are utilizing in their classroom and their experiences implementing these strategies to prepare students for the American Literature EOC administered in the 11th grade. The study could also provide insight into appropriate PD and other support teachers need to more effectively integrate ELA instructional practices in English classrooms within the local district. Moreover, the results could contribute to development of a collaborative forum amongst local district ELA teachers to share effective instructional strategies for ninth, tenth, and eleventh grade ELA classes that are successful in preparing students for success on the American Literature EOC (Jones, 2021). Although factors for poor performance in high school ELA students, such as low-reading level proficiency and lack of writing instruction, were identified in the research as a predictor of academic performance, there is still a gap in understanding high school

ELA teachers' experiences with implementing instructional strategies in 9th through 11th grade ELA classrooms in preparation for the test. (Alami, 2016; Mohammed, 2018). Little research was located that provided results of interview data detailing teachers' experiences with preparing 9th through 11th grade ELA students for the Georgia Milestone American Literature assessment administered to 11th grade students. The results of this study might add to the literature on high school English teachers' perceptions relating to 11th grade students not doing well on the American Literature EOC assessment and contribute to effective instructional strategies for preparing ninth through eleventh grade ELA students for the American Literature EOC assessment.

Students in the local school district must meet the state of Georgia requirements in order to obtain a standard high school diploma. One such requirement is taking the American Literature EOC standardized assessment aligned with the state's standards which is administered to eleventh grade students (GADOE, 2020d). Gathering teachers' views on factors in the local school district that could contribute to low American Literature EOC scores could inform curriculum, practices that engage students in the classroom, and other supports to help students attain proficient levels. Additionally, the local school district may be able to plan more effective PD workshops for ninth through eleventh grade ELA teachers to close the achievement gap between the local district, which will ultimately increase students' chances of academic success.

The insights from this study may provide a positive change for other school districts statewide. This study has implications for positive social change. Findings could assist with understanding teachers' experiences with adjusting instruction that enables

students to be proficient and distinguished in ELA standards. It may also contribute to: (a) addressing the gap in practice regarding writing instruction in high school ELA classrooms, (b) providing information for district-level policymakers, curriculum and instructional specialists, principals, and teachers to help them create or amend instructional practices, and (c) developing district level practices to increase their potential for more successful outcomes (Jones, 2018). Understanding teachers' perceptions and experiences related to preparing 9th through 11th grade students for the EOC assessment could highlight areas of instruction that are not effective and make modification that may increase the number of students passing the American Literature EOC with proficient and distinguished scores; thus, closing the achievement gap and better preparing students to be college and career ready. This study may contribute to positive social change by contributing to district interventions focusing on literacy instructional strategies that teachers can effectively incorporate into their lessons which, in turn, will increase overall student achievement.

Research Questions

I developed two research questions (RQs) to aid in understanding ninth- through 11th-grade teachers' experiences with instructional practices to prepare students in the local school district to be successful on the American Literature Georgia Milestone EOC assessment. Through interviews, I attempted to answer the following questions:

RQ1: What are ELA teachers' experiences with implementing instructional practices they perceive they are using to prepare ninth through eleventh grade students for the American Literature EOC?

RQ2: What additional training, resources or support, if any, do ELA teachers report they need to adequately prepare ninth- through 11th-grade students for the American Literature EOC exam?

Review of the Literature

The aim of the literature review is to provide the most current review of peer-reviewed research on curriculum and instructional practices that contribute to 11th grade students' low academic performance on the EOC assessment and solutions aimed at increasing student academic achievement. The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore ninth through 11th grade English teachers' experiences with instructional practices to prepare students for the American Literature EOC.

This review of the literature is to clarify the problem identified in the local school district. In doing so, I focused on finding research articles that entailed the effects of instruction and curriculum on academic achievement within the classroom setting. The literature review is an integral component of this research study and is focused on instructional practices and other factors perceived to be the causes of the low American Literature EOC assessment scores.

The following key terms were used to conduct the search for literature: *academic achievement*, *achievement success*, *secondary teachers*, *instructional strategies*, *writing instruction*, *teachers' perceptions on low student academic achievement*, *teachers' experiences*, *standardized assessments*, and *academic performance on standardized assessments*. The following scholarly resources and databases were used to conduct research: Google Scholar, Academic Search Premier, ERIC, Sage, and JSTOR.

Additional searchers were carried out on the local school district website and the GADOE website. Literature was chosen for the literature review that discusses the themes of standardized testing, instructional strategies and practices, and preparing students for statewide assessments. These themes will be discussed in further detail below. In the first section, I explain the conceptual framework used to guide this study.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this study is based on Madeline Hunter's model of mastery learning and explicit instruction. This instructional method relies on explicit teacher demonstrations, guided practice, review, evaluation, among other instructional practices (Hughes et al., 2017). Explicit instruction, which over the past 20 years has emerged from its original term, Direct Instruction, was first described by Engelmann and Bereiter in the 1960s (Hughes et al., 2017).

The original Direct Instruction model focused on the idea that teaching cognitive skills and processes directly, enhances learning. However, through years of evolution, explicit instruction became an organized approach to teaching and learning that uses instructional design to clearly teach fundamental skills and concepts that students would not typically learn on their own (Hughes et al., 2017). In explicit instruction, teachers establish clear learning objectives. According to Archer and Hughes (2011), explicit instruction offers a clear and structured method to teaching that is comprised of instructional design and delivery procedures. When preparing students to write effectively, teachers must place an emphasis on beginning lessons with clear statement of goals and expectations and conduct ongoing formative assessments to manipulate

instruction according to the students' needs. Effective teaching strategies, such as sequencing skills logically, providing step by step modeling, monitoring progress closely, gradual release of responsibility, and providing immediate corrective feedback are also key components of explicit instruction (Archer & Hughes, 2011; Burns et al., 2017; Pearson & Dole, 1987).

Durkin (1981) conducted a study which revealed that little comprehension instruction occurred in ELA classrooms. During her research, she found that teachers were giving assignments and assessments without thought or purpose, instead of fostering student comprehension (Raphael et al., 1988). Furthermore, she found that the instruction implemented in these classrooms was disorganized, random, and indirect. According to Keiler (2018) the instructional strategies teachers choose to implement have a direct effect on students' learning. Two studies by Gage and Needels (1989) and Rosenshine and Stevens (1986) contained a review of research of instructional practices and reached a similar conclusion: a structured, explicit, and scaffolded approach to instruction has a positive impact on student academic achievement.

In order to achieve student success, instructional strategies should be properly aligned with teaching and learning theory to offer the best practices of literacy instruction. This highly-structured method of direct instruction is aligned with Madeline Hunter's model of Mastery Learning (Hunter, 1982). Hunter defined teaching as a series of decisions that take place in three realms: content, learning behaviors of students, and teacher behaviors (Hunter, 1982). Content denotes the specific information, skill, or process that is suitable for students at a particular time. Decisions regarding learning

behaviors indicate how a student will learn and show evidence of that learning. The third area of decision-making, teacher behavior, refers to the use of principles of learning–validated by research–that enhance student achievement, i.e., research based instructional strategies. Hunter's Mastery of Learning and Explicit instruction provided a foundation for examining strategies to increase student growth by providing supports to students that are underperforming (Archer & Hughes, 2011).

Explicit instruction research over the past years have revealed that the process of understanding concepts can be taught, which, will eventually lead to students' ability to perform strategies independent of their teacher (Nourdad et al., 2018). Additionally, this research was supported by Duffy et al. (1986) study which found that explicit instruction is effective for at-risk students with low academic achievement since these students generally lack a knowledge base of effective learning strategies. Some authorities on literacy instruction suggest that explicit instruction is extremely effective for students who typically are low-achieving. It is known for providing timely remediation to students in need in addition to helping struggling students develop literacy skills (Canty, 2021; Daffern et al., 2020; Hughes et al., 2017). Furthermore, explicit instruction offers value in that it provides key features, concepts and procedures, monitor and assess student academic performance, and immediate constructive feedback (Burns et al., 2017; Carver & Klahr, 1986; Hammond & Moore, 2018; Klahr et al., 2001; Plavnick et al., 2015; Siegler, 1980).

Rosenshine (1987) documented two significant components of explicit instruction: teaching students strategies employed by experts in the field and heuristics.

Bereiter and Scardamallia (1985) referred to heuristics as “procedural facilitators.” Heuristics allow the learner to solve problems, draw conclusions and make judgements with minimal mental effort through the use of cognitive strategies. Cognitive strategies are guiding steps that teachers can employ with students to perform tasks such as reading comprehension and writing. (Rosenshine, 1995). In the form of concrete prompts or guides, these strategies support students’ efforts (West et al., 2017). Rosenshine’s work with explicit instruction focused on six major components to support student growth. The six components are (a) review, (b) presentation, (c) guided practice, (d) correction and feedback, (e) independent practice, a (f) ongoing review (Rosenshine, 1995). These instructional practices, along with teachers’ facilitation of student learning, help students master less structured reading and writing standards in ELA such as citing textual evidence, identifying the theme of a passage, or writing informative essays.

Research of explicit instruction has revealed that there are a variety of models that differ slightly to fit the various needs of respective subject areas. Although there are over a dozen components of explicit instruction as evidenced by a search of over 50 seminal works and articles published between 1980 to 2021, Archer and Hughes (2011) identified 16 components of explicit instruction that were used as the basis for this study of English teachers' perceptions and experiences related to implementing instructional practices in ninth through eleventh grade ELA classrooms in preparation for the American Literature EOC. The 16 elements of explicit instruction that Archer and Hughes (2011) outlined can be separated into six major categories of an instructional framework: (a) state learning objectives, (b) utilize target vocabulary and academic language, (c) model academic

skills and strategies, (d) provide frequent opportunities for learners to practice, (e) deliver timely feedback on practice, and (e) monitor student academic performance. These steps for explicit instruction allow for teachers to clarify strategies so that students can clearly understand how to use them in context to be successful in increasing academic achievement.

Through the use of one-on-one interviews, I was able to understand English teachers' perceptions of the reasons for the local problem and experiences with implementing instructional practices in ninth through eleventh grade ELA classrooms in preparation for the American Literature EOC. The following section provides an analysis of the existing literature regarding standardized assessments, instructional practices, and writing instruction.

History of Standardized Testing in Georgia and NCLB

For years, the educational system has mandated national and statewide tests to assess students' aptitude, knowledge, and achievement (Shavelson, 2020). The practice of standardized testing has created pressure among both students and teachers to perform well on these high-stakes assessments (Jackson, 2021). The local district's ELA curriculum and instruction supervisor asserted that teachers face the pressure of having to meet certain student growth measures, fear of not meeting the needs of all student learners, and the pressures of teaching specific state standards to meet state and district requirements. According to Ranson and Tomlinson (2018), the government's influence on education has increased over the last two decades. Over the past 20 years high-stakes standardized assessments have become a way for governmental entities to rate schools

which in turn places additional demands on teachers and students. Consequently, Goldhaber and Ozek (2019) contended that schools are putting more emphasis on students' passing standardized assessments rather than student learning.

In 2000, the Georgia A+ Educational reform act by Governor Barnes proposed an accountability system that graded schools according to student performance on state assessments (McCoy et al., 2020). Schools received letter grades based on student performance and improvements on state tests. Additionally, student test scores became an element of consideration for teachers' annual evaluations. Two years following the Georgia A+ reform act, NCLB became an educational reform in an effort to improve student achievement and close achievement gaps (Whitney & Candelaria, 2017). With the implementation of NCLB, states across the nation mandated national and statewide tests to ensure that students reached proficient levels, as outlined by test makers, on academic assessments (Whitney & Candelaria, 2017). NCLB legislation included performance percentages that the nation's schools were expected to achieve each year until 2014, at which time 100% of America's students were expected to demonstrate proficiency in the subjects of mathematics and reading. Failure to meet the prescribed performance levels resulted in schools not being granted adequate yearly progress (GADOE, 2020a).

During NCLB, in Georgia, high schools were evaluated according to how well eleventh grade students performed on the initial administration of the Georgia High School Graduation Test (GHSGT) (GADOE, 2020c). The GHSGT measured whether Georgia high school students mastered essential concepts and skills from the state-

adopted curriculum deemed necessary to earn a diploma. Students who sought to earn a regular Georgia diploma had to pass all four parts of the GHSGT and the Georgia High School Writing Assessment in addition to meeting other local and state graduation requirements in order to graduate (GADOE, 2020c).

In 2010, the GADOE transitioned from the Georgia Performance Standards to CCSS (Lee & Wu, 2017). Prior to the implementation of these new standards, reading comprehension and identification of predetermined answer choices were the focus of instruction. However, the CCSS mandated that writing be incorporated in the new curriculum (Common Core State Standards Initiative, 2021).

According to GADOE (2010), "the CCSS allows for a meaningful comparison of our students' achievement with students in other states" (p. 2). With the implementation of CCSS, the new high-stakes EOC standardized test was developed and administered in 2014 to reflect a need in the change in curriculum and in the state. The GADOE implemented the new assessment system, Georgia Milestones, to measure how well students have learned the knowledge and skills outlined in the newly adopted Common Core Georgia Performance Standards (Beaudette, 2014; Mays-Truitt, 2019). These tests replaced the criterion-referenced competency tests and EOC tests), and in 2016, it also replaced the Georgia High School Graduation Writing assessment throughout the state of Georgia (GADOE, 2020b).

This new assessment has transitioned from solely multiple-choice questions for assessing basic skills to more rigorous tests that require students to construct several written responses including open-ended (constructed-response) items in language arts and

mathematics and a writing component (in response to passages read by students) (GADOE, 2020f). Additionally, the Georgia Milestones, requires students to compose responses to prompts at a higher level of rigor than before to align with the college and career readiness focus of Common Core.

In Georgia, EOC assessments weigh as 20% of high school students' final grade; it is also a factor in teacher evaluations. Therefore, students' performance on the EOC has an impact that transcends beyond an indication of students' abilities. Currently, the American Literature EOC is the only ELA assessment students are required to take in high school. In September 2020, the GADOE decided to no longer administer the ninth Grade Literature EOC. The American Literature EOC is typically given to 11th grade students.

Instructional Practices

By the time students are in high school, they have already developed their unique learning styles; however, teachers should not assume that students will be active learners as opposed to passive learners throughout the learning process without effective guidance (Akinmoladun, 2018; Stanley & Porter, 2002). Therefore, instructional practices, such as explicit instruction, are essential to effectively teach students the necessary curriculum to ensure that students are thinking critically and meeting and exceeding state standards to prepare for the standardized assessments (Hughes et al., 2017). Aydin et al. (2017) further supported this statement by positing that schools must change the structures, culture, and programs of curriculum and instruction to meet the needs of a diverse student body. However, Nichols and Gianopulos (2021), found that some schools are not meeting

the overall needs of students because students' learning deficiencies are not addressed when they enter the classroom at the beginning of the school year. According to Guskey (2018), learners could have a better chance of understanding the instruction if pre-assessments were administered at the start of each school year to determine which instructional practices would help develop learners.

Several researchers acknowledged the need for educators to utilize evidence-based strategies, such as explicit instruction, however, these practices are often missing from ELA classroom instruction (Brindle et al., 2016; Owen, 2021; Wijekumar et al., 2019). Therefore, the need to understand what instructional practices high school ELA teachers are using to prepare students for success is an essential component of this section of the literature review. If teachers are expected to prepare students to score proficient and distinguished on the ELA EOC standardized assessment, they should also be prepared to provide quality instructional practices to improve overall student achievement with the aim of students learning and understanding material being delivered (Madani, 2019).

Explicit Instruction

Key components of explicit instruction have been categorized to include teachers stating clear learning objectives, modeling academic skills and strategies, utilizing target vocabulary and academic language, providing opportunities for learners to practice, delivering timely feedback, and monitoring student academic progress through the use of formative assessments (Archer & Hughes, 2011; Owen, 2021).

Learning Objectives

Betti (2021) outlined the difference between an objective and a goal. According to Betti (2021), an objective is a measurable, perceptible behavior for a day's lesson, whereas, a goal is outcome of a series of successfully completed objectives over the course of a few lessons. Researchers (Betti & Igaab, 2019; Betti & Mahdi, 2020; Thompson & Wyatt, 1952) asserted that there are seven characteristics of effective objectives. These characteristics are as follows: They should be (a) specific and accurate, (b) achievable, (c) based on psychological principles of learning, (d) geared towards the development of learners, (e) designed for changing students' behavior, (f) applicable in ordinary circumstances, and (g) should be regarding the change expected in the learner as opposed to the teacher. In addition to setting effective objectives, teachers need to aid students in understanding the relevance of the learning objective (Mohr & Mohr, 2017). Moreover, a well-planned objective's outcome should be measured by knowledge and critical thinking, collaboration and communication, and action (Rieckmann, 2017).

Modeling and Using Academic Language

Modeling is the act of the instructor demonstrating the skills, processes, and strategies students should use while working towards a particular objective (Canty, 2021). Explicit instruction includes modeling as a learning tool (Platt, 2018). Through modeling, teachers demonstrate each step in the learning and skill application process (Eggen & Kauchak, 1988; Platt, 2018). For example, in an ELA class, teachers model how the reading process works with the same or similar texts the students are expected to use for instruction as a way to activate prior knowledge and explicitly teach new concepts

and strategies (Platt, 2018; Tovani, 2000). Furthermore, Brevik (2019) clarified that studies have informed the educational sector that students who receive explicit modeling and explanations of how, when, and why to utilize a particular strategy generally benefit over students who do not receive explicit instruction and modeling. While the instructor is modeling, students actively listen and observe in addition to taking notes of the teachers' behavior (Canty, 2021). Modeling academic language vocabulary and target vocabulary is a scaffolding strategy to support students' use of the language of the content standards. In a case study, researchers (Pacheco et al., 2017) found that modeling academic discourse with sentence starters and using graphic organizers to focus on target vocabulary encourages students to practice incorporating new terms in daily discourse. Highlighting academic language in the classroom also supports students' understanding of what language is useful in various situations (Bailey, 2007; Pacheco et al., 2017).

Providing Time for practice and Timely Feedback

Archer and Hughes (2011) specified that teachers should provide guided and supported practice for students to promote success and build confidence. Additionally, it is recommended that teachers regulate the difficulty of practice opportunities during the lesson by scaffolding and employing several engagement strategies (Archer & Hughes, 2011; Graham, 2019; Mahan, 2020). In a study conducted by Bolliger and Martin on the importance of practice and student engagement strategies, instructors and students agreed on the importance of several engagement strategies (Bolliger & Martin, 2018). Other researchers have also indicated the significance of planning and implementing engaging activates during class time where students are able to apply course content to practice and

perfect their skills, and gain new knowledge and skills (Bolliger & Martin, 2018; Stavredes & Herder, 2014). The results of several studies reveal which instructional practices were the most effective at improving student achievement during class time. Results from the studies found that use of graphic organizers, think-pair-share, vocabulary study, questioning, scaffolded discussions, relevant texts, and writing during class time to prepare students for success are the most effective. (Graham, 2019; Payton, 2016; Regan et al., 2018). Additionally, requiring students to respond frequently during class practice time helps students to remain engaged in the lesson (Archer & Hughes, 2011).

It is recommended that teachers provide students with immediate supportive and corrective feedback (Archer & Hughes, 2011). Immediate feedback aids in increasing the learners' success rate and reduces the probability of practicing certain concepts incorrectly. However, according to Pitt and Norton (2017), immediate feedback is often under-utilized in the classroom. Feedback should be a continual process (Henderson et al., 2019). When students are afforded the chance to obtain varied feedback, the probability of students retaining and applying significant concepts increases (Henderson et al., 2019). Although tailoring feedback to individual learners' needs can involve extra work from educators, these efforts can increase students' positive responses to the feedback (Carless, 2013; Ryan & Henderson, 2018).

Monitoring Student Progress

Monitoring students' progress is the act of a teacher continually checking for students' understanding, assessing student performance, and providing prompt feedback

(Canty, 2021). Valley and Montgomery (2018) outlined five ways teachers can gather clear and reliable data for student progress monitoring. They stated that the teacher must define the problem, use reliable data collection tools, know students' starting point, set specific goals and objectives, and develop standardized system for monitoring student progress (Valley & Montgomery, 2018). In a study conducted by De Smedt et al. (2019), researchers found that monitoring student progress as a component of explicit instruction over the course of the five-week study resulted in more motivated students. The students who were monitored while practicing writing were more controlled motivated than the student who were practicing writing individually (De Smedt et al., 2019).

Effectiveness of Explicit Instruction in Writing

Explicit instruction can be effective for writing instruction in ELA courses (Stockard et al., 2018). Dozier-Brown (2019) conducted a study in which she examined the effect of explicit instruction on students' writing skills and investigated teachers' concerns about implementation of this strategy as a means of improving students' written communication skills. Teachers devoted six weeks to delivering explicit writing instruction to 53 students. They were interviewed through semi structured interviews about concerns with implementing this strategy. The results from the study revealed that some teachers felt ill prepared to teach writing, and that the PD they received in explicit writing instruction should have been slower paced. The conclusion of this study revealed that teachers require consistent, ongoing PD, classroom modeling, and support. Graham (2019) conducted 28 studies of over 7,000 teachers that examined writing instruction in contemporary classrooms. Findings from the study revealed that writing and writing

instruction in most classrooms are inadequate. Writing in many capacities is a fundamental skill. In schools across the nation, students write about assigned texts to develop their understanding. However, the overall picture that emerged from Graham's 2019 study was that writing instruction in most elementary and secondary classrooms is not sufficient. Although the leading purpose of NCLB was to provide a fair, equal, and significant high-quality education for all students, the goal of NCLB has not been met with regard to writing instruction in the United States (Shields et al., 2017). The local school district has also determined that writing instruction is not sufficient on the secondary level. More research, however, is needed on teacher experiences with teaching writing in their respective classrooms to prepare students for statewide assessments.

Stanford (2019) conducted a study on coherent explicit writing instruction. In the study she focuses on the problem of writing practices in 9th and 10th grade English classrooms at a local high school. Through informal teacher interviews and examination of writing scores on standardized tests, Stanford explored the impact of explicit instruction on opened ended essay writing prompt. Findings of this study suggest that providing coherence in explicit writing instruction has a significant impact on students' writing skills which, in turn, will assist in closing the achievement gap on the American Literature EOC. If teachers wait until students enter the eleventh grade to prepare them for the American Literature EOC which is administered in the 11th grade, the students begin at a disadvantage (Gulikers et al., 2018). Therefore, it is important to focus on the deficiencies in writing instruction when students enter their ninth grade ELA courses (Graham, 2019). By planning and providing access to high-quality writing instructional

materials for the teaching of writing, teachers can begin to include writing instruction as a part of the comprehensive curriculum to improve students overall American Literature EOC scores and close the achievement gap between students' scores at the local school district and the state levels (Graham, 2021).

Implications

This study has implications for academic change on both the local and district level for the teachers, district leaders, and students. Understanding ELA teachers' perceptions of why students are performing below proficient levels on this statewide assessment can influence curriculum decisions, instructional strategies, and district policies or practices to address common areas of specific deficiencies of low-achieving 11th grade students.

The local district can make positive changes through the development of professional learning plans by examining ninth through 11th grade English teachers' experiences with instructional practices to prepare students for the American Literature EOC. Gore et al. (2017) noted the positive effect of school administrators determining what teachers need to become more effective educators by way of PD. These plans may benefit the district by outlining factors that contribute to or hinder student academic achievement on the EOC.

Understanding English teachers' perceptions and experiences related to implementing instructional practices in ninth through 11th grade ELA classrooms in preparation for the American Literature EOC can give insight into reasons students are performing poorly districtwide which, in turn, can assist in making essential changes to

reduce the percentage of students scoring as a Beginning Learner on the EOC. Uncovering teachers' perceptions of reasons, that are both internal and external factors, for low American Literature EOC scores can allow for necessary discussions to evolve to brainstorm implementation of preventative measures throughout the local district. This, in turn, could result in an increase of 11th grade students American Literature EOC scores. Interviewing ninth through 11th grade ELA teachers in the local district may offer a deeper understanding of effective instructional practices and decisions that lead to improved student achievement. The results of this study were used to inform a 3-day PD to help ninth, 10th, and 11th grade ELA teachers with strategies to prepare 9th- 11th grade students to score proficient and distinguished on the Georgia Milestone American Literature EOC administered to 11th grade students.

Summary

Over the past 20 years, the education system has evolved tremendously to include high-stakes standardized assessments that impact stakeholders in various ways. Individual school districts are rated based on students' achievement on these assessments. While there are numerous factors that contribute to students' success on state standardized assessments, there are many factors that prohibit students from achieving academic success. The local school district is faced with low EOC scores that have lagged behind the state's average for the last 5 years and a need to determine reasons for this achievement gap. Research has supported the need to explore English teachers' perceptions and experiences related to implementing instructional practices in ninth

through 11th grade ELA classrooms to prepare students for success on the American Literature EOC which is administered in the 11th grade.

In the first section of this project study, I described the national and local problem and provided evidence from the literature regarding the research topic. Then a definition of terms was provided in addition to the significance of the study and RQs. The purpose of the study is to understand 9th, 10th, and 11th grade English teachers' perceptions and experiences related to implementing instructional practices in ninth through 11th grade ELA classrooms in preparation for the local school district's American literature and Composition EOC exam administered in the 11th grade. Through this study I attempted to provide insight into appropriate PD and other support teachers need to more effectively integrate effective research-based ELA instructional strategies. The literature review provided context for the current research topic. The conceptual framework was explained. The conceptual framework of explicit instruction supports the idea of the importance of instructional practices to best prepare students for mastery of statewide standards and a score of proficient or distinguished on the American Literature EOC. The review of literature also focused on the history of standardized assessments in the state of Georgia, explicit instructional practices used to prepare students for success in ELA courses, and writing instruction high school ELA classrooms. Section 2 describes the research design and approach along with validation for choosing the design. Section 2 also provides information about the sample size, data collection and analysis. Section 3 includes an outline of the project study that was composed based on the results of study.

Section 3 will also include a rationale, literature review, and project description. Section 4 provides a conclusion to the study as well as a reflection.

Section 2: The Methodology

Introduction

I chose a basic qualitative design to explore teachers' perceptions and experiences related to preparing students to score proficient and distinguished on the American Literature EOC. Using a qualitative design allowed me to examine the instructional strategies that participating teachers used to close the achievement gap between the local school district and the state. In the following section, I will discuss the research design and approach in detail. I will also justify the methodology chosen to answer the RQs. The sample and data collection and analysis procedures will also be discussed. This section will conclude with a discussion of ethical considerations.

Qualitative Research Design and Approach

I used a qualitative design to investigate the problem of the local district scoring below the state average for the past 5 years on the American Literature EOC. To understand the achievement gap between the district and the state, I used a basic qualitative design to explore ninth- through 11th-grade teacher experiences with implementing instructional practices to prepare students for the American Literature EOC administered to 11th-grade students. Qualitative researchers explore the "how" or "why" behind a phenomenon (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Yin, 2017). Additionally, the purpose of a qualitative research study is to explore how individuals interpret their experiences (Kalu & Bwalya, 2017; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Therefore, to gather information about teachers' perceptions and their experiences implementing instructional practices to

prepare students for the American Literature EOC, I used a basic qualitative research design to answer the following RQs:

RQ1: What are ELA teachers' experiences with implementing instructional practices they perceive they are using to prepare ninth- through 11th-grade students for the American Literature EOC?

RQ2: What additional training, resources or support, if any, do ELA teachers report they need to adequately prepare ninth- through 11th-grade students for the American Literature EOC exam?

Description of Qualitative Research Design

I used a basic qualitative design. Qualitative researchers "seek to discover and describe narratively what particular people do in their everyday lives and what their actions meant to them" (Liamputtong, 2019, p. 9). I chose qualitative methodology because it allowed me to collect data solely through individual interviews to understand (a) teachers' perceptions about the reasons students in the local district are not as successful on the EOC as compared to other students in the state and (b) their experiences related to instructional practices they are using to help raise scores. Qualitative researchers believe that research inquiries are subjective and that multiple realities are created by individuals (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004; Walther, et al., 2017). A qualitative approach is appropriate when the researcher seeks to capture participants' perceptions and experiences related to the study phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2016; Yin, 2017). Liamputtong (2019) emphasized that the basic qualitative approach with a phenomenological design investigates actual lived experiences. Thus, teachers were

interviewed to gain insight into their perceptions of the reasons the district's EOC scores lag behind the state's scores and their experiences with implementing instructional strategies to prepare students for the American Literature EOC. The qualitative methodology is appropriate for studying phenomena that are both implicit as well as explicit (Willig & Rogers, 2017).

Using a basic qualitative design allowed for an in-depth focus on the research problem and the generation of a rich description of the phenomenon under study (Creswell, 2014; Korstjens & Moser, 2017; Yin, 2017). Researchers use qualitative methodologies to explore, describe, interpret meaning or to generate new hypotheses and or theory (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Yin, 2017). Therefore, I used a qualitative methodology to answer the two RQs: (a) What are ELA teachers' experiences with implementing instructional practices they perceive they are using to prepare ninth- through 11th-grade students for the American Literature EOC? and (b) What additional training, resources, or support, if any, do ELA teachers report they need to adequately prepare ninth- through 11th-grade students for the American Literature EOC exam? Data were collected using semi structured interviews. Therefore, interview questions were open-ended and probing in order to gather in-depth experiences (Weller et al., 2018).

Justification for Qualitative Research Design

Yin (2015) used three relevant arguments to explain the differences between qualitative and quantitative research. His explanation supports why a qualitative research design was best for this study. First, qualitative research design allows the researcher to gain a deep understanding of the local problem, which allows for valuable narrative data

to be obtained (Tenny et al., 2017; Yin, 2015). Second, using a qualitative design allows the researcher to view perceptions of the participants (Busetto et al., 2020; Yin, 2015). Third, a qualitative study creates an opportunity for participants' responses and experiences to be analyzed until meaning emerges, which, in turn, allows unique insight about the problem to derive from the data (Tenny et al., 2017; Yin, 2015).

A quantitative design was not the appropriate approach because it would not provide the opportunity to capture in-depth experiences of teachers (see Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Quantitative research is the collection and analysis of numerical data to find patterns, make predictions, test causal relationships, and generalize results to wider populations. Numerical data would not have been sufficient to gain an understanding of how teachers interpret their experiences implementing instructional strategies to increase student achievement on the American Literature EOC. A quantitative research design would not have allowed the participants the autonomy to respond, in their own words, to the interview questions I asked. The interview questions were asked in a manner that allowed the participants to reflect on their experiences and perceptions and respond subjectively. This way, I was able to fully understand teachers' experiences implementing instructional strategies and their perceptions of why they believe the students in the local district are not performing well. Thus, a basic qualitative research design approach was best suited for this study.

Participants

Criteria for Selecting Participants

I conducted interviews with eight high school English teachers within the local district. I used convenience sampling. The number of participants was a minimum of eight to present a rich detailed description and provide an in-depth picture of the central phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2016). According to Creswell and Poth (2016), qualitative sampling size is more about quality than quantity. Participants were interviewed until data saturation occurred. Data saturation is the point where no new information can be garnered by enlisting new participants. Participants were recruited using purposive sampling techniques. Namely, participants were targeted based on certain inclusion criteria (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Purposive sampling is a nonrandom sampling technique used in this study to understand a central phenomenon being studied. The selected participants all served as ELA teachers in the local district at the time of the study.

Participants in the study met the following criteria: They (a) were teaching 9th-, 10th-, or 11th-grade English, (b) were teaching in the local school district, and (c) had taught in the school district for a minimum of 3 years. Moser and Korstjens (2018) recommended selecting participants with at least 3 years of professional experience in the field of study. Teachers within the local district who have at least 3 years of experience are knowledgeable of the ELA content and standardized testing requirements. Additionally, Merriam and Tisdell (2016) suggested that purposeful sampling assists the researcher with identification of the criteria for selecting participants. For the purposes of

this study, I examined English teachers' perceptions and experiences related to implementing instructional practices in ninth through 11th grade ELA classrooms in preparation for the American Literature EOC, what instructional strategies they are using to close the achievement gap between the district and the state, and what resources, if any, they report they need to adequately prepare ninth- through 11th-grade students for the EOC. Participants were selected based on the eligibility criteria and interviewed until data saturation was reached. According to Creswell and Creswell (2018), data saturation is reached when no new information is provided and themes become exceedingly redundant.

Justification for the Number of Participants

From the population of the local district's 180 ninth through 11th grade English teachers, a sample of eight English teachers were interviewed in order to gain insight into English teachers' perceptions and experiences related to implementing instructional practices in ninth through 11th grade ELA classrooms in preparation for the American Literature EOC. Qualitative studies generally require less participants than quantitative research (Vasileiou et al., 2018). Qualitative sample sizes should be large enough to obtain enough data to sufficiently describe the phenomenon of interest (Braun & Clarke, 2021). For basic qualitative studies, which relies on personal experiences, Creswell suggested a minimum of five participants to achieve the overall goal of saturation (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). However, due to the number of English teachers in the school district, a minimum of eight participants were chosen to offer a thorough

understanding of the participants' experiences and to sufficiently address the RQs (Yin, 2017). Once data saturation was reached, I stopped interviewing new participants.

Procedures for Gaining Access to the Participants

To gain access to participants, I used purposeful sampling. Due to the current COVID-19 pandemic, access to school personnel and teachers was not as easy as in previous years; therefore, I conducted purposeful sampling that included participants that met the aforementioned criteria. I provided full disclosure of the purpose of the study via email and made myself available to answer additional questions upon request. In addition, I sought permission from Walden's Institutional Review Board (IRB) to begin data collection. Immediately upon receiving approval from the IRB, I sent invitations to the teachers via email. Emails were sent to ninth, 10th, and 11th grade English teachers at the local school district who had been employed with the district for at least 3 years to participate in the study. Participants were asked to sign an informed consent before participating in the study. They agreed to participate in a semi structured interview for which I used an interview protocol.

I reassured the participants that the study was of a personal matter and therefore, they were not required by the district to participate. Participants were also made aware that they were free to decline at any time throughout the study. Furthermore, participants were assured that their decision to participate or not, did not interfere with their duties in the district.

Establishment of a Researcher-Participant Relationship

As a current teacher in the local school district for the past 9 years, I have established affiliation with the district. Although participants worked at various schools within the school district, my employment with the district served as the foundation of rapport with the participants. Additionally, I have taught both ninth and tenth grade English classes, namely, ninth grade Literature and Composition and World Literature; therefore, my experiences teaching these English courses established common ground with the participants. However, to help establish a positive researcher-participant relationship, I started each interview by introducing myself and explaining the purpose of the study, their role as a participant, and my role as the researcher. A positive researcher-participant relationship develops through open communication and full disclosure of the roles and responsibilities of both parties involved in conducting the study (Xu et al., 2020). I also reviewed the informed consent form with participants and allowed the participants to ask any clarifying questions they may have had prior to beginning the interview. Where applicable, I elaborated to provide further context for the interview. At the conclusion of each interview, I thanked the interviewees for their time and willingness to participate. This fostered trust between myself and the interviewees.

Protection of Participants' Rights

Set guidelines from Walden University's IRB were implemented to ensure that the participants were protected. After receiving permission to conduct research from the University's IRB (approval no. 02-14-220472874), I emailed potential participants an invitation to participate in the study. The invitation informed them of the nature of the

study and its purpose. Teachers interested in participating in the study responded to the email with the words “I consent.” The informed consent form detailed the study’s purpose, my role as the researcher, their role as a participant, and plans for preservation of their confidentiality. I also included verbiage that specified that their participation is strictly voluntary to allow them to opt out of participation at any time for any reason. Moreover, to ensure confidentiality, I assured participants that their identity would be kept confidential. Their answers to the interview questions were not linked directly to the individual participants’ names or school locations. I used pseudonyms such as Teacher A and Teacher B to protect the identity of each participant and ensure protection from harm. Additionally, virtual interviews were scheduled during times that were convenient for each participant to avoid conflict with the duties and responsibilities of their job. All correspondence remained confidential. Documents such as interview responses, journal notes, informed consent forms, invitation to participate responses, along with any other identifying documentation containing the individuals’ names or school locations were secured in a locked filing cabinet in my home office.

Data Collection

Identifying how the data will be collected and how the data will be used prior to conducting the actual study is key in qualitative studies (King et al., 2019). Data collection for this study was solely comprised of interviews to examine ninth through 11th grade English teachers’ perceptions and their experiences related to implementing instructional practices in 9th through 11th grade ELA classrooms leading up to the American Literature EOC administered in the 11th grade to close the achievement gap. In

addition, through interviews I gained insight into appropriate PD and other support that teachers perceived they needed to more effectively prepare 9th through 11th grade students to receive proficient and distinguished scores on the American Literature EOC once taken in the 11th grade. Interviews have unique data collection features that make them a valuable tool for qualitative data collection (Adhabi & Anozie, 2017). Unlike other methods, commitment from both the researcher and the participant was essential to complete this the study. I developed the interview questions based on the study's two RQs, which were as follows:

RQ1: What are ELA teachers' experiences with implementing instructional practices they perceive they are using to prepare ninth through eleventh grade students for the American Literature EOC?

RQ2: What additional training, resources, or support, if any, do ELA teachers need to adequately prepare ninth through eleventh grade students for the American Literature EOC exam?

Interviews were conducted immediately after receiving Walden University IRB approval and participants' consent.

Justification for Data Collection

To answer the study's RQs, semi structured interviews were used. These interviews consisted of 12 open-ended questions that lead the discussion to contribute to the understanding of teachers' perceptions and experiences related to preparing students for the American Literature EOC. For the interview protocol in qualitative data collection, three types of interview protocols are generally used: unstructured, semi

structured, and structured (David et al., 2018). The semi structured protocol is the most commonly used interview protocol of the three because it allows the participants to respond freely with flexibility while, still allowing the researcher to guide the interview by following an outline that may be enhanced with follow-up questions as various themes arise (Roulston & Choi, 2018). Eight teachers were interviewed. In qualitative studies, having a small sample size is common and allows the researcher to get an in-depth look into the experiences of the participants (Vasileiou et al., 2018). Interviews as a method of data collection allowed for in-depth answers to the RQs.

Data Collection Instrument and Source

With emerging technology, data collection through interviews is becoming increasingly flexible which, allows the researcher more options than the traditional face to face model (Adhabi & Anozie, 2017). Due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the social distancing mandates, I did not have direct face-to-face access to all English teachers in the district. Therefore, I began by contacting potential participants who fit the sampling criteria by sending an invitation to participate via email. Once invited participants agreed to participate and completed the informed consent form, interviews were conducted using the Zoom Virtual platform, to adhere to and practice safe social distancing. Although interviews occurred virtually, each interview was recorded for later review and transcribed.

Establishment of Sufficiency of Data Collection

Participants were selected based on the sampling criteria and interviewed until data saturation occurred. Interviews focused on exploring potential participants' lived

experiences through their descriptions and stories (Moustakas, 1994; Weiner, 2020). I developed the interview questions using concepts from the conceptual framework. Elements of Explicit Instruction were incorporated to guide the interview questions to explore English teachers' perceptions and experiences related to implementing instructional practices in ninth through 11th grade ELA classrooms in preparation for the American Literature EOC. Each interview question was developed to gain a deeper understanding of the experiences related to implementing instructional strategies teachers are using to prepare students for the American Literature EOC and what resources and support they need to support the students' needs as best they can. As the interview progressed, I probed the interviewees for deeper answers and explanations for further clarification as needed (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Data was deemed sufficient when saturation was reached and no new information was gleaned from the interviews.

Process for Collecting and Recording Data

The interviews were conducted within a span of three weeks. During week one, I interviewed three of the participants, four participants during week two, and one participant during week three. Participants were allowed to schedule their interviews at a time that was convenient for their schedule. Each participant chose a convenient date and time outside of their contractual work hours by responding to an email I sent. Due to COVID-19, once they selected a time to participate in the interview, interviews were conducted virtually via Zoom to practice safe social distancing protocols. Zoom has audio and video recording capabilities which allowed me to record the interviews, with the participants' permission. Interviews lasted an average of 45 minutes. Next, I reflected

on the responses by listening to the audio recorded interview sessions and taking notes in a research journal following each interview to gain an in-depth understanding of the teachers' experiences.

System for Keeping Track of Data

I used research logs and reflective journals throughout the data collection process to keep track of data. I took detailed field notes in a research journal during interviews with each participant to aid the understanding of the emerging themes. These notes are locked in a filing cabinet in my home office. Next, I used NVivo, a computer software for data analysis, to code the interview. Using NVivo allowed me to keep data organized. The data were analyzed to find significant patterns in the responses that link to the RQs. Categories were then created for the codes to narrow down and identify the patterns. Once patterns were identified, themes that explained similarities or differences across codes were created to develop the meaning of the patterns found in the data.

Procedures for Gaining Access to Participants

Before engaging with the participants, I received permission from Walden University's IRB. Next, I provided the local district with requested information on the study's purpose, participants, RQs, the research design, and the study's benefit to the district. Upon approval from Walden University's IRB, I sent potential participants who met the eligibility criteria an email invitation followed by an informed consent form. The informed consent explained, in detail, the nature of the study and reminded participants that their participation was voluntary (see Rubin et al., 2018). Interviews began once consent was given.

Role of the Researcher

According to Clark and Veale (2018), the role of the researcher in qualitative studies is crucial as the researcher collects and analyzes data. Therefore, my role in this study was that of the primary instrument of data collection and analysis. For the study, I collected, coded, and analyzed the data from interviews to reveal emerging themes. The interview questions were formulated to examine teachers' perceptions and their experiences related to implementing instructional strategies to prepare students to be successful on the American Literature EOC. In my role as an ELA teacher at the time of the study, I did not hold a supervisory position over any one employed by the school district; therefore, the participants were assured that nothing said in the interviews was punitive to harm them or their position with the school district.

I have been in education since 2008 and have served as an English teacher with the local school district since 2013. Having served as a teacher for various subjects, I have gained valuable knowledge of curriculum, instruction, and assessments. Over the past 13 years, I have taught world literature, speech, ninth-grade literature, writer's workshop, study skills, and international baccalaureate courses. I have cotaught classes, as well as advanced and gifted classes. Additionally, I have served on various committees aimed at bettering the school such as Teacher Support and Mentor team, Climate and Culture committee, and Literacy Initiative Committee. I have experience teaching and preparing students for success on state standardized assessments.

The study has a degree of possible bias because I and the participants work for the same school district in the same or similar roles. I understand that I may have had some

opinions and insight into the topic and RQs; however, to keep the integrity of the study, I remained unbiased by avoiding the use of leading questions. While conducting interviews I reassured participants that their responses would be used solely for the purposes of this study and that all responses are confidential. Additionally, I was careful to respect the time and well-being of the participants.

Data Analysis

Overview of Data Analysis

After completing interviews, the data were analyzed to understand the teachers' perceptions and their experiences related to implementing instructional strategies to prepare ninth through 11th grade students for the American Literature EOC. I carefully read through the interview transcripts and took detailed notes and summaries of the participants' responses in a research journal. Next, I used NVivo 12, a computer software for data analysis, to code the interview. According to Linneberg and Korsgaard (2019), basic coding is the act of identifying meaning within the data and labeling the segments of meaning with a word or short phrase, known as a code. Codes derived from frequent responses of the participants to identify patterns and make connections. Inductive coding allows the researcher to explore related ideas and later may possibly lead to a solution to the problem. The codes derived from the interviews were developed by using recurring phrases and terms used by the participants. Codes were then categorized. To remain unbiased and avoid inadvertently integrating my ideas and prior knowledge of the problem, the codes mirrored the data to ensure accuracy and credibility. According to Linneberg and Korsgaard (2019), this approach is called inductive coding. This type of

data coding allowed the inductive researcher to remain open-minded to offer credible interpretations of the raw data (Linneberg & Korsgaard, 2019). Creswell (2014) suggested that five to seven themes are sufficient to avoid duplication. Therefore, similar words and phrases were combined and analyzed for in-depth meaning. Thus, themes were created from the coded data and used to better understand teachers' perceptions and their experiences related to preparing 9th through 11th grade students for success on the American Literature EOC administered in the 11th grade.

Evidence of Quality and Procedures

In order to ensure credibility, I asked the participants to read the transcripts of their individual interview and review the codes that emerged from the interview to determine the accuracy of my interpretations. As discussed by Candela (2019), this method is known as member checking. According to Smith and McGannon (2018), member checking is known to be the most important way to strengthen a study's credibility. During member checking, participants were offered the opportunity to determine if their original words during the interview aligned with what they intended to convey. I emailed participants the preliminary findings to eliminate the likelihood of data misinterpretation. Candela (2019) suggested that the researchers provide the participants with a two-page summary of the findings to check for accuracy. In addition, I allowed my peers to review and examine findings to ensure accuracy and credibility.

Procedures for Addressing Discrepancies

Discrepant data is data that varies from the majority of findings in a study (Rose & Johnson, 2020). In this particular study, a discrepancy can be a differing viewpoint or

isolated theme. However, no discrepancies arose during the data analysis process. I was able to avoid inadvertently integrating them into the data analysis by member checking to prevent bias.

Limitations

This study had limitations that could affect the collected data. Using the purposive sampling technique for acquiring participants could have resulted in a significant level of bias. Interviews were the sole source of data collection; therefore, the data were dependent upon what information the interviewees were willing to share. However, I created interview questions aimed at understanding the participants' experiences related to instructional strategies used to prepare students for the American Literature EOC. Correspondingly, I ensured confidentiality which allowed the participants to feel safe and comfortable sharing. I am an employee of the local school district and therefore, could be bias in data analysis. However, as the researcher, I remained neutral through the data collection and data analysis phases of the study by periodically examining my views and the basis for these views in an effort to keep my personal bias at bay.

Data Analysis Results

Semi structured interviews yielded data regarding teachers' perceptions and their experiences related to preparing 9th through 11th grade students for success on the American Literature EOC administered in the 11th grade. Additionally, participant interviews produced data that helped to understand ELA teachers' perceptions of the need for additional training, resources, and support to improve ninth through 11th-grade students' performance on the American Literature EOC examination. A total of eight

participants were interviewed for the study. Participants' experience teaching ranged from three to 24 years, with the average being 12 years of experience. From the sample of participants, four participants taught 9th grade, two taught 10th grade, and two taught 11th grade American literature. Table 1 shows the demographics of participants.

Table 1

Demographics of Local District Teacher Participants

Participant identifier	No. of years in the profession	No. of years in the local district	ELA grade level taught
Teacher A	3	3	10
Teacher B	11	10	9
Teacher C	8	5	11
Teacher D	3	3	9
Teacher E	16	16	9
Teacher F	19	13	9
Teacher G	24	20	10
Teacher H	13	8	11

Note. ELA = English Language Arts.

All participants were interviewed virtually using the Zoom video conferencing platform. Interviews were recorded and I took notes in a journal during the data collection process. To confirm that the interview transcriptions were accurate, I replayed all interview recordings to ensure that the transcripts and recordings matched. A few words were changed in some transcripts to correct errors in transcription and accurately reflect the participants actual words. Afterwards, I read the transcripts several times to become familiar with participants replies. Participants were given pseudonyms in order to maintain confidentiality; each participant was identified as Teacher, A, Teacher B, Teacher C, etc. I followed the interview protocol (Appendixes B, C, and D) for each

participant; however, the interview lengths ranged from 25-45 minutes depending on each interviewees' responses, follow-up questions, and discussions that stemmed from the interview questions.

The interview questions were formed to support and answer the two RQs to aid in understanding 9th through 11th grade ELA teachers' perceptions and their experiences related to implementing instructional strategies to prepare students for the American Literature EOC. Participants responses to the interview questions were coded for analysis of categories and themes (Belotto, 2018). I used inductive coding, to allow the research findings to emerge organically (Linneberg & Korsgaard, 2019). No codes or themes were specified prior to transcribing the interview responses. The transcripts were coded using NVivo. Next, themes were derived from codes to attach meaning to the data in attempt to answer the two RQs.

Discussion of Findings

I sought to understand 9th through 11th grade ELA teachers' perceptions of the reasons for their students' low assessment scores and their experiences related to implementing instructional practices to prepare students for the American Literature EOC. To guide my investigation, I developed two RQs. Researchers develop RQs based on the study's purpose to generate understanding of the study phenomenon (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Six themes emerged from the data: PD, reading instruction/strategies, direct instruction, test score driven instruction, collaboration, and pre-assessments. Five to seven themes are sufficient to avoid duplication (Creswell, 2014). I combined similar words and phrases to narrow the number of themes and avoid redundancy. The interview

questions and themes for RQ1 are displayed in Table 2. RQ1 was, “What are ELA teachers’ experiences with implementing instructional practices they perceive they are using to prepare ninth- through 11th-grade students for the American Literature EOC?”

Table 2

Themes Identified from Data Analysis for Research Question 1

Interview question	Theme
What teaching method do you generally use for classroom instruction in a typical lesson (e.g., group work, stations, direct instruction, etc.…)?	Direct instruction, stations, partners
What factors do you consider when you choose the aforementioned instructional strategies?	Preassessment data
Describe how you develop your knowledge about the instructional strategies you incorporate in your lesson plans.	Professional development, collaboration
Describe how instruction has changed as a result of the Georgia Milestones Assessment for American Literature implementation.	Test score driven
What are your experiences preparing students for success on the EOC?	Regimented, overwhelming, frustrating
How do you plan for instruction? What resources do you use to deliver instruction?	Collaboration with colleagues, preassessment data, standards

Note. EOC = end-of-course assessment.

Theme 1: Direct Instruction

Interview questions one through three identified participants' current teaching methods, factors considered when choosing a method, and how they developed their knowledge about the strategies they chose to use in the classroom. All participants stated they used a combination of methods rather than one single method. Participants stated they used a combination of direct instruction and grouping such as group sessions or stations as their primary methods of instruction. However, all participants stated they used direct instruction. Most participants of the study stated that they chose their teaching

method based on an assessment of their student's pre-existing knowledge, the type of assignment, and the academic levels of the students enrolled in their class.

Teacher A stated, "I do find myself kind of giving direct instructions more often than I thought that I would. And I do more of the talking to get them where I need them to be before putting them in groups and things like that." Additionally, Teacher B stated that she used direct instruction and open discussion regarding the curriculum topic with the class. Teacher B detailed, "I employ a combination of group work and direct instructions more often than not, probably through lectures."

Teacher C stated, I always start with direct instruction because I like to lay the foundation for my students by giving them background information about anything they may need or explain in the assignment, so that when I give it to them, they work well. I also like to do "think-pair- share" where we have the students talk about it to their classmates and then share out.

Teacher E stated, "I had an awesome co-teacher that I taught with before, and we favored stations and direct instruction." Similarly, Teacher F stated, "direct instruction, things like that combination of direct instruction, group work attempt to make it where everybody has a role, so there's little opportunities to kind of pass the buck." Teacher G stated, "I use direct instruction and stations. I think the stations are like anecdotal pit stops if you want to call it that because you can hear the conversation that's going on amongst the students." Finally, Teacher H stated, "I use direct instruction and group work to reach my students."

Finally, participants stated they mainly felt that students' role in the classroom were to be actively engaged in the course. Subsequently, they felt that teachers are expected to be the facilitators of learning in the classroom and should ensure the students learn through the use of effective instructional practices. Regarding the type of assignment and student, Teacher G stated: “I try to pick instructional strategies that I know that can help the students understand the assignment. It also depends on the assignment what I'm doing. Some assignments don't work well with group work, so it just depends on the students that I have and the type of assignment that needs to be completed.”

Theme 2: Preassessment

Interview Question 3 asked participants what factors they considered when choosing their teaching method, of which, the majority stated they considered the students' pre-existing knowledge through pre-assessment data as well as the type of assignment and students they have in their class. Most participants stated that they used pre-assessment data to inform instruction and that Microsoft PowerPoint, Quizlet, and the internet are chief resources in their daily instruction. Specifically, Teachers A, B, D, E, F, and G stated they considered a student's pre-existing knowledge, and Teachers C, E, F, and G considered the type of assignment and students they have in their class when choosing an instructional strategy. Specifically, Teacher A stated, “So I try to always start with probing questions. So what do you know about this? And just kind of giving them an opportunity, giving my students an opportunity to let me know what they know first.” Similarly, Teacher B stated:

…that really just depends on what the data shows in most cases. If I am given a pre-assessment, and it appears that the students are already familiar with the concept, that gives me the autonomy to move through a little bit quicker and ex out some things as I go.

Teacher D stated, “It just depends on if it's a subject that I've already introduced, and we need to build on that standard or that subject.” Teacher E stated, “I always consider my students' pre-existing knowledge in a subject area before choosing an instructional strategy.” Similarly, Teacher F stated, “once I’ve assessed my students' current knowledge on the subject, I’m better informed on choosing an instructional strategy.”

Participants were also asked how they planned for instruction and what resources they used (interview question 9-9a). Most participants stated they used pre-assessment data to plan their instruction. For example, Teacher E stated, “your data is going to drive you wherever you need to go. After you look at data, you definitely have to examine and say, okay, what strategy am I going to use?” Similarly, Teacher G stated, “pre-assessment data is key in informing how I am going to instruct my students.” Participants also stated that they planned their instruction based on observations, based on day-to-day results, through collaboration with other teachers, and through the assessment of several factors.

Theme 3: Collaboration

In Interview Question 4, participants were asked how they developed their knowledge for using the teaching strategies employed in their classrooms. The interview questions revealed that the participants derived their teaching strategies from research

and collaboration. Participants stated that they predominantly gathered knowledge by conducting their own research and/or collaborating with co-workers. Specifically, Teachers A, B, D, E, F, and G stated they conducted their own research, and Teachers A, B, C, D, and F stated they collaborated with co-workers. For example, Teacher A stated:

I try to do as much research. I try to look into things that I learned in school because it was just so much information, and it's easy to lose it if you don't use it. So, I try to always go back to assignments that I had and the books that I received or the textbooks that I have ordered. So, I look into that and then I also kind of have conversations with my fellow coworkers, my fellow instructors, sometimes even people who don't teach the same grade level that I teach just because they have a wealth of knowledge and strategies.

Similarly, Teacher D stated, “I am a fairly new teacher, so a lot of my knowledge comes from my colleagues or professional development. I also conduct a good deal of research to include student data.” Finally, Teacher F stated:

It's usually if something's been introduced to me from a coworker, I learn better from my peers. While I appreciate some of the professional development that we’re offered, often times it does not come with an opportunity to extend that to actually practice in the classroom, so I can't necessarily say that I get it from the district. Often times with my own research and ideas I have, I'm not quite sure how that's to be implemented, but I'll get out there and look up things and or just get activities and strategies on social media.

Theme 4: Test Score Driven Instruction

Regarding their school's current standings, most participants were unaware of the American Literature EOC scores; however, they suggested that the implementation of the Georgia Milestone EOC exam made instruction more test score-driven and constrained teachers' time and what they can teach. Further, participants of the study reported having mixed experiences related to preparing students for success on the EOC assessment; however, most participants reported negative experiences such as not having enough time and autonomy.

Participants were also asked how they perceived instruction has changed since the implementation of the Georgia Milestone assessment EOC. Teachers A, C, D, E, F, and G stated that the implementation of the EOC made instruction more test score-driven. For example, Teacher A stated, “I feel like instruction has changed because a lot of administrators, coaches are kind of all about the test scores, and I think that changes the classroom dynamic to be score related, as opposed to knowledge building.” Similarly, Teacher C stated, “I think with the milestone implementation just like any test, has changed instruction because now teachers kind of tailored their instructions to the test. It kind of cuts out some of the autonomy in teaching because you have to focus on what's going to be on it. So that's how it has changed instruction for me in my mind. Teacher D stated, “We definitely prepare our students for the assessment in the form of ensuring that they're able to write constructed responses. So, our hope throughout the year is that, all of the lessons that we teach, all of our lessons basically fit together to ensure that our students are prepared for the test.”

Most participants either implied or stated they felt the EOC controlled their instruction. As illustrated in Teacher C and Teacher D's previous statements, they felt their instruction was centered on ensuring students were prepared to pass the exam. Furthermore, Teacher C also stated, "it also puts time constraints on teaching and what you can teach. So specific examples would be teaching to the test instead of being able to bring in a variety of materials for students to connect with."

Teachers D, F, and G suggested their experience of preparing students to be too regimented. For example, Teacher G stated, "When we get closer to testing, my stations are very targeted for those areas that they can expect to connect with on the EOC. It becomes very regimented." Teacher A made comments that suggested her experience was unpleasant. Specifically, she stated, "I hate it. My experience is awful. It's awful because so much of preparing them is like a task-based thing that I've been assigned to teach this certain thing. There's a certain way from my superiors in the building, and I don't think that it's effective. I think that it interrupts general instruction. Teacher C stated that she felt overwhelmed and frustrated:

> When I first started teaching, it was very overwhelming. I did feel like I was about to drop at any moment trying to prepare them. So much emphasis is put on the test, and I had a whole bunch of information and curriculum that I had to cover using the same pacing guide, and it was very frustrating. I didn't feel like I could do it all, and I don't think that the students are taken into consideration because following the pacing guide trying to cover all the criteria for the test is overwhelming for the students too.

Table 3 shows the interview questions and themes for RQ2, which was, What additional training, resources, or support, if any, do ELA teachers report they need to adequately prepare 9th through 11th grade students for the American Literature EOC exam?

Table 3

Themes Identified from Data Analysis for Research Question 2

Interview question	Theme
What ELA instructional strategies from the district professional development sessions do you utilize in your classroom?	Close reading
Which strategies do you find most effective when teaching the district curriculum for 9th-11th grade English?	Close reading
What type of support do you need to best prepare your students for success on the American Literature EOC?	Professional development, training, coaching
From your experiences teaching 9th, 10th, or 11th grade ELA, why do you think students in the district are not performing well on the American Literature EOC?	Students not prepared for grade-level assessment, lack of reading instruction

Note. ELA = English Language Arts; EOC = end-of-course assessment.

Theme 5: Professional Development

Participant responses regarding the type of support needed suggested participants need better teacher enrichment, better instruction for implementing reading strategies, and coaching. Participants made other recommendations to include the need for constructive feedback, leaders to be better trained, and improved technology. For example, Teacher A stated, “I feel like professional development is designed to kind of enrich the teacher, and that doesn't really happen.” Similarly, Teacher B stated, “I think that I also need professional development. I definitely need to improve on some of my teaching strategies, especially when it comes to reading comprehension.” Teacher D

stated, “Although the PD sessions are created for teacher enrichment, there is a gap in the teaching and application of the strategies discussed which results in the sessions meeting their objective.”

With regards to PD sessions provided by the local district, although participants stated they attempted to use some of the instructional strategies taught, a modified version of close-reading strategies was suggested to be the most effective strategy in 9th through 11th grade ELA classrooms.

Theme 6: Reading Instructional Strategies

Teachers suggested that they thought students were not doing well on the EOC for several reasons. However, the most prominent reason was that participants thought students needed more preparation time prior to being enrolled in the American literature course. For example, Teacher B stated, “The American Lit standards, like the 11th to 12th grade standards, should be introduced to students in the 9th grade, so that you're building towards those standards. When we're assessing students or when we're collecting data, we can literally break those standards down like that's something that I'm going to try to implement in my classroom next year.”

Teacher C stated,

> So I think they [the local school district] should start having those basic reading and basic writing classes as electives within the school built in for those students who fall within those criteria to be put into those classes before they get to American literature class in the 11th grade. So that way, when they get into American Literature, we're not having to teach them how to read. We're teaching

them what to do when they read it, and we're teaching them to comprehend and to work with it and to really implement the skills that we're teaching.

Similarly, Teacher D stated, “It's funny that they implement reading support classes in college, but we don't do it in high school, but we're preparing students for college. It should be the same format; we should have those remedial reading classes for students who come in already at a learning deficit, because in actuality, we don't have time to teach the basics of reading and writing in American literature in 11th grade.”

Teachers' perceptions regarding the support they need to better prepare students for the American Literature EOC suggested the need for better teacher enrichment through PD, guided instruction on how to implement reading instructional strategies, and ongoing coaching. Furthermore, participants suggested that implementing remedial or basic skills reading and writing courses prior to American literature course will support students who have difficulty with reading and writing and allow them more preparation time in 9th and 10th grade before being enrolled in American literature courses in grade 11. Therefore, this study's findings suggest that participants believe preparation for the American Literature EOC should begin much earlier for students, and teachers require more targeted in-depth PD and coaching to better prepare 9th through 11th grade ELA students for the American Literature EOC exam.

Summary of the Results

The themes described in this section were identified by participants' responses concerning the perceptions of 9th through 11th grade ELA teachers regarding the reasons for the local districts’ low American Literature EOC scores, their experiences with

preparing ELA students for the American Literature EOC, and their perceptions regarding additional training, resources, or support needed to prepare 9th through 11th grade students for the American Literature EOC. The themes that emerged were PD, reading instruction/strategies, direct instruction, test-driven instruction, collaboration, and pre-assessments. The themes indicated that teachers needed PD they deemed relevant to instructional strategies geared towards assisting ELA teachers with American Literature EOC preparation, specifically, reading instructional strategies. Regarding participants' experiences implementing instructional practices, teachers in the study suggested that although they implemented a few strategies taught during the district PD sessions, most of them were modified to fit the needs of the students in their classrooms. Most participants in the study revealed that they mainly learned instructional strategies through other means outside of the district-provided PD. Specifically, they derived their teaching strategies from research via the internet and collaboration with co-workers. The results of the data collection also discovered that few participants were knowledgeable of their respective schools' American Literature EOC scores and the local districts' American Literature EOC scores as compared to the state average. In order to better prepare 9th through 11th grade students for the American Literature EOC, participants suggested that they needed more targeted, in-depth PD and ongoing coaching among other resources. Moreover, the results of the study suggested that remedial reading and writing courses and/or instructional strategies for students are needed beginning in the 9th grade to better prepare students for the American Literature EOC administered in the 11th grade. Participants results also indicated that direct instruction and group work is the preferred

method of instruction for preparation of the American Literature EOC. Teachers often administered pre-assessments to determine what students needed to know; however, there was no mention of how teachers knew that students learned the information taught.

Discrepant Cases

While collecting data and analyzing data, I reviewed results to determine if there were any discrepancies. I did not identify any discrepancies that altered the findings of the study. According to Merriam and Tisdell (2016) researchers should examine the data to ensure that there are no conflicts that would impact or alter findings. During my review of the data, I did not find evidence of discrepant cases.

Data Validation

Ensuring validity of data is essential to a basic qualitative study. When conducting interviews as a method of data collection, it is important to confirm accurate interpretations of findings. Therefore, I employed member checks. Creswell & Creswell (2018) explained that member checking is an effective way to validate findings. After I conducted interviews and analyzing the data, I furnished each participant with summary of the findings based on his or her transcript analysis. Each participant had an opportunity to review and provide feedback (Birt et al., 2016). All participants agreed that the summary of the findings aligned with their views; therefore, no edits were made as a result of member checking.

Discussion

Semi structured interviews were instrumental to gain insight into teachers' experiences related to implementing instructional practices they are using to prepare

students for the American Liteft5rature EOC. Participants of the study appeared comfortable sharing their experiences with me during the interviews; and therefore, I believe their responses to be open and honest. Most participants of the study appeared eager to help their students prepare for the American Literature EOC. However, their responses regarding PD sessions and the EOC scores did not appear they felt they had the tools and support necessary to influence how their students performed on the exam significantly. Participants' responses also suggest that teachers in this sample predominantly did not view the Georgia Milestone EOC favorably since many teachers viewed the assessment as a constrain on teachers' instructional time and teaching autonomy.

Regarding the need for support and training, participants suggested they needed more support through teacher enrichment, instruction on implementing the teaching strategies proposed in PD sessions, and coaching. Participant responses indicated a disconnect between what is taught during district PD sessions and what they found useful to implement in their classrooms as tools to prepare students for the American Literature EOC. Few participants from the sample appeared willing to adopt teaching strategies proposed during PD stating that they had success using the close reading strategy. However, it could be implied that as a result of not having clear in-depth instructions or ongoing coaching on how to properly implement some of these strategies, teachers are forced to modify the strategies delivered to them according to their available resources. For example, Teacher A mentioned that she modified the close reading strategy. These

research findings support the premise that the current PD sessions should be enhanced to improve effectiveness in providing teacher enrichment and the proper training.

The conceptual framework, Madeline Hunter's model of mastery learning and explicit instruction, is comprised of explicit teacher demonstrations, guided practice, review, evaluation, among other instructional practices (Hughes et al., 2017). When broken down into eight components the lesson cycle includes (a) anticipatory set, (b) objective and purpose, (c) teaching/input, (d) modeling, (e) check for understanding, (f) guided practice, (g) independent practice, and (h) closure (Han et al., 2013). Some of the teachers' experiences related to implementing instructional strategies they are using are consistent with Madeline Hunter's model of mastery learning and explicit instruction. Specifically, I noticed from the interview responses that some teachers mentioned the need to connect students with the topic to engage them in the subject matter. Finding a way to engage the student could be considered the anticipatory set element of Madeline Hunter's model. The anticipatory set occurs when "teachers provide a hook for students to relate the relevance experiences of the students to the learning subject matter" (Goss & Sonnemann, 2017; Han et al., 2013, p. 80).

In addition, one of the themes identified in the study was the use of direct instruction. According to Heart (2016), direct instruction is related to three elements of Madeline Hunter's model of mastery learning. Specifically, teacher input, modeling, and checking for understanding. Although direct instruction in the form of teacher input through lectures was mentioned by several participants and emerged as a theme in this study, no participants mentioned modeling reading and writing as an instructional

strategy to prepare students for the American Literature EOC assessment. However, several study participants mentioned using student-led groups wherein students were able to teach and collaborate with their peers. Therefore, modeling between student peers was mentioned as an effective teaching strategy. Establishing clear objectives and the purpose of lessons were also not mentioned by the participants in the study. Objectives and purpose are components of Madeline Hunter's model of mastery of learning. When preparing students to write effectively, teachers must place an emphasis on beginning lessons with clear statement of goals and expectations (Hughes et al., 2017). After analyzing the results of the data collection there seems to be a gap in the practice of establishing and beginning lessons with a clear statement of purpose. Finally, pre-assessment of students' knowledge was a major theme identified in this study. Teachers suggested pre-assessing students' knowledge to guide their instruction methods. Pre-assessment data was used by all participants to determine specific instructional strategies to teach standards and concepts. Therefore, the findings from this study partially support the conceptual framework, Madeline Hunter's model of mastery learning.

After analyzing the results of the data collection, the next step was to determine how best to address the local problem of low American Literature EOC scores. Based on the analysis of the data and the themes that emerged, the logical project for the study would be to develop a targeted, in-depth 3-day professional development series grounded in research-based practices to increase teacher effectiveness to improve student achievement on the American Literature EOC. During the 3-day PD plan, I plan to provide instructional strategies and resources that teachers can implement throughout the

district in 9th, 10th, and 11th grade ELA classrooms to prepare students for success on the American Literature EOC. These instructional strategies and resources will include the themes and concepts that emerged from the data.

Summary

In this section, I provided a review of the methodology, participants of the study, data collection and analysis procedures, and proposed limitations of the study. I also provided a review of the data analysis results in relation to the two RQs. A discussion and recommendation for project deliverable was then provided along with a conclusion. Eight participants took part in the data collection of this basic qualitative study through semi structured interviews. The discussion section provided an overview of participants responses for all interview questions as they related to each RQ. Section 3 will provide a discussion of (a) the project, (b) the literature in support of the project, and (c) how the research results were disseminated.

Section 3: The Project

Introduction

PD is a key component of the success of any major organization (DiPaola & Wagner, 2018). It is necessary to ensure that faculty, staff, and other essential employees are up to date on the latest research-based information in the particular field. After collecting data through interviews, I designed a 3-day PD. According to Mitchell et al. (2018), well-structured PD is important because it fosters a sense of community while integrating content-specific and pedagogical expertise. Additionally, effective PD provides timely feedback and on-going coaching in order to effect change (Mitchell et al., 2018). The goal of this project is to provide 9th- through 11th-grade ELA teachers in the local district with targeted, in-depth PD that they can use in preparing students for success on the American Literature EOC. In the following sections, I will describe the project, goals, and rationale; review literature supporting the project type; and discuss the evaluation plan and implications.

Project Description and Goals

The project is a comprehensive PD plan. This PD plan will be delivered to 9th-, 10th-, and 11th-grade ELA teachers within the local school district. The PD plan will consist of the facilitation of learning instructional based-practices, resources, and collaborative sessions that will span 3 full days. I will deliver the PD using Microsoft PowerPoint as the primary delivery instrument with supplemental handouts as needed. The contents of the PD will address topics that the research participants mentioned in their responses to the study interview questions.

The overall goal of the PD is to empower teachers to transform their classrooms by employing effective research-based instructional strategies to increase student achievement in ELA. Over the course of the 3 days, participants will

- review research regarding mastery learning and explicit instruction
- participate in small group discussion
- review research-based reading comprehension and vocabulary instructional strategies
- engage in guided lesson planning to demonstrate mastery learning
- collaborate with peers to plan the next unit to incorporate instructional strategies
- review learning targets and success criteria for student success
- set specific learning targets for student learning based on data
- set success criteria.

The objective of the overall PD is to enhance the current local district PD with a plan that allows teachers to put what they have learned into practice. When PD is focused and intentional, while emphasizing application, collaboration, and reflection, teachers can gain valuable information to implement in the classroom to effect a positive change in student achievement (Opper, 2019).

Rationale

I chose PD as a solution to the local problem to aid teachers in preparing students for success on the American Literature EOC. When teachers participate in meaningful PD sessions, the results can be beneficial to students and the general school environment

(Gore et al., 2021). However, PD solely focused on improving teachers' content knowledge in ELA has not been found effective for improving student achievement in ELA (Gore et al., 2021). When PD sessions allow for collaboration and active learning opportunities to plan and integrate knowledge and skills, results have been efficacious as it relates to student growth (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017). Therefore, I designed the project to give 9th- through 11th-grade ELA teachers the opportunity to learn research-based instructional strategies aimed at increasing student achievement, collaborate with peers, and plan for instruction in ELA courses with the aim of increasing student achievement on the American Literature EOC.

I developed this comprehensive PD plan based on the findings from the interviews. The results of the study revealed that teachers felt that in-depth, targeted PD is needed as a support to help increase student academic achievement on the EOC. Additionally, the results showed that there is a gap in practice in the use of an effective instructional framework that focuses on statements of goals and objectives to target student learning and that reading instructional strategies are needed to support struggling readers in preparation for the American Literature EOC. This comprehensive PD addresses the local problem by providing 9th-, 10th-, and 11th-grade ELA teachers in the district with PD sessions to address the issues of effective reading instruction and setting learning goals and objectives.

Review of the Literature

In this section, I provide a scholarly review of the current literature on the effectiveness of ongoing, targeted, in-depth PD; reading instructional strategies; and

instructional frameworks. Key phrases such as *professional development for increasing student achievement in ELA*, *adult learning*, *modeling*, *reading instruction*, and *reading comprehension* were used to search over 40 sources in the following databases and search engines: Google Scholar, Academic Search Premier, ERIC, Sage, ProQuest, and JSTOR. I focused on literature published within the last 5 years. The review of the literature supports continuous in-depth PD to address the local problem of low American Literature EOC scores across the local district.

Professional Development for ELA Teachers

Effective PD for teachers has a long-lasting influence on student learning (Gore et al., 2021; Opper, 2019). In the past, however, a significant number of PD sessions have been geared towards increasing teacher content knowledge rather than pedagogical knowledge. Gupta and Lee (2020) found that teachers came to PD workshops with various levels of content understanding. Furthermore, in their findings, Gupta and Lee noted that there is a substantial difference in teachers' experiences. As a result, it is important to assess teacher understanding of ELA content before deciding on the topics for PD sessions in order to adapt the PD curriculum to their needs (Sims & Fletcher-Wood, 2021). Doubet and Southall (2018) found that focused PD featuring strategy-modeling has the potential to shape middle and high school English teachers' beliefs and practices in reading and writing instruction. However, in the qualitative study that they conducted with 55 teachers, Doubet and Southall also found that ELA teachers may not sustain the learned instructional strategies without embedded, long-term support.

Developing effective teacher PD relies heavily on focusing on desired objectives (Philipsen et al., 2019). Knowing the desired goals for the PD is essential to long-lasting positive effects for student achievement (Almuhammadi, 2017). In a study conducted by Almuhammadi (2017), results indicated that effective PD focused on three concepts. These concepts are identified as content, context, and process. Almuhammadi stated that "focusing on the 'process' and 'context' is important to the success of PD because it provides the needed motivation to instructors" (p. 123). Teachers are motivated by student outcomes; therefore, when student success is tied to PD, teachers view student success as an indicator of the quality of their teaching. As a result, ongoing PD for ELA teachers can be beneficial in shifting instructional practices when teaching reading comprehension (Aldosemani, 2019). Through PD focused on instructional strategies to explicitly teach reading skills, teachers can attribute student progress to the new instructional practices learned in PD (Rodgers, et al., 2022; Williams-Collins, 2019).

Effective PD also requires knowledge of adult learners. Engagement of adult learners is dependent on making the connection between content and their everyday lives (Major & Calandrino, 2018). It is important to consider the needs and interests of adult learners when developing effective PDs to ensure expectations and experiences are addressed (Shi, 2017). Additionally, adult learners require learner-centered strategies to support self-learning in the form of actively participating and applying new knowledge (Almuhammadi, 2017). Thus, the type of PD that resulted from this project is job-embedded to allow for ELA teachers to collaborate and plan lessons as they learn various strategies to improve student achievement in ELA.

Reading Instruction

Reading comprehension is considered one of the most complex intellectual processes in which people engage (Elleman & Oslund, 2019). No one is born with the ability to read; therefore, reading comprehension can also be difficult to teach (Elleman & Oslund, 2019). One must be taught explicitly through a series of steps before being able to read and comprehend the text. Shanahan (2020) mentioned that some data on the science of reading instruction provide evidence that explicit decoding instruction would be valuable to reading success. Teaching students to decode words, letters, sounds, and phrases require knowledge of researched-based reading instructional strategies. Robertson et al. (2020) noted that when ELA teachers pivot from lecture style reading instruction to providing reading instruction through a range of research-based strategies, low-performing readers' literacy skills can accelerate to increase overall achievement. In support of this concept, Siregar et al. (2019) conducted a study to determine whether or not there is any significant correlation between reading strategies and reading comprehension achievement. The result of this research revealed that there is a substantial relationship between reading strategies and higher-level reading comprehension (Siregar et al., 2019). According to Siregar et al., most readers may encounter difficulties with comprehension; however, proficient readers resolve comprehension issues by consciously applying effective reading strategies to combat challenges. Therefore, ELA teachers should not only teach students reading strategies for the sake of increasing student achievement, but also to empower students to employ reading strategies on their own to assist with comprehension challenges in the future.

Employing strategies involve the reader's awareness of comprehension deficits to select the most suitable means of solving the reading comprehension issue (Brevik, 2019). Several researchers have noted that strategies can be arranged according to when they are most useful to the reader, i.e., before, during, or after reading (Brevik, 2019; Leidig et al., 2018). These strategies are known as strategic reading. Strategic reading is the process of overcoming comprehension obstacles to construct meaning from a text (Brevik, 2019). However, not much research has been conducted surrounding comprehension strategies that ELA students on the secondary level use as a tool to construct meaning from complex texts (Brown, 2017). According to Solís et al. (2017), very little time is spent on explicitly helping ELA students with their reading comprehension in middle and high school. For this reason, it is important to provide 9th – 11th grade ELA teachers with targeted PD to explain how to effectively incorporate reading comprehension strategies as a way to increase student achievement on the American Literature EOC.

Brevik (2019) conducted a 2-year study of 60 ELA lessons in ninth and 10th grade English classrooms to investigate the type of reading comprehension instruction and strategies teachers employed to increase student achievement. Results revealed that teachers offered guided strategy practice based on students' needs with narrative and expository texts more than half of the time (Brevik, 2019). Findings of the 2-year study also revealed that teachers encouraged the use of reading comprehension strategies that students had prior knowledge of rather than teaching new ones. Offering additional PD on reading comprehension strategies will assist teachers with developing lessons that

build on students' prior knowledge of certain reading strategies. Brevik's continual emphasis on reading comprehension instruction and scaffolded strategy practices showed that when ELA teachers make reading comprehension instruction a priority, students can develop critical literacy awareness to determine texts meaning, purpose, and intent (Brevik, 2019). Thus, the goal of the 3-day PD is to build teacher practices through research-based reading strategies to help students comprehend various texts in preparation for the American Literature EOC.

In line with the American Literature EOC data from the local school district, researchers have found that a significant portion of students are not proficient on state reading tests (Duke et al., 2021; Koon et al., 2020). However, researchers have also found that comprehension-focused interventions such as close reading, vocabulary instruction, and activating prior knowledge can increase reading comprehension which can, in turn, increase proficiency on state assessments (Lee & Tsai, 2017). Close reading is a researched-based strategy that requires that students break larger texts into smaller chunks to teach struggling readers to analyze their reading in order to foster reading comprehension (Williams-Collins, 2019). With regard to vocabulary instruction, research revealed that teaching students the meanings of words within a text supports students' comprehension of that text (Wright & Cervetti, 2017). Moody et al. (2018), conducted a study to determine if knowledge of vocabulary instruction theories has an impact on teachers' performance and student vocabulary and reading comprehension achievement. The results of the study revealed that while vocabulary instruction is helpful to build comprehension on the elementary level, more research is needed on the secondary level

since vocabulary instruction is critical for comprehending the abstract and domain-specific vocabulary found in content-area textbooks (Moody et al., 2018). Providing PD on vocabulary instruction to 9th, 10th, and 11th grade ELA teachers may also prove effective in having a positive impact on reading comprehension achievement.

According to Duke et al., (2021), reading comprehension is also influenced by content and purpose. What one is reading and the purpose for which one is reading heavily affects one's ability to comprehend (Duke et al., 2021). Anticipating and understanding a texts' structure supports reading comprehension (Brevik, 2019; Duke et al., 2021). Therefore, a significant number of researchers have studied the impact of text structure instruction on comprehension. Davis et al. (2017), conducted a study of 83 students to assess their comprehension of expository texts. The results revealed that content knowledge was a strong predictor of comprehension. Additionally, Hwang and Duke (2020) conducted a study of over 15,000 students in which they examined students' prior knowledge of science content as it relates to comprehension of informational texts. The findings discovered that cultivating science domain knowledge is important to supporting reading comprehension development in informational science related texts (Hwang & Duke, 2020). Studies have shown that students generally comprehend texts that are written to tell a story such as narratives in the form of short stories and novels (Cervetti & Wright, 2020; Davis et al., 2017; Dhillon et al., 2020). However, informational texts may be more challenging to comprehend at any level without prior knowledge. This means that prior knowledge of not only academic content, but also

cultural knowledge, contribute to achievement in reading comprehension (Duke et al., 2021; Hwang & Duke, 2020).

The aforementioned research and strategies can be supportive in increasing student achievement in reading comprehension, which can, in turn, increase student achievement in the American Literature EOC. The project will include a guide of various research-based resources to support teachers in 9th through 11th grade ELA classes with preparing students for success on the American Literature EOC. Teachers will be able to identify appropriate strategies to increase student achievement where needed.

Project Description

The project, a PD plan, developed as a result of the study's findings. The PD plan is geared towards increasing student achievement on the American Literature EOC assessment through professional learning communities for 9th, 10th, and 11th grade ELA teachers in the local district. The project (Appendix A) consists of 3 days that include reviewing the results of the study, learning student-centered practices, and engaging in learning communities to address the needs of students in ELA classrooms. To address themes identified in the study, I will provide teachers with training in several areas. To address Theme 1, direct instruction and Theme 2, pre-assessment, the project will provide research-based strategies for explicit instruction for ELA classes. To address Theme 3, collaboration, the project will offer opportunities for teachers to collaborate to plan relevant lesson based on student data. To address Theme 4, test-score driven instruction, Theme 5, PD, and Theme 6, reading instructional strategies, the project will include various reading comprehension instructional strategies through PD sessions to support the

9th through 11th grade ELA teachers in preparing students for the American Literature EOC in lieu of test-score driven instruction. The sections below discuss resources, existing supports, potential barriers and solutions, implementation and timetable, and roles and responsibilities.

Resources and Existing Supports

A successful 3-day PD plan relies heavily on having the necessary resources and expert support (Darling-Hammond, et al., 2017). The local district has two ELA content coordinators and two professional learning facilitators who are currently in place as existing support to assist in the implementation of this project. The ELA professional learning facilitators will work with instructional coaches and other teacher leaders such as department chairs and grade level leaders to provide job-embedded PD to teachers. Additionally, the district has several PD days built into the yearly calendar. These built-in days serve as a resource and support because it will allow me the time to facilitate the PD without interfering with teachers' instructional workday. The local district is also equipped with technology such as smart boards, speakers, projectors, and laptops that would be necessary to conduct a successful PD.

Potential Barriers and Solutions

Research suggests that effective PD should take place during the workday (Gore, et al., 2017). However, this may not always be feasible. Although the local district has several built-in days for PD; some PDs are already planned for the teachers during those pre-determined days. An alternate schedule to allow teachers to choose which PD

sessions they would like to attend based on their needs could be a potential solution to the aforementioned barrier.

Another potential barrier may be teachers' resistance to the implementation of these strategies to support students in preparing for the American Literature EOC. Some teachers may not be willing to implement the recommended literacy strategies in their ELA classrooms. However, a potential solution to this barrier could be meeting with ELA instructional coaches to disseminate the researched based strategies with evidence to support their effectiveness for supporting student growth in ELA. The instructional coaches would be available at the various high schools to offer on-going support at the school level for teachers who need it.

Implementation and Timetable

Implementation of the project will begin directly after I receive approval from my committee. To implement the project, I will begin by submitting a proposal for the local district PD department for ELA to explain the data and significance of the proposed PD plan. The proposal will include the local district's American Literature EOC scores for the past 5 years along with research to support the plan. During the meeting with the ELA PD department, I will discuss the upcoming calendar for PD for the next school year in an effort to be added to the calendar. Once the PD is approved by the ELA PD department, the PD offering will be shared via email with ELA teachers in the local school district.

The proposed timeline is for the start of the 2022-2023 school year. Beginning in September, the first part of the 3-day session will be offered virtually as a self-guided PD

to include pre-assessments, reflections, and self-paced information on explicit instruction. This first session will be conducted to allow teachers to implement explicit instruction strategies in their classrooms as early as possible. The second and third sessions would be face-to-face in October and November respectively. During the next two sessions, teachers will participate in collaborative planning sessions, small group discussions, whole group discussions, and modeling. The 3-day PD will end in November, one month before the American Literature EOC is administered in most schools in the local district, to allow teachers time to prepare students and implement strategies learned.

Roles and Responsibilities

As the researcher, my role began with identifying the problem within the local district. Afterwards, I conducted research and collected data to determine the cause of the problem. As a way to address the local problem, my role is to develop a detailed PD plan to ensure that the PD department, administrators, teacher leaders, and teachers understand the goal and objective of the plan. In this role, I will do all necessary research, make copies, develop formative and summative assessments to evaluate effectiveness of the PD. Additionally, it is my responsibility to collaborate with the ELA PD department to gain their support in assisting with the implementation of the 3-day comprehensive plan, providing resources and materials, and facilitating all three sessions.

Project Evaluation Plan

Researchers have evaluated the influence that surveys and reflective feedback have on PD to assess the impact of the PD in educational settings as a way to meet students learning needs (Gubbins & Hayden, 2021). Formative assessments will be used

throughout the 3-day PD to determine the effectiveness of the PD. Formative evaluations in the form of surveys via Google Forms will be available after each session to monitor the effectiveness of the session by evaluating participants' understanding of the material, pacing of the sessions, and participants' ability to implement learned concepts in their classrooms. Participants will have access to the link through the use of a QR code. The goal of the formative evaluation is to assist me and other facilitators in determining if modifications to any portion of the sessions are needed to strengthen the PD for the following sessions.

The project goal for the PD is to provide 9th-11th grade ELA teachers with targeted, in-depth PD to educate them on strategies they can use in their 9th-11th grade ELA classrooms to increase student achievement on the American Literature EOC. By providing sessions centered on Explicit Instruction, reading instruction, and learning targets teachers will gain new strategies and practices to implement in 9th, 10th, and 11th grade ELA classroom to support student growth. The survey will include questions and statements intended to gather information about teachers' participation in the PD, their comfort level implementing the learned strategies, and recommendations for improvement (Appendix B). I will review teachers' responses on a rolling basis to determine the effectiveness of the PD sessions and make changes accordingly. The information gleaned from the evaluations of the PD will be helpful to not only the researcher, but, also to key stakeholders such as principals, curriculum supervisors, and district professional learning facilitators.

Project Implications

This project, a 3-day PD plan, may contribute to positive social change by providing insight to school district ELA curriculum supervisors, professional learning facilitators, administrators, instructional coaches, and teachers regarding effective instructional strategies for increasing student achievement on the American Literature EOC. Although the target population for this study is 9th-11th grade ELA teachers, administrators and other school districts in the state can also benefit from the information in this study. The local implications include the need for targeted in-depth PD for 9th through 11th grade ELA teachers to assist them with incorporating effective strategies to strengthen students' reading comprehension. This, in turn, can better help teachers understand the impact these specific strategies have on student growth in ELA which can create social change through classroom instruction.

Summary

The overall goal for this study was to increase student achievement on the American Literature EOC which is administered to students in their 11th grade year. This project was developed as a direct result if the study's data analysis results to provide targeted in-depth PD to teachers of 9th, 10th, and 11th grade ELA students to offer research-based strategies that teachers can implement in the classroom immediately to aid in ELA student achievement leading up to the American Literature EOC. In Section 3, I outlined the details of the project, a 3-day PD, provided a rationale for the project, review of the literature, and discussed potential barriers and solutions and existing resources and supports. Additionally, I outlined the project goals and implications for social change. In

Section 4, I present the projects overall strengths and limitation and a reflection of the importance of the work.

Section 4: Reflections and Conclusions

Introduction

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore English teachers' perceptions and experiences related to implementing instructional strategies in 9th-, 10th-, and 11th-grade classrooms in preparation for the American Literature EOC. I wanted to find possible solutions for the districts' low scores. Ninth- through 11th-grade ELA teachers responded to interview questions. Analysis of the interview data revealed six key themes: professional development, reading instruction/strategies, direct instruction, test-driven instruction, collaboration, and preassessments. Based on the findings, I developed a targeted, in-depth, 3-day PD plan to inform teachers of research-based instructional strategies they can use to increase student achievement on the American Literature EOC administered to 11th-grade students. In Section 4 of this study, I discuss the project's strengths and limitations, offer recommendations for alternative approaches, and consider the project study's implications for future research. Additionally, in this section, I reflect on the importance of the work and provide a conclusion to this study.

Project Strengths and Limitations

I designed the project to support 9th- through 11th-grade ELA teachers with strategies, resources, and additional supports they needed to prepare students for the American Literature EOC assessment. The PD sessions include research-based strategies to aid teachers in planning and implementing reading instruction as a means of increasing student achievement in ELA. The sessions provide time for teachers, instructional coaches, and ELA PD facilitators to collaborate to support one another. Additionally, the

project allows for district-level ELA personnel to make necessary changes in curriculum and instruction on the district level to better support teachers and students in preparation for the American Literature EOC.

A major limitation of this project study was the time allotted to PD. Three days may not be sufficient to provide thorough, in-depth PD on reading instruction to assist teachers in providing instruction to increase student achievement on the American Literature EOC. Several teachers may request additional PD to make significant changes to their instruction to support student growth in ELA. An additional limitation of the project was the small sample size. Although eight was a sufficient sample size for the study, more input from addition 9th–11th-grade ELA teachers in the district may have added to the project's insights.

Recommendations for Alternative Approaches

There are alternative approaches that could yield additional results. The study could have been conducted on a larger scale to allow more conversation surrounding instructional strategies and resources teachers need to better prepare ELA students for the American Literature EOC. Therefore, one recommendation is to open the research to include several other low-performing school districts in the state of Georgia. Allowing more underperforming school districts to participate in the study would aid researchers in gathering further relevant data. An additional recommendation for an alternative approach would be for ELA instructional coaches to lead quarterly discussions with 9th-, 10th-, and 11th-grade ELA teachers to assess student literacy achievement on an ongoing

basis. This way, teachers and coaches can be proactive in developing a plan to address concerns and support teachers throughout the school year.

Scholarship, Project Development, and Leadership and Change

While working on this project study, I learned a great deal about the local school district, teachers' perceptions of the local problem, teachers' perceptions of how they are preparing students for the American literature EOC, and what supports teachers need to better support the students. In addition to learning about the inner workings of my project study, I have also learned a lot about myself as a scholar. During this time, I transformed into a research-informed practitioner as I identified the problem of the local district's lagging American Literature EOC scores as compared to the state, identified the gap in practice, conducted relevant research of peer-reviewed literature and published dissertations, and gathered data through interviews. I learned that I am a kinesthetic learner which means that I like to be "hands on" with my learning; this resulted in me in printing hundreds of articles that I read through and highlighted to gather information for this project study. Searching, printing, reading, and highlighting such a large number of articles became overwhelming at times; therefore, I also learned that time management and boundaries were an integral part of the project study process. Through this study, I have gained valuable insight that may be beneficial to the field of education by providing insight on how teachers and school leaders prepare students for success in high school ELA.

The project development process has had a significant impact on my work as a classroom teacher. Conducting research of teachers' perceptions of the strategies they are

using in ELA classrooms to prepare students for the American Literature EOC and the support they need to better prepare students has inadvertently taught me the importance of research and data in my everyday work as a classroom teacher. Combing through the literature to support the need for effective PD and reading instruction on the secondary level further supported my current classroom practices. As I began to delve into the research, I noticed that much of what resulted from the data was also relevant in my own classroom with my students. As a result, I started to apply much of what I learned to my everyday classroom practices.

After completing the research component of the project development process, I found developing the project itself to be extremely rewarding. I developed this project to assist ELA teachers with implementing research-based strategies that are effective in increasing student achievement on the American Literature EOC. While developing the PD, my main focus was on the outcome. Through my research, I have learned about the significance of having a learning target and success criteria. The learning target is the overall goal of the PD, and the success criteria is how the facilitator and participants will know they have reached the overall goal. Keeping this in mind helped me to remain focused on the development of the PD and the evaluation.

This project has given me the confidence to home in on my leadership skills as an educator. As a high school teacher, it was routine for me to remain in my classroom, teach my students, and occasionally collaborate with my colleagues. However, as a result of the project study, I have gained the confidence to branch out into other aspects of school leadership. I have volunteered to conduct school-level PD sessions on various

topics in an effort to help other teachers develop skills and strategies that will be helpful. It is important to effect change wherever I go to improve the quality of education for students through supporting teachers' professional growth. This realization in the impact of leadership has changed the way I look at my role as an educator as a whole.

Reflection on Importance of the Work

The local district's student data showing lower scores on the American Literature EOC compared to the state average prompted me to undertake this study. The local district was challenged with identifying the effectiveness of instructional strategies in 9th- through 11th-grade ELA classrooms to increase low Georgia Milestones American Literature EOC scores in the 11th grade. Despite the district plans and initiatives, it was unclear what ELA teachers were doing in their 9th-, 10th-, or 11th-grade classrooms to prepare students for the American Literature EOC taken in the 11th grade. The information presented in this study is important because it not only reveals gaps in the teachers' practices, it also highlights the importance of in-depth, targeted PD to assist teachers in incorporating strategies to increase student performance in ELA. This work and the findings can be applied to effect change on a larger scale in many other school districts across the state that are also performing below the state average on the American Literature EOC. The importance of the work can be found in its potential ability to assist educators in implementing research-based reading strategies along with explicit instruction to positively impact student learning in ELA.

Implications, Applications, and Directions for Future Research

This study centered around what 9th, 10th, and 11th grade ELA teachers are doing in their classrooms to prepare students for the American Literature EOC and what supports teachers perceived they needed to prepare students for success on the exam. Teachers' perceptions revealed that while they were attempting to prepare students for the exam in 11th grade ELA classes, preparation for the American Literature EOC should begin in the 9th grade. Teachers also revealed that the local districts' current PD did not meet the needs of the teachers nor the students due to lack of ongoing support. As a result, the project emerged as a way to support teachers' implementation of research-based instructional strategies to increase student achievement on the American Literature EOC. The expectancy of this project study is that ELA teachers will gain valuable knowledge of how explicit instruction and reading instruction can effect change in 9th, 10th, and 11th grade students' ELA achievement.

Future researchers can investigate how implementing reading instructional strategies in other core content areas such as science and social studies can positively impact student achievement in ELA. Additional research can also be conducted to examine how bridging the learning gap between 8th grade and 9th grade can support students' grade level readiness in ELA to prepare for the American Literature EOC once students enter high school. With regard to additional research for the project, future researchers can evaluate and develop an effective PD plan that spans the course of the school year to include observations and constructive feedback to offer ongoing support for ELA teachers.

Conclusion

In this study, I identified the local problem along with the gap in practice. I conducted research through interviews to gain the insight of eight teachers in the local district who aided in providing relevant data to address the problem. I learned a great deal about my study, and myself as I analyzed data in preparation for developing a comprehensive PD plan for 9th, 10th, and 11th grade ELA teachers in the local district. This PD was created to positively change the learning outcome for students, teachers, administrators, and district level professionals. While I understand that change may not occur immediately, I believe that this study has opened the door to vital discussions regarding the necessary research, resources, and supports teachers need to increase overall student achievement in ELA and the American Literature EOC administered in the 11th grade.

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Appendix A: Project

The project, a professional development plan, developed as a result of the study's findings. The PD plan is geared towards increasing student achievement on the American Literature EOC assessment through professional learning communities for 9th, 10th, and 11th grade ELA teachers in the local district. The project consists of 3 days that include reviewing the results of the study, learning student-centered practices, and engaging in learning communities to address the needs of students in ELA classrooms. To address themes identified in the study, the project will provide teachers with training in several areas. To address Theme 1, direct instruction and Theme 2, pre-assessment, the project will provide research-based strategies for explicit instruction for ELA classes. To address Theme 3, collaboration, the project will offer opportunities for teachers to collaborate to plan relevant lesson based on student data. To address Theme 4, test-score driven instruction, Theme 5, PD, and Theme 6, reading instructional strategies, the project will include various reading comprehension instructional strategies through professional development sessions to support the 9th through 11th grade ELA teachers in preparing students for the American Literature EOC in lieu of test-score driven instruction. A detailed timeline is provided below:

Detailed Timetable

Day 1: September 2022

Pre-assessment- Each teacher will be given a pre-assessment to complete via email to evaluate their current knowledge and use of explicit instruction in their ELA classrooms.

Article 1- Teachers will read a selected article on the impact explicit instruction has on student achievement via emailed link.

Discussion questions- Teachers will answer in-depth discussion questions in response to the reading via google forms to be shared in group discussion during Day 2 in October.

Video- Teachers will watch a video explaining the importance of explicit instruction in ELA.

Article 2- Teachers will read a selected reading on how to implement explicit instruction in the ELA classroom via emailed link.

Discussion questions. Teachers will answer in-depth discussion questions in response to the reading via google forms to be shared in a small group discussion during Day 2 in October.

Reflection- Teachers will be asked to reflect on their current classroom practices and strategies to determine how they can create a lesson using the explicit instruction model.

Day 2: October 2022

8:15am-9:30am: Continental breakfast provided, Welcome, introductions, overview of the PD

Breakfast will be provided for both face-to-face PD sessions. Teachers will be introduced to the professional learning facilitators. Teachers will receive an overview of the agenda and materials.

9:30am-10:30am: Small group discussion of Article 1 and Article 2.

Teachers will be asked to share thoughts with whole group.

10:30am-10:45am: 15 Minute Break

Participants may use the restroom, stretch, make phone calls, etc.…

10:45am-12:00 noon: Facilitator will conduct a PowerPoint on Reading Fluency instruction.

Facilitator will engage teachers in discussions and short activities during PowerPoint

12:05pm- 1:05pm: Break for lunch on your own.

Participants may leave to get lunch.

1:15pm-2:15pm: Participants will engage in activity to model Reading Fluency instructional strategies.

2:15pm-3:15pm: Teachers will engage in collaborative lesson planning by grade level to incorporate Explicit instruction and Reading Fluency Instruction in a week's lesson.

3:15pm-3:30pm: Facilitators will provide final wrap-up and preview of day two of the PD plan.

Day 3: November 2022

8:15am-9:30am: Continental breakfast provided, Welcome, Review of Session 2 PD, Overview of Session 3 PD

Breakfast will be provided for both face-to-face PD sessions. Facilitator will review previous PD topics and discussions. Teachers will discuss "Glows and Grows" they experienced in their classrooms since the last session. Teachers will receive an overview of the agenda and materials for day three.

9:30am-10:30am: Facilitator will conduct a PowerPoint on vocabulary instruction

Facilitator will engage teachers in discussions and short activities during PowerPoint presentation.

10:30am-10:45am: 15 Minute Break

Participants may use the restroom, stretch, make phone calls, etc.…

10:45am-12:00 noon: Facilitator will conduct a PowerPoint on Learning Targets and Success Criteria.

Facilitator will engage teachers in discussions and short activities during PowerPoint presentation.

12:05pm- 1:05pm: Break for lunch on your own.

Participants may leave to get lunch.

1:15pm-2:15pm: **Teachers will engage in collaborative lesson planning by grade level to incorporate Explicit instruction, Learning Targets and Success Criteria, and Vocabulary Instruction in a week's lesson.**

Facilitator will move through the groups to provide feedback during work period

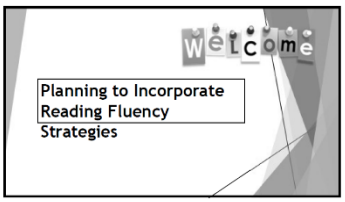
2:15pm-3:15pm: **Teachers will volunteer to engage in activity to model their lessons for the other participants.**

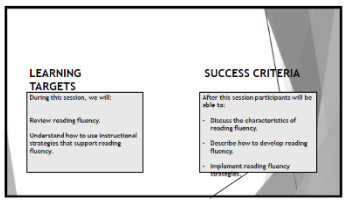
The facilitator will give constructive feedback.

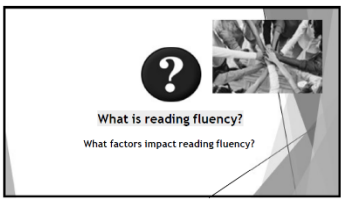
3:15pm-3:30pm: **Facilitators will provide final wrap-up and preview of day three of the PD plan.**

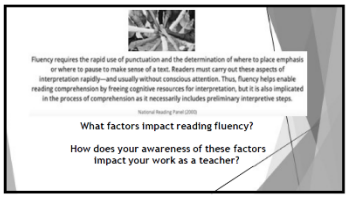
Facilitator will review key points, answer questions, and provide contact information and additional resources for participants.

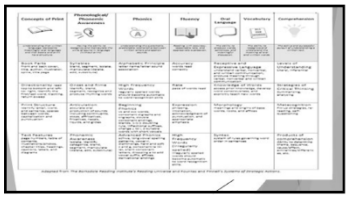
Day 2 Slides: Presentation 1 -Reading Fluency

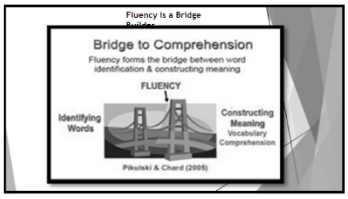


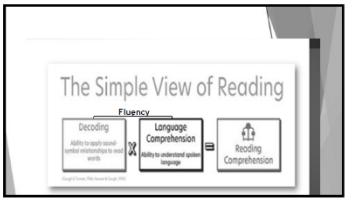


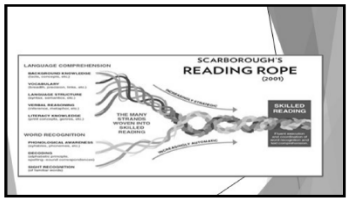


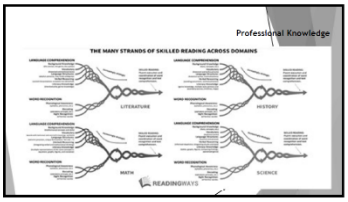


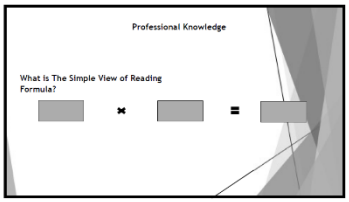


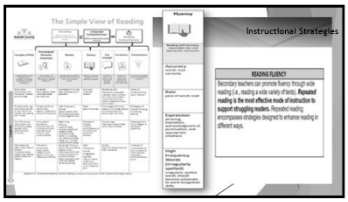


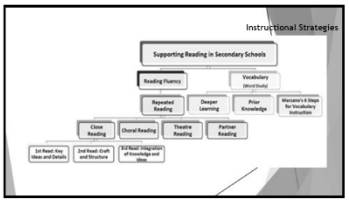


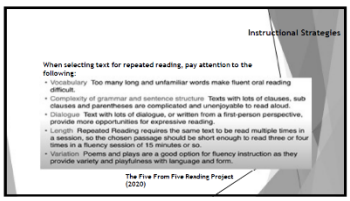


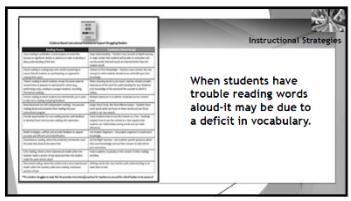


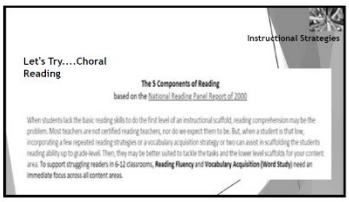


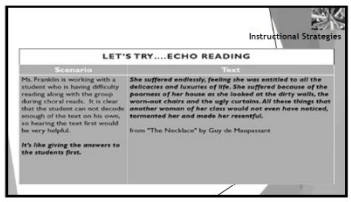


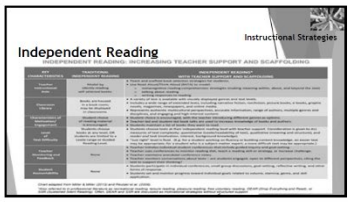


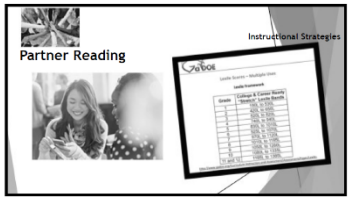


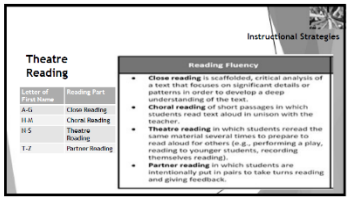


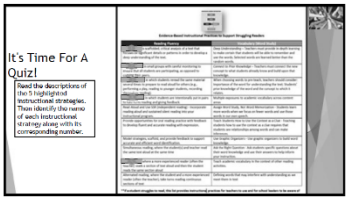


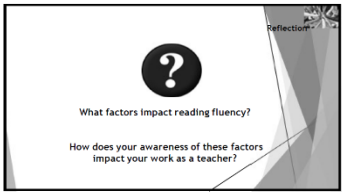


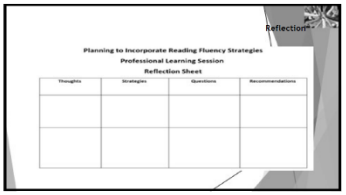



Instructional Strategies
Partner Reading


Instructional Strategies
Theatre Reading
Reading Fluency
Close reading is scaffolded, critical analysis of a text that focuses on significant details or patterns in order to develop a deep understanding of the text.
Choral reading of short passages in which students read text aloud in unison with the teacher.
Theatre reading in which students reread the same material several times to prepare to read aloud for others (e.g., performing a play, reading to younger students, recording themselves reading).
Partner reading in which students are intentionally put in pairs to take turns reading and giving feedback.
Letter of First Name
Reading Part
A-G
Close Reading
H-M
Choral Reading
N-S
Theatre Reading
T-Z
Partner Reading

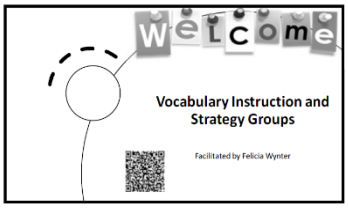

It's Time For A Quiz!
Read the descriptions of the 5 highlighted instructional strategies. Then identify the name of each instructional strategy along with its corresponding number.

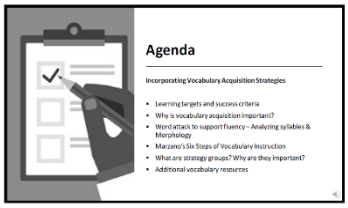

Reflection
What factors impact reading fluency?
How does your awareness of these factors impact your work as a teacher?

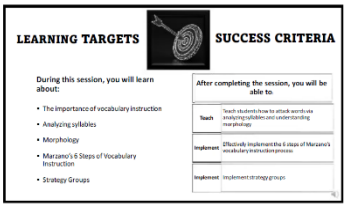

Reflection
Planning to Incorporate Reading Fluency Strategies
Professional Learning Session
Reflection Sheet
Thoughts
Strategies
Questions
Recommendations

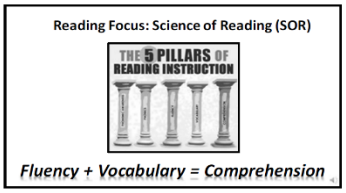

Evaluation
TIME TO EVALUATE
https://forms.office.com/r/YimKKSAPqn

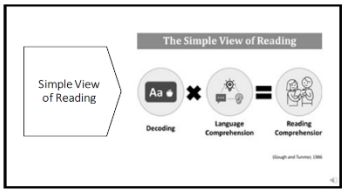
Day 3 Slides: Presentation 2- Vocabulary Instruction

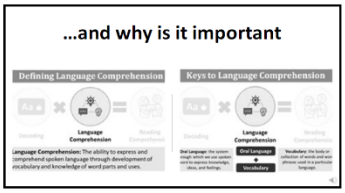


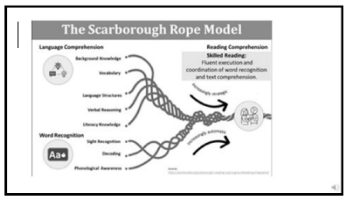


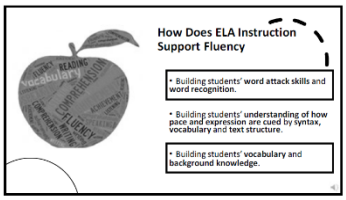


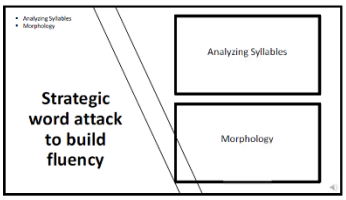


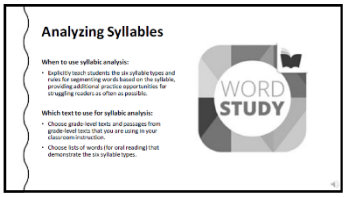


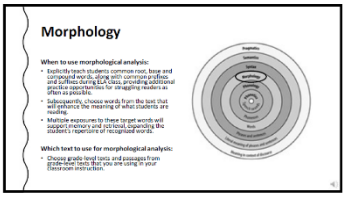


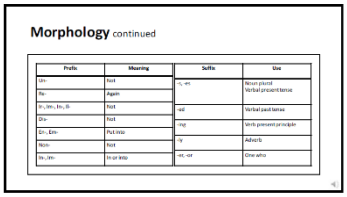


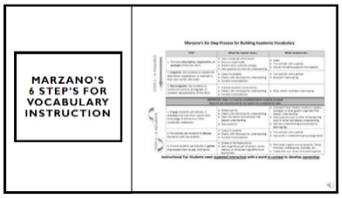


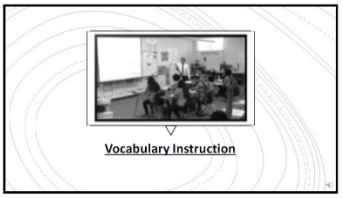


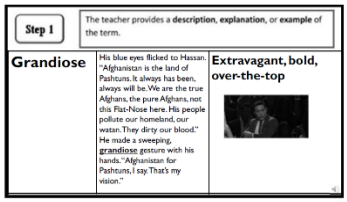


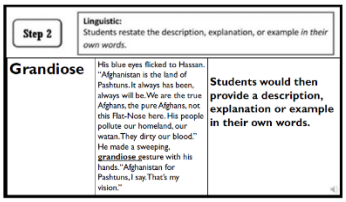


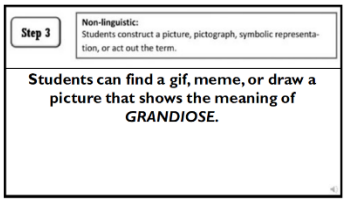


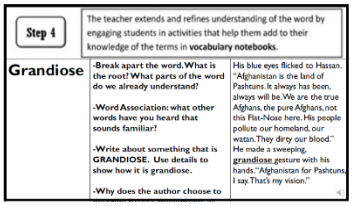


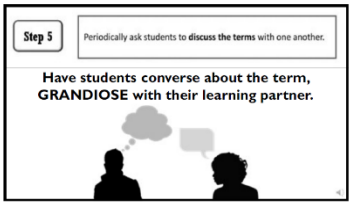


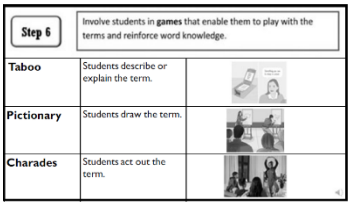


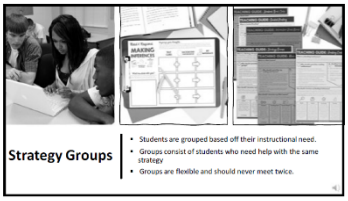


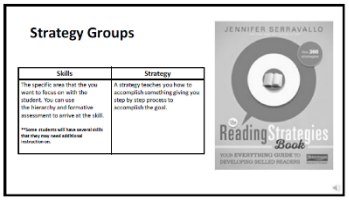


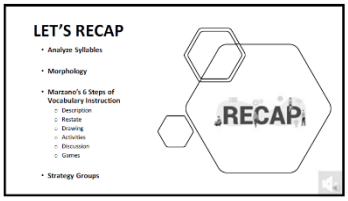

Step 4
The teacher extends and refines understanding of the word by engaging students in activities that help them add to their knowledge of the terms in vocabulary notebooks.
Grandiose
-Break apart the word. What is the root? What parts of the word do we already understand?
-Word Association: what other words have you heard that sounds familiar?
-Write about something that is GRANDIOSE. Use details to show how it is grandiose.
-Why does the author choose to
His blue eyes flicked to Hassan. "Afghanistan is the land of Pashtuns. It always has been, always will be. We are the true Afghans, the pure Afghans, not this Flat-Nose here. His people pollute our homeland, our watan. They dirty our blood." He made a sweeping, grandiose gesture with his hands. "Afghanistan for Pashtuns, I say. That's my vision."

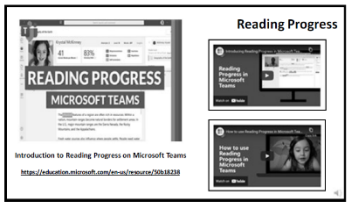

Step 5
Periodically ask students to discuss the terms with one another.
Have students converse about the term, GRANDIOSE with their learning partner.


Step 6
Involve students in games that enable them to play with the terms and reinforce word knowledge.
Taboo
Students describe or explain the term.
Pictionary
Students draw the term.
Charades
Students act out the term.

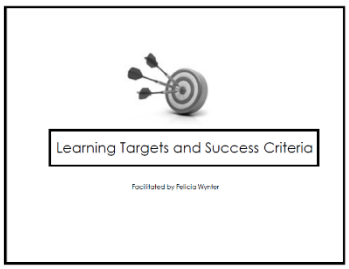

Strategy Groups
Students are grouped based off their instructional need.
Groups consist of students who need help with the same strategy
Groups are flexible and should never meet twice.

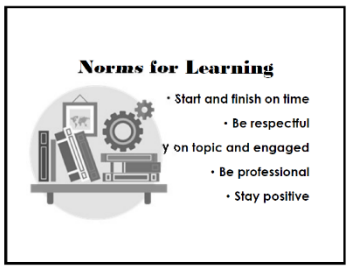

Strategy Groups
Skills
Strategy
The specific area that the you want to focus on with the student. You can use the hierarchy and formative assessment to arrive at the skill.
**Some students will have several skills that they may need additional instruction on.
A strategy teaches you how to accomplish something giving you step by step process to accomplish the goal.
JENNIFER SERRAVALLO
Reading Strategies Book
YOUR EVERYTHING GUIDE TO DEVELOPING SKILLED READERS

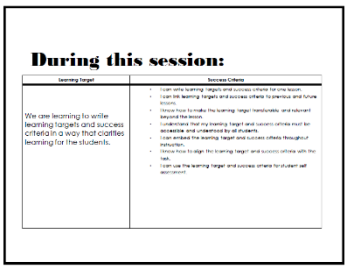

LET'S RECAP
Analyze Syllables
Morphology
Marzano's 6 Steps of Vocabulary Instruction
Description
Restate
Drawing
Activities
Discussion
Games
Strategy Groups
RECAP

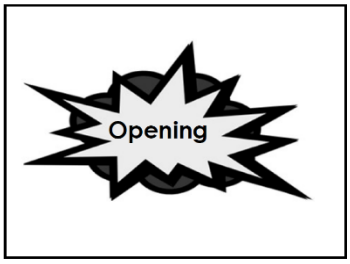

Reading Progress
READING PROGRESS
MICROSOFT TEAMS
Introduction to Reading Progress on Microsoft Teams
https://education.microsoft.com/en-us/resource/50b18218
Reading Progress in Microsoft Teams
How to use Reading Progress in Microsoft Teams

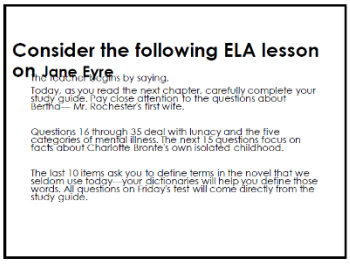
Day 3 Slides: Presentation 3- Learning Target and Success Criteria

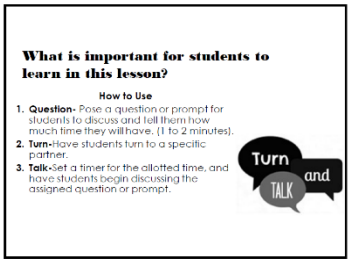


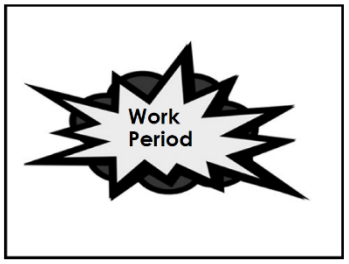


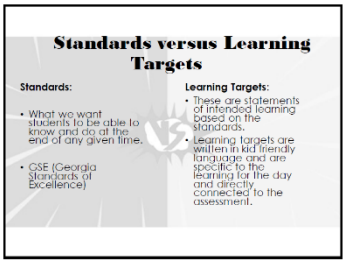


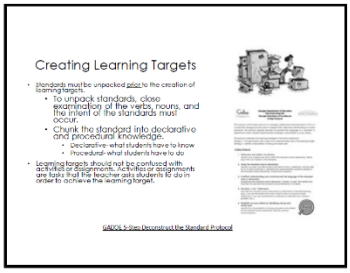


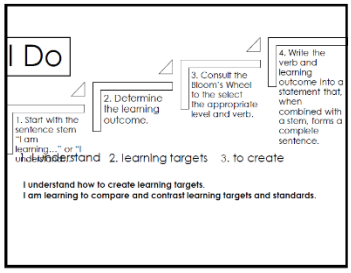


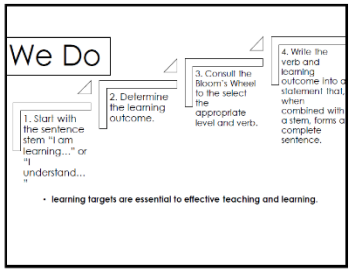


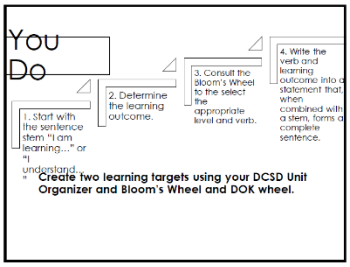


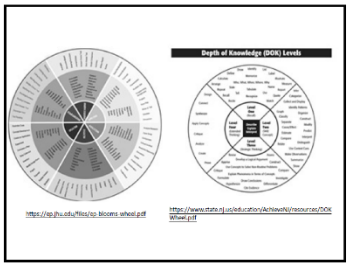


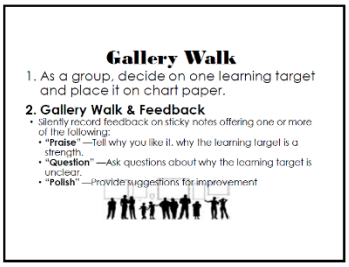






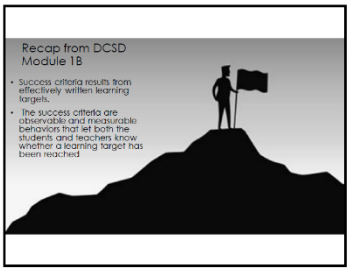


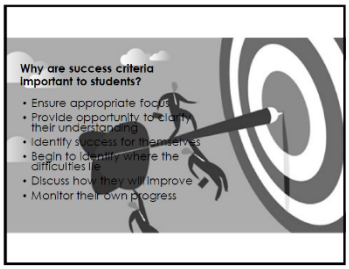




A learning target contains ALL of the following characteristics:

- ❑Describe exactly what the student is going to learn by the end of today's lesson.
- ❑Be stated in student friendly language.
- ❑Be framed from the point of view of a student who has not yet mastered the learning outcome for the lesson.
- ❑Be shared with students throughout the lesson.





Success Criteria tips for teachers:

- Need to be known and shared
- Should be the same for all learners (differentiation happens with the activity, rather than the success criteria)
- Can be used across the curriculum
- Need to be referred to constantly by students

How do you write a success criteria?

- The teacher must ask:
  - **What is the evidence that will demonstrate that the students have hit the learning target?**
    - What am I looking for (WILF)...
    - What do I expect from everyone...
    - To be successful, the student must...
  - In other words what will it **look and sound like** for both student and teacher, if the student hits the learning target.

I can... I understand... or I know....

Learning Target	Success Criteria
• I am learning to write success criteria based on a learning target.	• I can link the success criteria to previous and future lessons. • I understand that the success criteria must be accessible and understood by all students. • I can embed the success criteria throughout instruction. • I know how to align success criteria with the task. • I can use the success criteria for student self assessment.

Writing the success criteria

1. Using your first learning target, create the success criteria necessary to meet the learning target.
2. As a group, build consensus around the success criteria and make any necessary revisions.
3. Write the final success criteria on the legal paper provided.
4. Exchange your finalized success criteria with another group and use ARMS strategy to make revisions.

During this session:

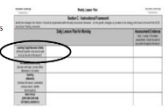
Learning Target	Success Criteria
We are learning to write learning targets and success criteria in a way that clarifies learning for the students.	• I can write learning targets and success criteria for one lesson. • I can link learning targets and success criteria to previous and future lessons. • I know how to make the learning target transferable and relevant beyond the lesson. • I understand that my learning target and success criteria must be accessible and understood by all students. • I can embed the learning target and success criteria throughout instruction. • I know how to align the learning target and success criteria with the task. • I can use the learning target and success criteria for student self assessment.

Learning Targets & Success Criteria are:

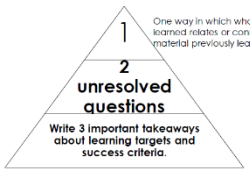
- ✓For one lesson
- ✓Linked to previous and future lessons
- ✓Based on knowledge of standards and students
- ✓Transferable and relevant beyond the lesson
- ✓Embedded throughout the lesson
- ✓Measurable
- ✓Aligned with the task
- ✓Used for student self-assessment
- ✓ Accessible and understood by all students

Next Steps...

1. Work with collaborative planning teams to deconstruct unit standards.
2. Create learning targets and success criteria for weekly lesson plans applying the principles from today's PL.
3. Use the teacher self-assessment guide for learning targets and success criteria.
4. Conduct learning targets and success criteria classroom walkthroughs.



Final Countdown



Appendix B: Evaluation

Session Name: _____ Date: _____

Facilitator: _____

Please complete the professional development survey below by reading each statement and clicking on the corresponding number. A one (1) indicates strongly disagree and five (5) indicates strongly agree.

1. The objectives and outcomes of this program were clearly presented. 1 2 3 4 5
2. The content of the professional development met my expectations. 1 2 3 4 5
3. The materials used were appropriate for the objectives. 1 2 3 4 5
4. The facilitator was knowledgeable about the subject matter. 1 2 3 4 5
5. The delivery method was effective for subject matter and audience. 1 2 3 4 5
6. This professional development has prepared me for implementation. 1 2 3 4 5
7. I would recommend this professional development session to a peer. 1 2 3 4 5

Comments:

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____